

# **LAY PRINCIPALS UNDER CONTRACT**

**'Going Down for the Good Turf'**

**An exploration of the perceptions of selected secondary lay principals in relation to the religious and spiritual dimensions of their role**

Submitted by

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## STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP AND SOURCES

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

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

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

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the ACU Human Research Ethics Committee on 17 Sept 2003.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to consider the understanding and experience of a selected number of lay principals of diocesan secondary Catholic schools in Victoria as to the religious and spiritual dimensions of their leadership role and to identify what supported them in the discharge of their responsibilities in these domains of their leadership.

Based on this purpose, I identified three research questions:

1. What is the understanding of lay Catholic secondary principals in Victoria, of their role as a ministry within the Catholic Church?
2. In what ways have principals experienced the spiritual and religious dimensions of their leadership role?
3. In what ways have principals sought and/or experienced formation beyond academic study which has enriched their practice of principalship?

The theoretical perspective of the research is Interpretative Constructionism and the methodology adopted is Multiple Informant Case Study. The researcher has taken the stance of 'interrogatory fellow traveller' in relation to the research informants.

The methods used to gather data are (a) focus group, (b) biographical written statements, (c) document analysis and (d) personal reflection in response to the previous three methods.

In general, the findings of this research study suggest that lay principals of Catholic secondary schools who were informants in the study understand the role of principal of a diocesan secondary school as a ministry within the Catholic Church. While the informants did not use overtly theological terms to articulate this understanding, the accounts of their experience in principalship and the insights gained through reflection on their leadership behaviour have led them to believe that they are in fact exercising a legitimate ministry within the field of Catholic secondary education in Victoria. This research has brought to light a body of knowledge about the work of a group of principals which has not previously been subject to critical scrutiny.

While the study is of intrinsic merit in recognising and describing the work of secondary lay principals, from an instrumental perspective these findings raise a number of issues relating to the preparation, induction and support available to newly appointed and continuing principals in diocesan Catholic secondary schools in Victoria.

As a consequence the following propositions are offered:

Further study using a wider informant group of principals is warranted to confirm the findings of this enquiry and to expand on the knowledge already gained. Such study might include parallel studies of lay principals in congregation-owned schools, in other states of Australia or in other countries where the Catholic

Church has established schools as an agency of its evangelising mission in education.

This study is of potential assistance to aspiring principals, principals and system authorities in the planning and development of appropriate professional learning and support, including formal academic study and formational opportunities.

The findings confirm the importance for leaders and aspiring leaders in Catholic education of sound theological and spiritual education as a necessary part of their preparation for leadership, both pre-service and in-service.

The findings confirm the significance of appropriate liturgical induction or commissioning for principals.

It is suggested that one practical form of support for principals is the provision of access to regular professional supervision and spiritual direction.

It is recommended that the process of appointment and induction of principals be undertaken more systematically, perhaps using the principles of project management, especially in relation to the identification of enhancing and inhibiting factors present within the staff community at the time of the appointment of a new principal.

The findings indicate that schools have had varied experiences of developing a distinctive ethos and charism, based on a particular founder or group of founders. It is recommended that all diocesan secondary schools be encouraged to develop an appropriate charism and spirituality, based on the character of the local faith community and the history of the particular school.

The findings point to the need for further development of an authentic spirituality of educational and faith leadership, based in the reality of principals' lives as family and community members and educators in faith of their staff and wider community.

Informants to the study indicated their awareness of the tension between occupying a leadership role in the Church and personal positions in conscience on matters of Church teaching. Some further study of this issue may be warranted.

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I relinquished principalship at the end of 2005. I would like to dedicate this thesis to the many friends and colleagues who have travelled the lonely paths of principalship and whose faith, courage and commitment to their communities is a source of inspiration and hope. Often when the road seems particularly lonely and difficult, we discover the paradox that we are never truly alone but rather in solidarity with each other and with the One who accompanies us on our way, unique in our responsibilities but together on the journey.

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*'Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests...'*

## **CHAPTER 1 RESEARCH PROBLEM DEFINED**

### **1.1 Introduction to the research**

Over the past thirty years, the principalship of Catholic secondary schools in the state of Victoria has passed gradually but steadily into the hands of lay people. This has occurred in the context of a decline in the numbers of Religious and Clergy directly involved in the administration of secondary schools and a simultaneously emerging emphasis on the role of the laity in the mission of the Catholic Church in the wake of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962 - 1965) – hereafter referred to as Vatican II.

The effective principalship of Catholic secondary schools depends to a significant degree on the continuing availability of committed, faith-mature educators who are able to maintain and lead schools in the provision of both good education and good Catholic education and who operate from the assumption that the religious and spiritual dimensions of their leadership are an essential dimension of leadership in Catholic schools. The present research seeks to describe the understanding and experience of secondary lay Catholic principals with regard to the significance of their role during a period of rapid change relating to the leadership of Catholic secondary schools, specifically in those aspects of the role that have to do with the religious and spiritual dimensions of their work as principals. This research is especially significant in the context of an apparent silence in the literature as to a description of the understanding and experience of those who have been principals of Catholic secondary schools during a period of substantial change both within the Catholic Church and in the wider educational community.

In broad terms, the definitions of religion and spirituality used are those proposed by O'Murchu (1997, p.75) who views 'religion' as having to do with the formally institutionalised structures, rituals and beliefs associated with one or other of the official religious systems and 'spirituality' as having to do with the universal human quest for meaning and purpose in life. O'Murchu suggests that far from

being a subset of religion, as it is often perceived, spirituality is a much more overarching dimension of human experience which may be expressed by reference to a particular religious tradition, or not, as the case may be. It is the quest for integration, unity and peace which is embedded in every human person. Groome (2001) puts it this way: "It is more accurate to call ourselves spiritual beings who have a human life than human beings who have a spiritual life" (Groome, 2001 p.332): "...whenever educators help learners to live their lives according to their sense of highest calling; when they educate people in how and what to love...they engage and nurture their spirituality." (Groome, 2001 p.335).

Religious leadership has to do with the expression of externally observable behaviours associated with rituals, texts, symbols and a belief system. Spiritual leadership, on the other hand, is more difficult to observe, having about it a more interior and less tangible nature. When a principal is acting out of deep personal conviction in providing an interpretation of the meaning of events, or pastorally caring for staff, validating experiences by reference to a religious tradition, consoling, challenging, accompanying others on the spiritual journey towards wholeness, meaning and integration, spiritual leadership is occurring.

Given that the change from religious to lay leadership in Catholic secondary schools may be considered as a historically significant by-product of Vatican II, I believe there is some value in attempting to understand with more clarity what insights and experiences colleague principals have gained during this period of change. This has value in making a contribution to the historical record of a period of rapid change within the Catholic Church in Victoria but it may also assist system authorities in the preparation, induction and support of candidates for principalship of Catholic secondary schools in the future.

## **1.2 Research site**

Catholic secondary schools have been a significant feature of Catholic life in Victoria for well over a century. Historically, these schools were established and maintained by religious orders with an apostolate (see glossary of terms) in education. They were typically convent and monastery schools, usually single-

gender in enrolment and staffed mainly by Religious brothers and sisters. Principalship was exercised by members of the relevant religious congregation and principals were accountable to the respective congregational leaders rather than directly to diocesan bishops or other ecclesiastical authorities. During the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a number of factors combined to cause the staffing of Catholic secondary schools to become predominantly lay, including a decrease in the number of vocations to religious life and a new emphasis, as a result of Vatican II, on the importance of the role of lay people in the life of the Catholic Church. Alongside this emerging trend, the demand for Catholic secondary schools in outer metropolitan and regional centres prompted the development of co-educational diocesan secondary colleges, owned and operated by single parishes or clusters of parishes. The emergence of these diocesan colleges prompted the need for a new set of structures and relationships to deal with the issues surrounding governance and accountability. A significant element of these developments was the gradually identified need for the clear articulation of the responsibilities of a parish priest or groups of parish priests respectively in their capacity as canonical administrators of secondary schools.

Such colleges sometimes had 'seeding' support for the initial phase of their establishment from a religious congregation, especially in the provision of a religious principal. In 1972, there were no lay principals of Victorian Catholic secondary schools. In 2003, the number of lay principals was 75 (77.3% of all principalships in the state) indicating a rapid change over a relatively short period of time.

Prior to 1993, lay principals were being appointed to congregational and diocesan schools without clearly defined reference to the specifically Catholic nature of their leadership. Each of the congregations involved in Catholic education would have had explicit or implicit expectations of lay principals appointed to their own schools but it could be argued that no comprehensive understanding of the religious and spiritual responsibilities attaching to the role was articulated by the various appointing authorities. In some cases, the appointment of a lay principal to a congregational Catholic secondary school would involve an orientation process, based on the distinctive charism of the

Religious Congregation and its educational philosophy. In many cases, especially in diocesan secondary schools, the demonstration that applicants for principalship were 'practising' Catholics, as attested to by a reference from their parish priest, seemed a sufficient basis for appointment (note; the term 'practising' is used to denote a Catholic who is observant in the sense of active participation in the sacramental life of the Catholic Church by belonging to a community and regularly participating in its public prayer and worship.)

As for their professional competence and suitability, these were tested by requirements such as academic qualifications and relevant experience. In 1993, the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria adopted a policy relating to the appointment of lay principals - "Policy Statement on Lay Principals Under Contract in Catholic Secondary Schools" - commonly known as LPUC. ("Lay Principals Under Contract," 1993) and hereafter referred to by this acronym. This policy attempted to define for the first time the specific religious responsibilities of lay principals in Catholic secondary schools and the accountability structures and key relationships with ecclesiastical authorities which were the context of their work.

### ***1.3 Identification of the research problem***

At the same time as these changes were occurring, there had been a gradually developing theology of ministry within the Catholic Church which broadened the understanding of the term 'ministry' to include various forms of pastoral and community leadership as practised by non-ordained members of the Church. While this broadening had begun before Vatican II it was given significant impetus in the wake of the Council and was expressed specifically in LPUC, which describes lay principals of Catholic secondary schools as giving witness "both sacramentally and generally" ("Lay Principals Under Contract," 1993, 2.2) to the Church's official educational ministry.

In many discussions with colleagues, I have come to the view that, while many principals may understand their appointment primarily in terms of their educational and managerial leadership capabilities, they may perceive that responsibility for religious leadership can be delegated to pastoral and Religious

Education staff internally and parish clergy/chaplains externally. It may also be the case that colleague principals have a 'compartmentalised' rather than an integrated understanding of their leadership responsibilities. In one sense, these various responsibilities may be in tension with each other; for example, the managerial dimension of principalship involves the principal acting as an employer's agent in the supervision of staff while the religious dimension calls for the principal to have regard for the pastoral care and personal growth of staff.

Rather than use the term 'research problem' I am following Punch (2000) in using the term 'research question' in the sense that the area of enquiry is an exploration of what is currently unknown. In that sense, it may indeed be a problem but the emphasis of the research is less with finding a 'solution' than with describing something that is currently not well known or understood. As will be explained further on, there appears to be a dearth of literature on how, having been appointed in very specific contractual terms, principals have actually undertaken the work of leading in a way that "gives witness, both sacramentally and generally," (p.2) to the Church's official educational ministry ("Lay Principals Under Contract," 1993). Nor has much been written or recorded by principals themselves as to what their experience has been.

#### ***1.4 Purpose of the research***

The purpose of this study is to explore the understanding and experience of a number of lay principals in Victorian Catholic diocesan secondary schools in the discharge of their responsibilities in the specifically religious and spiritual aspects of their leadership as school principals. These responsibilities are explicitly stated in their contract of employment but may be implicit in their understanding and experience of their leadership practice. The colleague principals' understandings of these leadership responsibilities may, on anecdotal evidence, be widely divergent. The writer has been a secondary lay principal whose professional practice in principalship was experienced entirely in diocesan rather than congregational secondary schools. Such schools may not be able to draw on the charism of a founder or build their identity and culture on the foundation of a distinct congregational tradition or of a distinctive understanding of Catholic education. My own journey in principalship has involved an ongoing commitment

to understanding more fully how to provide effective leadership within the terms of these responsibilities while at the same time attending to the range of managerial and educational responsibilities of principalship. One of the questions to be addressed in this context is the degree to which the principal exercises leadership based on the charism of baptism and a spirituality grounded in the reality of the local community and the communal reality of the diocesan secondary school – family, parish etc. – rather than on a charism appropriated from a religious congregation which may or may not ‘fit’ the particular situation of the school. Many colleague principals have indicated to me that they frequently reflect on their work and its meaning, but rarely express or articulate their insights in a way which is accessible to others. Part of the purpose of this research is to give a voice to these colleague principals’ insights since they remain largely inaccessible at present. In this way, the experience of colleague principals may lead to a deeper appreciation by system authorities of the ways in which principals can be more effectively supported in the discharge of their responsibilities.

### ***1.5 Evolution of research questions/issues***

My beginning point was to consider the definitions provided in LPUC as a context for the specifically religious and spiritual responsibilities of the principal. These include a definition of the ‘ministry of lay leadership’ and a statement explaining the purpose of Catholic secondary schools ("Lay Principals Under Contract," 1993) followed by the articulation of the responsibilities of the principal in relation to these definitions. These responsibilities include giving witness to the ministry of lay leadership, contributing to the work of spreading the Gospel, exercising a ministry modelled on Jesus Christ and grounded in the Catholic faith, having a pastoral relationship with others in the school community that is sustaining, healing, growth-oriented and embodying respect, concern and compassion for the individual. The principal is required to establish and nurture a community where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is genuinely cherished and lived and where the faith development of staff is facilitated.

During many discussions with colleagues, I became aware that colleague principals were in varying degrees familiar with these responsibilities in a vague

and general way but did not use the terminology contained in LPUC when talking about their work and its significance to them. This in turn led me to frame a number of research questions which might assist in making explicit what seemed largely tacit.

### **1.5.1 Research question 1**

What understanding do lay Catholic secondary principals in Victoria have of their role as a ministry within the Catholic Church?

### **1.5.2 Research Question 2**

In what ways have principals experienced the spiritual and religious dimensions of their leadership role?

### **1.5.3 Research question 3**

In what ways have principals sought and/or experienced formation beyond academic study which has enriched their practice of principalship?

## **1.6 Design of the research**

“Digging,” (Heaney, 1969), provides a ready metaphor for this exploration. Relevant aspects of the poem include the power of remembering and seeing patterns and links in images so recalled. The perspectives of time and experience are significant. The act of remembering portrayed in the poem is a deliberate and reflective process. It is not aimless but has about it a kind of intentionality and purpose, such as that required in the use of the gun or the pen. Finally, it is about constructing and communicating meaning through language. The use of metaphor sometimes provides a powerful way of illuminating or clarifying a complex event or situation (Patton, 2002). In the present study, the metaphor refers primarily to the process of discovery which is central to the process of qualitative data gathering and analysis.

As an explorer in the nominated landscape, I sought to discover or uncover, that which may have been hidden. I wished to disclose and explicitate insights not only as an observer but as a ‘fellow labourer in the garden.’ An assumption being made here is that there are, in fact, insights to be uncovered.

I am also aware of the importance of giving voice to a group whose experience is largely 'unvoiced' and therefore unknown. I wanted to hear people's stories and compare them with my own, not only to gain a deeper understanding of the experience but to describe and record the experience of a group of people (secondary principals) who have been in a critical leadership role in Catholic education during a historically significant period in Victoria.

Given this theoretical stance, I used two instruments to collect data. The first of these was a focus group of three colleague principals, with myself as a fellow-traveller, who were asked to comment on the text of LPUC in relation to their understanding and experience of the responsibilities there described and to comment on what they had found helpful to them on the journey in terms of support, formation and other experiences.

On receipt of the informants' responses to a number of questions posed during the focus group session, I transcribed the focus group responses and used material so gathered to frame a number of questions to which a second group of colleague principal volunteers were asked to respond in writing. These informant statements were used as a second source of primary data in relation to the three nominated research questions. The third source of data was my own responses to the data gathered both as a confirmation of the experience of fellow-colleague principals and a commentary on it.

Earlier on, I had indicated in the research proposal that my intention had been to conduct a pre-research 'informal conversation' with the previous Director of Catholic Education, Melbourne, Executive Director of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and author of LPUC, with a view to identifying possible themes and categories for investigation. It would have been valuable, as part of the context of the research, to know what concerns and needs the policy was developed to address. The previous Director had played a significant part in the development of the policy and it was of immense value to me to better understand the issues perceived to be confronting the Catholic school system in Victoria during the period immediately prior to the adoption of this major policy of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria.

As things eventuated, this interview was not held until after the primary data had been gathered because of the unavailability of the informant but when the interview was held, at a later stage, it proved invaluable as an insight into the factors which influenced the drafting and promulgation of the policy.

### ***1.7 Significance of the research***

There appears to be a dearth of literature on how, having been appointed in very specific contractual terms, principals have actually undertaken the work of leading in a way that indicates compliance with the vision and conditions of LPUC. Nor has much been written or recorded by principals themselves as to what their experience has been.

Since 1993, the LPUC contract has been the basis of appointment for lay principals of Catholic secondary schools in Victoria, yet it seems not to fully inform the review processes to which principals submit periodically in a specific way as a condition of their appointment. It is important, as a part of the background to this exploration, to identify the perceived need in 1993 that the policy was drawn up to address. Given that the Catholic Church in Victoria continues to see its schools as an important element in its mission (Pascoe, 2005) and given that the leadership of these schools will continue to be predominantly in the hands of lay principals, it seems worthwhile to explore what it means to be a witness, both sacramentally and generally, to this mission.

My interest lies specifically in that part of the educational mission of the Church which is expressed in diocesan secondary schools. While all Catholic schools have undergone periodic review under the provisions of the Registered Schools Board of Victoria, it is not clear whether schools have been evaluated in terms of their religious dimension. In the case of secondary schools in the Ballarat Diocese an audit of Religious Education curriculum and practice has for some years been conducted by Catholic Education Office staff in association with the cyclic Registered Schools Board review. Secondary principals are subject to periodic reviews as part of their contractual arrangements but I am unaware of any systemic collation of data resulting from these reviews.

Principals of diocesan secondary schools are increasingly challenged to seek ways of creating and maintaining a process of personal and professional development of staff which is inclusive and at the same time faithful to the Catholic tradition. This exploration may make a contribution to the further development of an appropriate professional development discourse in schools.

It may also serve to record something of the experiences of a diverse group of practising principals during a significant period in the history of Catholic education in Victoria, whose story has remained largely 'unvoiced' and whose insights, in the light of their period of service, might prove invaluable for a future generation of colleague principals.

A further benefit of the research may be to contribute towards the design and development of appropriate forms of pre-service and in-service for principals of Catholic schools. This may include elements not only of theology (and especially ecclesiology and missiology) but also of the development of the 'inner journey' – the spiritual integration of work, relationships and self in the practitioner's own life.

### ***1.8 Limitations and delimitations of the research***

A limitation of this study is that given the uniqueness of each person's life journey, it may be neither possible nor appropriate to argue for replicability of the research findings but rather to focus on the journalling of design decisions and the rationale behind them as a means of allowing others to inspect the procedures, protocols and decisions followed at each stage of the research, (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

It is also noted that, given the limited number of informants being used, others might, with greater time, money and/or resources, approach the research question in a different way (Bouma, 1993) which might involve gathering data from a wider group of informants or extending the depth and scope of questions used to elicit responses from informants. While the limited nature of the enquiry

is acknowledged, its significance is not necessarily adversely affected by its limited range (Punch, 2000).

Because the investigation is intended to describe rather than explain the experience of informants, there is no strong need to establish causal links between various factors identified. On the other hand, the fact that the data are firmly based on real life and real people may allow the findings to be transferable across a wider group than the specific research informants. The presumption of any such transferability and final conclusions, however, can only be tentative.

Possible delimitations for this study include the qualitative and subjective nature of the data collected and of the data collecting process. I have used data collected from informants to construct meaning around the phenomenon of religious and spiritual leadership. Data as voluntarily presented by informants is coloured by their own unique experience of principalship and so it is not possible to be definitive in any conclusions drawn from an analysis of the data nor to establish the external validity of conclusions reached.

## **1.9 Outline of thesis**

### *Chapter 1 The research question identified*

In this introductory chapter, the research field has been identified and the research questions stated. The chapter also provides an overview of the research design and summarises the contents of each of the subsequent chapters in the thesis.

### *Chapter 2 The research context*

The second chapter explains the background and setting for the research. It provides an explanation of the specific characteristics of diocesan secondary Catholic schools in Victoria and explains some of the factors leading to the appointment of lay principals in these schools. It also explains the particular contractual terms and conditions pertaining to the appointment of lay principals in diocesan secondary schools.

### *Chapter 3 Literature review*

The research question emerges from a review of relevant literature which includes the personal, theological and organisational contexts within which the research topic is situated. This chapter identifies the specific research questions to be used as a result of highlighting lacunae in the literature in relation to the nominated area of research.

### *Chapter 4 Design of the research*

It is important to identify the underlying assumptions on which the research is based. Chapter 4 indicates the nominated theory of knowledge out of which has emerged an epistemological framework within which the data were gathered and analysed. Further, this chapter demonstrates how the theoretical stance adopted is suited to the nominated research problem and how it determines the method used to gather and analyse data.

### *Chapter 5 Presentation and analysis of the findings*

Once the data have been gathered using a nominated method, Chapter 5 reports on the data collected and gives an account of the findings which emerged from a detailed analysis of the data.

### *Chapter 6 Review, recommendations and conclusions*

The final chapter indicates how the research questions have been answered and provides some tentative recommendations to those currently in principalship, those aspiring to principalship and system authorities. It also indicates a number of implications for the profession in relation to desired or recommended ways in which the practice of lay principalship in Catholic secondary schools can be supported, enhanced and sustained.

*'When the spade sinks into gravelly ground'*

## **CHAPTER 2 CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH**

### ***2.1 The purpose of the research***

The purpose of this study is to explore the understanding and experience of a selected number of lay principals in Victorian Catholic diocesan secondary schools in the discharge of their responsibilities in the specifically religious and spiritual aspects of their leadership as school principals. Whereas the contract of employment is explicit about these responsibilities, many principals would not use this explicit language to describe their work and its significance and may in fact use quite divergent language. While principals indicate that they frequently reflect on their work and its meaning, they rarely express or articulate their thoughts and reflections in a way which is accessible to others. Part of the purpose of this research is to give a voice to these colleague principals' insights so that principals themselves and system authorities can appreciate more deeply the ways in which principals can be supported in their work. The research may also encourage greater reflectivity on the part of principals as to the meaning, value and significance of their work.

In this chapter, the context for the research is described. Catholic schools exist in Australia only because the Catholic Church has identified Catholic education as a major field of mission for at least the past one hundred years. Admittedly, Catholic schools have operated in diverse ways and for a variety of purposes but they remain an important agency in the Australian Catholic Church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Hutton, 2002).

### ***2.2 Changes in the Church, changes in society***

During the nominated period of change from religious to lay leadership, the Catholic Church in Australia has undergone significant changes flowing partly from the experience of Vatican II and partly from responding to changes in the prevailing social, cultural and political climate (Collins, 1997, 2004). Not all the changes which have occurred have been welcomed uniformly, especially by lay

members of the Church, and there has been a significant amount of confusion and resistance to some of the changes (Mc Gullion, 2003).

The prevailing Australian culture now seems to be more pluralist and secular and more attuned to the rights and needs of individuals. In this context, the changes in society at large seem also to be discernible within the Catholic Church of the English-speaking first world (Gallagher, 1997). Lay members of the Church are better educated than ever before and more attuned to open and transparent processes in organisations, whether in the world of work or in the political sphere- processes based on consultation, communication and collaboration. While transparency, openness, collaboration and the valuing of the contribution of every member were part of the vision articulated by Vatican II, the Church, both locally and globally, seems to be showing signs of reverting to a previous mode characterised by centralised hierarchical control and a restoration of traditional clerical authority, even within parishes and other local institutions of the Church. It is perceptible too in a 'Roman' re-emphasising of the uniformity of doctrine and liturgical practice (Collins, 2004).

Arbuckle (1993) interprets this phenomenon in the context of Chaos Theory, explaining how a strong reaction to sudden change is a necessary and unavoidable part of the full cycle of change. The main feature of this reaction, in organisational terms, is a temptation to return to a perceived more stable, more controlled situation as a way of coping with the fear, anger and uncertainty which often accompany rapid and significant change. Collins (1997) gives a more historical perspective as part of a review of the tension between centralising tendencies in the Catholic Church of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the conciliar origins of the early Church.

One significant aspect of this trend has been a renewed emphasis on traditional forms of individual piety and devotional practice as against a more social-justice action and communal stance. Another has been a recent emphasis in schools, at least in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, one of the dioceses where the study was conducted, on a more prescriptive and propositional approach to Religious Education compared to a previous approach based firmly on a catechetical, experiential and integrated model (shared Christian praxis) (*Guidelines for*

*Religious Education of Students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne: Junior/Middle/Senior Primary and Junior/Middle/ Senior Secondary (6 Volumes), 1995).*

The Church has also been deeply affected by the rapidly secularising culture within which it is situated (Gallagher, 1997; Mc Gullion, 2003), one symptom of which is a gradually emerging ambiguity in role responsibilities within the Church, especially in relation to the role of the laity and the role of women (Power, 2002; Rademacher, 1991). Part of this ambiguity can be seen in the relatively recent development of a body of theology around the theme of ministry and in conflicting understandings of ministry (Collins, 1992: Collins, 1997, 2004). This has included a critical evaluation of the relationship between ordained and non-ordained ministries and the respective roles and responsibilities of clergy and laity. In the midst of this change, Catholic schools have found themselves torn between many conflicting expectations and demands, both by Church authorities, parents, students, employers and their own staff. Principals have been forced to grapple with new challenges of leadership across all these categories.

As a secondary principal who has served during this period of change, I have increasingly found myself thinking about how the terms of appointment as spelt out in LPUC are understood and experienced by principals, especially in relation to the religious and spiritual dimensions of their leadership, within their schools and within the community in which the school is situated. I have also wondered how colleague principals have sustained themselves spiritually in the journey of principalship and what are the wells and oases at which they have been spiritually renewed and sustained?

### **2.3 The emergence of LPUC (Lay Principals Under Contract)**

The Catholic Church in Australia is divided into seven archdioceses and twenty one dioceses. Melbourne is the capital of the state of Victoria and is an archdiocese. It is also the metropolitan see of the ecclesiastical Province of Victoria which includes the three suffragan dioceses of Ballarat, Sale and Sandhurst (*The Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia*, 2005).

In 2003 there were 348 primary and 86 secondary Catholic schools in Victoria employing 5,501 primary and 6,088 secondary teachers. In 2001, Catholic primary and secondary schools attracted 71% of their total income from State and Commonwealth grants (Dixon, 2005).

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria is the major Catholic educational organisation within the Province of Victoria and it has the responsibility, on behalf of the bishops of the province, of dealing with Commonwealth and State Governments and making policy for Catholic education in the State of Victoria. LPUC is a policy of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria.

While the LPUC contract has been the basis of appointment for lay principals of Catholic secondary schools in Victoria since 1993, it is noted that, during the research period, a new more developed policy, currently known as 'Lay Principals In Catholic Secondary Colleges' is nearing completion but has yet to be ratified and published. This new policy is intended to address a number of aspects of LPUC which are perceived to be in need of development, including clearer accountability processes and a recognition of the public nature of the role of principal as a ministry.

The need for a policy defining the role and responsibilities of lay principals emerged in the context of the great changes brought about by the decline in the numbers of Religious and the rise of diocesan regional schools in Victoria. Religious congregations had always managed their own schools independently of diocesan and parish influence or control but with the emergence of diocesan schools, linked sometimes to a single parish and sometimes to a cluster of parishes, there was a need to define the relationships between diocese, canonical administrators and principal (personal communication by Sr Marie Therese Harold pbvm, Sept 28, 2005). The emergence of the new diocesan secondary schools gave rise to the need for some accountability and governance mechanisms. Hence college boards also emerged clearly at this time so that governance and accountability at a local level could be assured. During the 1980s in particular, much energy and effort went into devising a policy that would address the complex set of new relationships which needed definition. In the

case of religious order schools the governance and accountability mechanisms were implied or assumed. In the case of diocesan schools, these needed to be made explicit.

It is also important to note that Victoria had preserved a strong tradition of local autonomy of secondary schools compared with the practice of other dioceses in Australia who have developed a range of more centralised systems of Catholic secondary school provision. This has had major consequences for the development of local governance structures in Victoria.

The implied ecclesiology of LPUC, as suggested by Mons. T. Doyle, former Executive Director of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (personal communication July 26, 2005) seems to be that of the Church as “the People of God” – one of the key concepts emerging from the documents of Vatican II. According to this understanding, the mission of the Church is the mission of all the baptised, by virtue of their baptism and not as determined by ordination (Flannery, 1992d). In this understanding, the school was seen as one expression of ‘Church,’ as was the parish, the family and the diocese. Each of these expressions of Church collaborated in a spirit of mutual cooperation and respect in unity with the local bishop and through him in unity with the Universal Church. This is still the ecclesiological basis on which lay principals of secondary schools are being appointed since LPUC continues to be the basis of principal appointments. Given that the Catholic Church in Victoria continues to see its schools as an important element in its mission and given that the leadership of these schools will continue to be in the hands of a predominantly lay principalship, it seems worthwhile to explore what it means to be a witness, both sacramentally and generally, to this mission.

Hence the purpose of this study is to explore the understanding and experience of lay principals as to how they have been influenced, explicitly and implicitly, by the specific terms of their contract in relation to “the ministry of the principal,” (“Lay Principals Under Contract,” 1993).

My current interest lies specifically in that part of the educational mission of the Church which is expressed in diocesan secondary schools, since it is possible

that these schools are less likely to have been described or evaluated in this context than those owned by religious congregations with a well developed educational mission, for examples the Christian Brothers, the Marists and the Loreto sisters. This is to say that religious congregations have long been guided by the vision of a founder and a developed philosophy and tradition in education and so have been in a position to reflect, from time to time, on the degree to which their schools have been effective in giving expression to this vision. Diocesan regional schools have not had a uniform coherence of vision and philosophy and to my knowledge have not been able to reflect on their priorities and effectiveness within a well-defined context of philosophy and purpose.

Diocesan secondary schools in Victoria emerged at the same time as a significant decline was occurring in the availability of religious congregations to staff and lead schools. This meant that these schools were established under the auspices of local parishes and with support from the respective diocesan Catholic Education Office (O'Farrell, 1993). While most current principals of Catholic secondary schools are themselves the product of the pre-diocesan college congregational schools, some of the more recent appointments to principalship include people who have never experienced a Catholic childhood or education, having been adult converts to Catholicism and perhaps less familiar with the traditions, customs and practices known to 'cradle' Catholics (focus group informant, personal communication, 17 November 2003).

If leaders of Catholic schools are to be people not only with technical competence but also with a deep grasp of the spiritual dimensions of Catholic education, as described by writers like McMahon, Neidhart, Chapman and Angus (1990), Conroy (1999), Groome (2001) and Grace (2002) their leadership will of necessity be spiritual and religious in character. This includes the overt articulation of Catholic beliefs and values and also the sort of authentic, holistic, integrated leadership which can validate to their community the soundness and attractiveness of those beliefs. Increasing numbers of teachers in Catholic schools are well-disposed and sympathetic to the goals of Catholic education but not faith-committed in terms of sacramental practice or regular worship in a parish community. It is an ever-growing challenge for principals to be able to create an inclusive discourse in the staff community which is sourced in the rich

tradition of Catholic Christian education but which does not exclude others through an incomprehensible barrier of language or symbols. Added to this is the complexity of the challenge for principals to attend to the faith development of all the staff, as required by the terms of LPUC, ranging as they do across a very wide spectrum of belief positions and not necessarily 'in faith' in any conventional sense of that term. This challenge is articulated by Sharkey, (Duncan & Riley, 2002). The present study may make a contribution to the further development of an appropriate professional development discourse in schools and some new ways of thinking about the faith needs of all members of the school community.

The LPUC document in its time and context had positive and negative aspects; on the positive side was the spirit of Vatican II with a new emphasis on opening up the mission of the Church to the laity and a sense that the responsibility for the mission of the Church was shared by all the baptised, not just the hierarchy or the clergy. The appointment of lay people to significant positions of leadership was very much seen as one way of giving effect to this new understanding. On the negative side there was a very real perception that the handing over of leadership to lay people was a problem. There was fear and uncertainty in the minds of some that the 'purity' of the tradition would not be preserved and protected in the hands of the non-ordained (as cited by Sr Marie Therese Harold pbvm in personal communication Sept 28, 2005). Sr Marie-Therese Harold was a senior member of staff at the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne during the 1980s and 90s who had a foundational role in drafting LPUC and who worked closely with Mons. T Doyle, then Executive Director, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) LPUC reflects something of the tension between these two factors as perceived during that period.

#### ***2.4 The funding of Catholic schools and its implications – the DOGS case***

Another important part of the context of the development of the policy was the increasing receipt of state and commonwealth government funding for Catholic schools, commencing in the late 1960s and now an established part of the funding of Catholic education systems in Australia, and the related increasing expectations of public accountability for how schools were governed and led.

In 1981, the High Court of Australia handed down a decision in what came to be known as the DOGS case (*ATTORNEY-GENERAL (VICT.); EX REL. BLACK v. THE COMMONWEALTH* [1981] HCA 2; (1981) 146 CLR 559 (2 February 1981), 1981). An organisation known as the Committee for the Defence of Government Schools challenged the state and commonwealth funding of non-government schools on the grounds that the Australian Constitution expressly forbade state support for the establishment of any religion (Section 116). The argument was that Catholic schools should not be funded because they were religious schools.

Catholic school authorities at the time were concerned not to raise the religious profile of their schools too high – wishing to underplay the religious character of schools so as not to attract undue political attention or accusations of sectarianism, favouritism or privilege (as advised by Mons. T Doyle, former Executive Director of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, personal communication July 26, 2005). On the other hand, the finding of the DOGS judgement was, in the opinion of Mons. Doyle (personal communication July 26 2005) that if a school could demonstrate it was a bona fide school, providing good education, albeit with a particular emphasis (Catholic, etc.) then it should attract funding by virtue of the fact that it was first and foremost a school and that its religious character was part of its being a good school. This was also significant in the context that Catholic taxpayers were contributing towards the cost of state education through their taxes and were regarded as being entitled to the direction of state and commonwealth education funds towards the Catholic schools which were seen as community schools rather than bastions of privilege or upward social mobility.

In the light of the High Court decision, that the provision of government funding to Catholic schools did not breach the Australian Constitution, Catholic Education authorities formed a view (Mons. T Doyle, personal communication, July 26 2005) that they may have understated or underemphasised the religious nature of Catholic schools in a desire not to inflame sectarian sentiment. They henceforth attempted to set out a very bold and specifically religious statement about the kind of leadership required in Catholic schools as part of a response to

the DOGS judgement. This new confidence was eloquently expressed in the language of LPUC.

### **2.5 *Catholic School Leadership – religious and spiritual in character***

It is significant to note that some writing on the question of leadership (Du Pree, 1997; Duignan, 2002; Palmer, 1998; Starratt, 2004) argues strongly that the exercise of leadership is primarily a moral act, having about it the living out and articulation of a clear set of foundational spiritual values. Leadership comes about when such characteristics are combined with the necessary technical competencies associated with leadership (Beare, 2001; Creighton, 1999; Palmer, 1998). The thoughts of such writers, approaching the question from outside the ecclesial perspective of the Catholic education setting, seem to strike a chord with the understanding expressed within local Catholic documents such as LPUC and various Roman documents relating to Catholic education (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, 1983, 1988, 1998). A more recent document prepared by the United States Catholic Bishops' Conference on lay ministry echoes the same ideas ("Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: a Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry," 2005).

The present study contributes towards the design and development of appropriate forms of pre-service and in-service for principals of Catholic schools, including elements not only of theology (and especially ecclesiology) but also of the development of the 'inner journey' – the spiritual integration of work, relationships and self through access to formation opportunities and the means to develop an integrated spirituality of leadership. This quality of interiority, central in the Christian tradition of spirituality, seems to have been one of the most difficult things for colleague principals in the present study to talk about, yet it could be argued to be fundamental to all other aspects of leadership as experienced by principals of Catholic secondary schools.

### **2.6 *The colleague principals' stories***

The present study may also serve to record something of the experiences of a diverse group of colleague principals during a significant period in the history of

Catholic education in Victoria, whose story has remained largely untold and whose insights, in the light of their period of service, might prove invaluable for a future generation of colleague principals. Each of the informants for this study shared their story generously and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to talk about their unique journey in principalship. They also appreciated the opportunity to reflect on the significance of their leadership to themselves, their families and communities. The stories are unique and diverse but some underlying themes are common to them all. The loneliness of the position and the realisation that they were caring for the most precious cargo – the lives of their staff colleagues and students – were deeply felt by all of them. The discovery of their hidden strength and resilience was another experience, each in different situations but common to them all.

## **2.7 Summary**

This chapter has outlined the background to the appointment of lay principals of diocesan Catholic secondary schools in Victoria. It has described how these schools differed from the more historically established congregation-owned secondary schools and has also identified some of the specific characteristics of the role of principals in diocesan secondary Catholic schools as distinct from those in other types of Catholic secondary schools and by reference to the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Policy – “Lay Principals Under Contract 1993.” It has also outlined those dimensions of leadership which can be identified as spiritual and religious in nature since it is on these dimensions that the present enquiry is based. Finally, it has provided some background to the three research questions posed in the present enquiry.

The next chapter will provide a review of relevant literature and show how the nominated research questions have been developed to respond to gaps in the literature.

*...buried the bright edge deep...*”

## **Chapter 3 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The body of literature relating to the nominated research enquiry is considerable and while the starting point for the present enquiry is LPUC, this document seems to point to three major areas within which it might be helpful to look for relevant literature, each of which relates to the enquiry as one facet of a multi-faceted question. My beginning point was to reflect on the experience of lay secondary principals in Catholic schools in Victoria and to discover whether there were any published accounts of the work of the principal through his or her own eyes. Secondly, the literature on education, educational administration and educational leadership, situated within a broader body of literature considering the theory of organisations seemed to warrant some attention. The third major area to be considered was the specifically Catholic literature, including the theology of ministry and relevant documents published by Church authorities, both local and global, relating to Catholic schools and the leadership of these schools. Of particular relevance in this area was the need to review literature dealing with the development of lay leadership in the Catholic Church and how this is expressed in an educational context. This chapter seeks to identify where the practice described conforms to current understanding and also where the literature seems to be silent.

### **3.2 The purpose and scope of the research**

The purpose of this study is to explore the understanding and experience of a selected number of lay principals in Victorian Catholic diocesan secondary schools in the discharge of their responsibilities in the specifically religious and spiritual aspects of their leadership as school principals. Many principals seem reluctant or may be unable to articulate and describe their work and its meaning in specifically theological terms. The language principals use to talk about their work does not seem to follow a uniform pattern. For some principals, their understanding is tacit, not explicit. It is not expressed in a way which can make their thoughts accessible to others. Part of the purpose of this research is to uncover some of the understandings and insights of principals in relation to their

work, especially in its religious and spiritual dimensions. This may help principals themselves to reflect critically on their experience as principals and also assist system authorities to more effectively support current and future principals. It also has the potential to assist members of school communities to develop a richer understanding of the role.

Given the purpose of the research as stated above, the review of literature requires the consideration of a number of distinct clusters of literature in the nominated area, including the following three major groupings, each emerging from LPUC but distinct from each other and each pointing towards the research topic and giving rise to the research questions. The primary literature centres around the immediate personal experience of principalship, as related by principals themselves or as observed and recorded by others. The role of principal is situated in the literature of organisational theory and leadership while the particular characteristics of leadership in a Catholic educational context are defined in some significant ways by the literature of theology and Church documents. These related fields may be depicted diagrammatically thus:

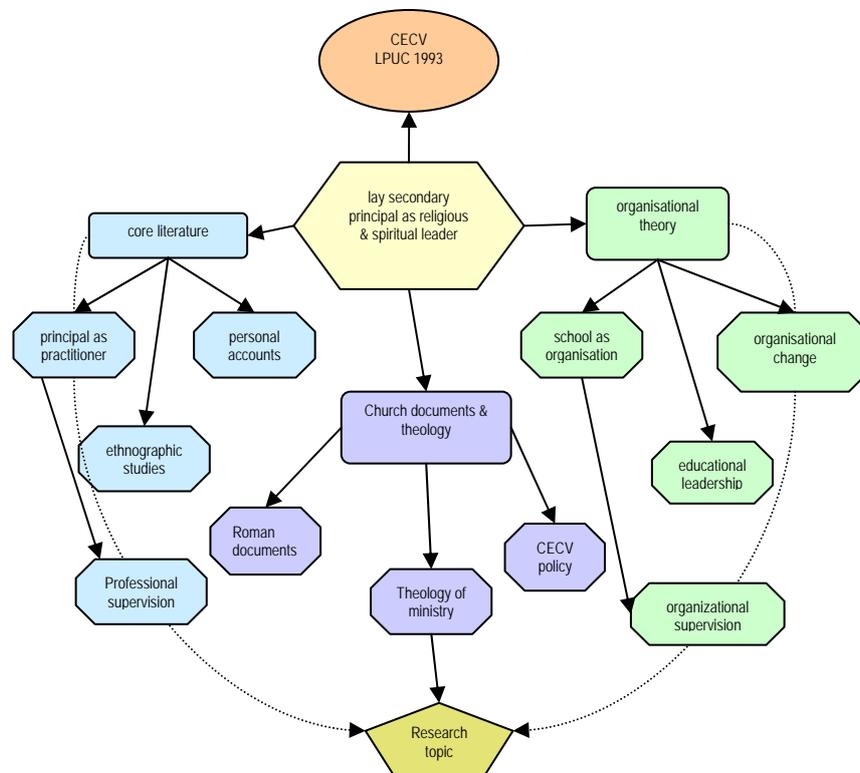


Figure 1 Scope of Literature Review.

### **3.3 *The principal as practitioner***

This study is focussed on the understanding and experience of lay principals in diocesan secondary Catholic schools in Victoria but relatively little seems to have been recorded of the stories of these people, whether in narratives which chronicle their work as principals or in the insights and self-understanding they have come to as a result of reflecting on their work. Rather, the literature seems to concentrate on the theoretical and system aspects of leadership, including at least one exploration of principalship as reflective practice (Sergiovanni, 1995). Some case studies are also available, (Ashbaugh & Kasten, 1995). A classic early study of principalship was 'The Man in the Principal's Office' (Wolcott, 1984), an ethnographic account of the behaviour of a principal at work which examined the role from a cultural anthropological perspective. More recently, David Loader (1997) has written reflectively about some of the experiences and situations he found himself dealing with during his years as a principal of a large independent school in Melbourne and some of the insights he has gained from these situations. Another brief reflective account is provided by Patricia Ryan (1997). Within Australia, only a small number of recent studies of principals at work seems to be available, (Dimmock & O'Donoghue, 1997; Loader, 1997; Wildy, 1999) while in the United Kingdom, a recent comprehensive survey of principals of Catholic schools has been undertaken (Grace, 2002). I have been unable to source other direct descriptions of principals at work which have the insight-based reflective quality of Loader's account (1997). It seems ironic, in a field such as educational leadership, which has generated a considerable volume of literature about so many aspects of principalship, that the voices of principals themselves appear not to be present to a significant degree. It is hoped that this study will bring into the open that which is currently unknown about the meaning a representative group of lay principals of Victorian Catholic secondary schools attribute to their experience.

### **3.4 *The role of principal as leader within an organisation and system***

In turning now to some of the broader literature on educational leadership, I consider the context of the principal's work, both within the school and within the systems and settings in which the school is situated. Since the 1990s a significant and growing body of literature has developed in relation to educational

leadership and specifically the role of the school principal as an agent of educational change and improvement, (Duignan, 1997, 2002; Dunford, Fawcett, & Bennett, 2000; Leithwood, Begley, & Bradley Cousins, 1992; Maxcy, 1991; Smith & Piele, 1997). It has arisen in the context of the study of schools as organisations, exhibiting the same characteristics as organisations in general and requiring appropriate roles and structures of leadership and has its origins in the development of theories of organisation as summarised by Haramlambos, Van Krieken, Smith, & Holburn (1996).

Beginning with the theory of scientific management known as Taylorism, characterised as it was by a profoundly mechanistic representation of organisations, then followed in reaction by an emphasis on human relations based on the importance of interpersonal relationships and progressing through to the rise of corporate culture, all such theories seemed to have been based on the quest for enhanced productivity rather than motivated by what was good for the people within the organisation. Running alongside these phases in the development of organisation theory was the gradual emergence of educational administration as a distinct discipline within the general field of organisation theory (Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs, & Thurston, 1999) which identified four strands of general organisation theory within the educational context: the movement towards efficiency (scientific management), the emphasis on the person (human relations), politics and decision-making and the emergent strand of 'culture.'

In addition to these developments it would seem that the 1980s was a period when the management of schools became markedly more demanding and complicated (Turney, 1992) with the focus moving from system administration towards schools as autonomous units requiring system coordination and a resultant tension between the role of educational leader and the role of corporate manager (Dimmock, 1996). In this circumstance, Turney (1992) argues that principals are often ill-prepared for the complexity of a role which requires competence in planning, communicating, motivating, organising and controlling across four domains: the total school context, the multiple contexts within the school, the wider school community and the educational system within which the school is situated. "The principal's job is steeped in ambiguity and unrealistic

expectations.” (Starratt, 2003, p.245). Turney (1992) suggests that the changes so noted are a reason for principalship to move away from the ‘heroic leader’ model towards an emphasis on a more realistic and shared leadership while Grieses (2000) sees the need to understand organisational change as a process wherein participants enter a discourse dealing with knowledge, skills and attitudes. Such a posture requires a shared approach to what Turney calls participative decision-making (Turney, 1992). But organisational change cannot be viewed solely from a structural perspective since human persons with their individual emotions, motives and intentions provide a complex and often unpredictable context for organisational change (Shaw, 2002).

Within the Australian context, Lakomski and Evers (1995) plot the development of theories of educational administration beginning with Walker in 1970. His emphasis was on a scientific fact-based approach, moving through systems theory which emphasised the social nature of organisations with institutional and individual dimensions. This led to a ‘subjectivist’ reaction represented in the work of Greenfield as described by Lakomski and Evers (1995) and the emergence of a cultural perspective. This in turn has prompted a response in critical theory (Foster, 2003) which looks beyond the motivation of persons to the consideration of the social and political context of human intention and behaviour.

In one sense this pattern of change and development may be understood as an evolutionary process, with each prompting a reaction or response thus leading to the emergence of a new paradigm. Thus far, the theories of organisation discussed have to do with issues of productivity, efficiency and outcomes but more recent writing goes further and defines schools as distinctive organisations whose human intensity gives them a unique value structure (Sergiovanni et al., 1999). Educational administration is portrayed as a distinct science, relying heavily on the previous theories and paradigms from the fields of organisation and administration but using them in a uniquely value-oriented way, thus making of educational administration an ethical science or moral craft. An example of this development is Telford’s (1996) concept of collaborative leadership. She suggests that leadership of schools should be collaborative in nature and that such collaborative leadership is at the heart of the school’s culture. Telford argues that “the leader’s capacity to hold fast to the moral, social or spiritual

vision of the school and at the same time be flexible, creative and problem –solve at the operational level contributes directly to school success” (1996, p.132). Starratt (2003, 2004) believes that “education is a profoundly moral work...which calls on the full humanity of teachers and students...” (Starratt, 2004, p.2). For educational leaders, “loving relationships are crucial to our authenticity.” (Starratt, 2004, p.67). Benjamin (2002) supports this view when she says that education is “an engagement with ethical intent.” (Benjamin, 2002, p.75). A similar set of challenges for leadership to those confronting school principals can be observed in other human service organisations (Duignan et al., 2003).

One significant aspect of organisation theory which impinges on the present study is the area of change management, especially, in the present context, the appointment of a school principal as a change event and the consequences of that change event. In a United States study of school improvement, Brown and Comola (1991) explored the phenomenon of resistance to change in an educational setting and identified fear of change as motivated by a loss of power. While members of the organisation may have accepted the need for change at an intellectual level, this brought with it a loss of power as expressed in changes to the power relationships prevailing among members of the organisation.

More recent studies of the phenomenon of change (Randall, 2004; Shaw, 2002) have explored the human, as compared with the structural, aspects of this phenomenon. Shaw (2002) argues that many studies of organisational change have been based on the assumption that organisations operate in conditions of trust, truth-telling, consensus and collaboration with decisions and actions based on rationality, valid knowledge and collaboration. She argues that the reality is often otherwise, that the basic forces at work have to do with power based on fear, irrationality and coercion, leading to resistance. The question she puts is not how we change organisations but rather, given the inevitability of ongoing change, how we can participate in the way things change, how we are changing ourselves and our situation, how we struggle for ongoing sense-making through conversation as the basis for joint action. An example of the complexity of change is provided by Brooke-Smith (2003) in his comparison of two widely different schools communities and their reaction to the appointment of a new

principal. His study highlights the intensely political nature of resistance to change.

Randall (2004) suggests that in undertaking organisational change we need to move away from an emphasis on the three “Resource E’s” to a new emphasis on the three “People E’s” (Randall, 2004, p.80) from economy, efficiency and effectiveness to E’s which energise, enable and empower. Randall’s underlying argument is that for too long, change theory has failed to fully recognise the human dimension of change, including the perceptions of people and the effects on them. He argues that more attention needs to be paid to the actors rather than the structures.

In a very real sense the appointment of a principal and their successful uptake of the appointment can be regarded as a significant change event in the life of a school and if so, it warrants the sort of ‘project management’ process described by Randall. Kirton (2003) suggests the need to deal with particular and specific change events, “resistance to this change” (Kirton, 2003 p.14) rather than a consideration of change as a generic phenomenon. In her terms, change is inevitably triggered by a ‘precipitating event’ with foreseen and unforeseen consequences and effects for various parties. Lee (2003) suggests that there is a “universal conservative impulse” (Lee, 2003) at work within which the potential or actual loss of power and control brought about by the change event create fear and anxiety. These deeply human and powerful emotions lie at the centre of resistance to change and one of the critically important issues in change management is how to deal effectively with them.

In considering the historical sequence of the development of theories of organisation, from which emerge theories of educational administration, it is possible to see a sort of evolutionary process at work. Various strands and paradigms become dominant then give way to new paradigms while still retaining their influence, whether in major or vestigial ways. The emergence of an understanding of schools as communities, whose primary purpose is the transmission of shared values leads to a consideration of the role of those leading such schools as one which is primarily ethical, cultural, moral and spiritual. The retention in human beings of the genetic heritage of millions of

years of evolutionary development may provide an apt metaphor for the way in which current leaders in schools and schools themselves continue to exhibit features, characteristics and ongoing influences of previous paradigms as they deal with present complexity. The present enquiry seeks to explore the awareness and experience of principals as they have lived in that complexity.

### **3.5 *Catholic Schools as a subset of schools in general***

It is to be noted that Catholic secondary schools in Victoria had always enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, a factor which inevitably includes attention to governance as well as management and leadership, three essential strands identified by Beavis (1997). This is a significant dimension of the work of principals in diocesan secondary schools in Victoria where governance is exercised at a strongly local level by regional parish clergy working in cooperation with a School Board and principal and with support and advice provided by the appropriate diocesan Catholic Education Office.

The unique and specific purpose of schools must be reflected in the leadership they require and in any analysis of the effectiveness of this leadership. If Catholic schools are considered as a sub-set of schools in general, it is important to recognise that these schools have a number of specific characteristics which are distinctive, or at least which are articulated in a distinctive language such that they can be seen as both similar to and different from schools in general. Furthermore, if it is accepted that Catholic schools do have distinctive characteristics, it is then reasonable to suggest that they require a style of leadership which “fits.” The principal of the Catholic diocesan secondary school is located in a web of interconnecting systems and organisations, as well as being the leader of a specific complex organisation – the school for which he/she is responsible. Part of the present task will be to describe some of the elements of this interconnecting network and begin to define some “fitting” characteristics (Mc Laughlin 2001).

My purpose is also to show how Catholic schools, while distinctive in nature and purpose, share many characteristics and features applying to schools generally and to all human organisations. While the Church is a theological entity for which

titles such as “the Mystical Body of Christ,” the “People of God” and “Communio,” are used as metaphors for the Church (Flannery, 1992d) to describe the nature of the Church, it is also a human institution, situated in time and place and having about it all the social, cultural and organisational characteristics universal to all human institutions. It may be possible, therefore to explore structures such as schools by reference to literature which discusses organisational growth and the contribution of leaders to this process. Not all such literature is necessarily ‘secular’ in nature and there would appear to be a significant degree of convergence between the specifically secular literature and that body of literature which I have called ‘related’ in this literature review, having mainly to do with Catholic theology and ecclesiology. For example, the application of Chaos Theory to human institutions as ‘systems’ (Wheatley, 1994) is taken up and applied to the situation of the Catholic Church in the wake of Vatican II (Arbuckle, 1993) and therefore able to be applied to the Catholic school as an ecclesial organisation. However, it may sometimes be misleading to too readily apply a model from Physics to organisations such as schools (Davis & Maxcy, 1998) which may require more subtle, more reflective and less deterministic analysis.

Ludwig (1995) speaks about the institutional dysfunction of the Catholic Church since Vatican II, taking up and echoing Collins’ (1991) analysis and pointing out the urgent need for renewal from the base rather than from the hierarchy downwards. A further commentary on the challenges currently facing the Catholic Church in Australia is provided by Mc Gullion (2003) who argues that the contemporary Catholic Church is in crisis for a complex array of reasons. These include challenges to authority, the question of dissent, generational change, a loss of imagination and they contribute to a situation where the Church hierarchy is seen as increasingly out of touch with the members.

If the role of principal is to witness to the Gospel and in so doing work to bring about the reign of God one of the goals of such work would be to promote social justice and so change the material reality of life here and now rather than in some future time and place (Collins 1991). In this sense the principal is acting directly as an agent of change within the organisation and so impacting directly on the quality of life and the meaning of life to others. Especially in times of rapid

change the leader is called to act with passion and soul and with a sense of authenticity towards self and others (Duignan, 1998). These are universally human challenges but they strike a particular resonance with those charged with leadership in Catholic schools.

### **3.6 *The nature of principalship in a Catholic school***

Over the past thirty years or so, the number of lay principals appointed to Catholic secondary schools has been steadily increasing (see Appendix A). While the general trend to lay leadership in these schools has been noted as a historical development in the story of Catholic education in Victoria, not a great deal has been written about the experience of principals during this period nor about the degree of understanding they have as to the special characteristics of their role. The explicit terms under which lay principals in Catholic secondary schools are currently appointed place emphasis not only on managerial, educational and organisational leadership responsibilities but also on specifically spiritual and religious leadership responsibilities as well ("Lay Principals Under Contract," 1993). These spiritual and religious responsibilities are not to be thought of as a sort of overlay but rather as integral to the exercise of leadership within a faith community (McLaughlin, 2000; Sullivan, 2001).

Given that terms such as 'mission,' 'ministry' and 'lay' are all used as explicit categories in the responsibilities of the principal it will be necessary to briefly review the literature on lay ministry in the Catholic Church and the degree to which the role of principal can be understood as a ministry within the educational mission of the Catholic Church of Melbourne (*A Statement of Principles Regarding Catholic Education, Archdiocese of Melbourne*, 2002).

The term 'ministry' has a relatively brief history in Catholicism, first making its appearance in the wake of Vatican II and being more fully developed theologically only in the 1980's (O'Meara, 1983). It emerged not out of the decrees of councils or churches but rather out of a period of intense change in society, when individuals began to search for greater freedom, maturity and equality within the Church. O'Meara points out that after an initial period when the term was used to describe almost any kind of work or service within the

ecclesial community, definitions gradually sharpened in focus to the point where ministry began to be understood in terms of, for example, liturgical, educational and catechetical activity within local churches, with well defined characteristics. The definition of ministry now included the following characteristics; it involved doing some specific thing; it was oriented towards the bringing about the 'reign of God'; it was public; it was done on behalf of the Christian community as a result of a gift received in baptism (and ordination); it had particular limits and identity within a diversity of ministries and it involved some sort of public commissioning (O'Meara, 1983).

This definition is taken up and built on by Osborne (1993) who understands ministry in the context of both clerical and lay ministry as grounded in gospel discipleship and only then in secondary distinctions such as lay, clerical, or hierarchical. He makes the important point that the documents of Vatican II never use the term 'lay' to designate the common source of discipleship and goes on to argue that the terms 'lay' and 'clerical' are historically determined categories which are theologically incomplete and no longer helpful in seeking a true understanding of ministry. Jesus was neither clerical nor lay, nor were his mission and his ministry. Every Christian, through Baptism and Eucharist shares in the three-fold ministry of Christ as priest, prophet and king. Osborne asks whether the mission of the Church is a clerical mission or a lay one and observes that this is an absurd and meaningless question. If the mission of the Church is clerical, how can it produce a lay ministry, if lay how can it produce a clerical ministry?

Another aspect of this discussion on ministry is considered by Collins (1992) who argues strongly that not all Christians are ministers. Collins refutes the definition of ministry as understood in the protestant churches (that all the baptised participate in ministry and that ministry is equivalent to 'service') and in the strong insistence of Pope John Paul II on the cultic and sacrificial aspects of ministerial priesthood (John Paul II, 1992). Rather, Collins suggests a definition based on ministry of the Word to which limited numbers are called and then received and recognised in the community by some form of ordination. Discussing 1:Cor., Collins considers the gifts of the Spirit (*charismata*) as leading some to ministries (*diakonai*) and others to activities (*energemata*) but these are distinct from each

other. A further refinement of Collins' distinction between ministry and service is given in 'Deacons in the Church' (Collins 2002) where the author describes ministry as a sacred mandate to a mission or function at the behest of a church rather than the generic provision of any service to the community.

Most of these writers seem to agree that those called to leadership roles within the community ought to undergo some form of installation through which the one called is accepted and affirmed by the community as a form of validation but some, at least, remain impatient about the lack of clarity in the current documents and about the institutional slowness to respond to the ambiguities apparent in the documents (Rademacher, 1991).

If ministry is something quite distinct from the provision of a generic service to a community but rather has about it the nature of a sacred mandate to a mission or function at the behest of a church (Collins, 2002; O'Meara, 1983) it seems important for that distinction to be well understood by those who are deemed to be fulfilling a ministerial role. The characteristics of lay ecclesial ministry as spelled out by the US bishops are:

- *Authorisation* of the hierarchy to serve publicly in the local church,
- *Leadership* in a particular area of ministry,
- *Close mutual collaboration* with the pastoral ministry of bishops, priests and deacons,
- *Preparation and formation* appropriate to the level of responsibilities that are assigned to them.

("Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: a Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry," 2005, p.7). These could well be applied to the role of principal to test the degree to which the role can indeed be recognised as a ministry.

It would seem that further development in a theology of ministry within the Catholic Church is likely. The terms 'mission' and 'ministry' are used interchangeably by some writers (Osborne, 1993) while some of the documents of Vatican II (Flannery, 1992f) use the terms 'apostolate' and 'mission' in such a way as to suggest a distinctly lay state which is very different from that of the clerical state. Further ambiguity and uncertainty arise in *Lumen Gentium*

(Flannery, 1992d) where the expressions 'People of God' 'Christifideles' and 'priesthood of all believers' are all used in various contexts and in sometimes contradictory terms. 'People of God' originally implied 'everyone in the Church, clerical, religious, lay' but usage since then has tended to imply it to refer to 'that part of the people of God who are not clerical' Similarly 'christifideles' – all Christ's faithful, all the baptised, now seems to suggest 'other than the ordained' Christifideles Laici, (John Paul II, 1989) tried to resolve and clarify these apparent contradictions but in the letter on the role of the parish priest, (Congregation for the Clergy, 2002) the separation between priestly ministry and lay involvement is once again sharply made. This is especially significant in the context of sharply falling numbers of clergy (see Appendix B) to the point that the availability of celebration of the Sunday Eucharist can no longer be taken for granted in many parishes.

Enormous development in the theology of ministry has indeed occurred since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when a pope could say:

*"In the hierarchy alone reside the power and the authority necessary to move and direct all the members of the society (the Church) to its end. As for the many, (the laity) they have no other right than to let themselves be guided and so follow their pastors in docility"* (Pius X, 1906).

In considering the emergence since Vatican II of a gradually more comprehensive theology of ministry, it seems reasonable to suggest that that further development of theological and ecclesial thought are likely. Indeed such development seems clearly to be in progress ("Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: a Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry," 2005).

It seems, in considering the development of the theology of ministry, that theological reflection on pastoral practice has tended to lead to the further development of an articulated and more comprehensive theology to explain and understand that practice. It may be that an examination of the lived experience of lay secondary principals will help illuminate further theological reflection on the meaning of ministry as applied to the role of principal of the diocesan secondary

school. Given the uneven and partial development of a clear theology of ministry in the Catholic educational context, it seems appropriate to explore the understanding and experience practising principals have of their role as “an integral part of the Church’s official educational ministry...” (“Lay Principals Under Contract,” 1993) and by so doing, add to the collective understanding of the role as it currently is, and as it might become, in the future.

Within this general discussion of the role of principal as a ministry, it is important to consider some of the specific responsibilities of leadership explicitly referred to in the principal’s contract. These include service, pastoral and collaborative dimensions. They also include the responsibility for facilitating and nurturing the faith growth of colleagues and students. All of these activities are assumed to be underpinned by a living of the Gospel in life and work. How do principals understand this spiritual dimension of their role? Can we speak of such a thing as a spirituality of lay principalship and if so, what would be its defining characteristics?

Dreyer (1994) argues for a definition of spirituality which includes prayer, contemplation, virtue, work, sexuality and ‘being in the world’ as dimensions of the way in which God is present in the life of the person. Such a spirituality, she says, requires openness, transparency, honesty, reflectiveness and mutual communication. Holiness is judged not by office, gender or success but by love, justice, peace, joy and patience. She picks up O’Meara’s definition of ministry (1983) especially in relation to the intentional public nature of ministry and argues that this intentionality should flow from faith commitment and from a clear understanding that our everyday ordinary lives and work are the locus of our spiritual journey. She also warns strongly against applying a ‘clerical’ spirituality to lay persons and points out the need for structures supportive of lay spiritual life. Finally Dreyer cites Bernard Lonergan (1994) in arguing that meaning emerges out of the authentic reflection of a community of persons.

Naming one’s world both orders the world and allows one to orient oneself within it. This naming creates reality, shaping it in deliberate intentional ways. Things come to have meaning as a result of a complex process of events, ideas and persons interacting but the question arises as to who assigns meaning. Dreyer

(1994) argues that the process of assigning spiritual meaning through reflection on experience must include the participation of the lay community. The present study invites principals to reflect deeply on their role and to develop a fuller understanding of the ministerial dimensions of principalship in all that this implies for future growth and development.

Whitehead and Whitehead (1991) take up the discussion of the spiritual dimension of leadership by claiming that pastoral leaders can only be recognised as religiously authentic when they are willing to exercise spiritual leadership. They must be present to their community in a human and spiritual way. For this to happen they must be willing to be companions in faith, fellow disciples and familiar with hope and doubt, having been strengthened by the experience of crisis and consolation in their own lives.

A further dimension of leadership discussed by Whitehead and Whitehead (1991) is the collaborative nature of pastoral and spiritual leadership. Collaboration, they argue, requires connections between persons. While any staff group or team needs organisational order, role definition and clarity of goals, it also needs interpersonal relationships based on trust, respect and openness. Organisations may assign 'headship' but the group confers legitimacy by accepting the right of the appointed person to influence their lives. While leadership has an institutional base (role/office) and personal qualities (competence/vision) it also has to take account of the extra-rational dynamics of symbolic, religious and spiritual authenticity. The lay secondary principal is at a place of extraordinary convergence in this regard.

According to Whitehead and Whitehead, (1991) such leaders have to be at ease with who they are. They must have befriended their limitations and not be embarrassed by their personal weaknesses. If they operate out of a defensive style of leadership or a fragile ego, they will motivate others to either protect them or expose them thus leading to group disharmony and instability. Whitehead and Whitehead (1991) argue that spiritual leadership is the most demanding task of leadership, helping people find meaning in their own lives. Those willing to accompany the ones being led in their grappling with the deepest questions confronting them, who stand with them and strengthen them in the search are true spiritual leaders.

These dimensions of the role of the principal as a religious and spiritual leader give rise to a series of questions. In what ways do lay secondary principals experience the personal inner journey of the spirit? What sustains them on the journey? What support do they access? What does this mean to them? Is it tied to the meaning-making activities mentioned above? How do they nourish the faith life of their staff?

This responsibility for adult faith development poses a particular challenge to principals. While the religious and faith education of children and young people are very well resourced in terms of classroom materials, training in appropriate pedagogy for teachers and access to professional support, my observation is that principals and other leaders in Catholic schools have not generally had the opportunity to develop the necessary confidence and skill to articulate their own beliefs and encourage others towards a deeper experience of Christian faith.

The General Directory for Catechesis (*General Directory for Catechesis*, 1998) is quite explicit about the need to give adult religious education and catechesis priority of provision, as does *Christifideles Laici* (John Paul II, 1989) yet systematic programs for staff seem not to be evident. This leaves principals with the responsibility of designing and providing appropriate opportunities themselves, presumably. A similar concern applies to the other adult members of the school community for many of whom contact with the school is often the most likely or most frequent contact with the 'institutional' Church.

These questions are all the more difficult in the context of the general decline in religious belief which some writers identify with the onset of 'postmodernity' (Gallagher, 1997; O'Murchu, 1997, 2000) - a condition of 'unbelief' which takes shape in a number of forms including religious amnesia, secular marginalisation, anchorless spirituality and cultural desolation. One expression of this decline is the statistical evidence that regular church attendance and participation are falling, especially among the younger members of the Church (Dixon, 2005). Gallagher (1997) cites Sandra Schneiders who suggests that an explicitly Christian spirituality has three main characteristics; lived experience – giving

more attention to faith response to God rather than to doctrine; developmental – fostering further growth; it is practical – having to do with skills to nourish a conscious relationship with God through prayer. According to Groome (2001) spirituality is a quality or reality lying at the heart of Catholicism which is life-giving and which should permeate all education and define the vocation of every teacher.

This prompts the question “to what degree do principals understand this explicitly stated leadership responsibility within their role as principal and how have they experienced this dimension of their leadership?” In undertaking this kind of faith development leadership, what resources have they called on in terms of personal faith maturity and appropriate theological and catechetical preparation?” What practical skills can they help to develop in their staff that enable access on a daily basis to the gift of God in Christ while acknowledging the limited realities of each person’s life situation?

These questions are all the more urgent and significant in the context of the broad spectrum of faith backgrounds and experience teachers bring to their role in the Catholic secondary school at the present time. Sullivan (2001) describes this complexity well in his discussion of the tension between being distinctive **and** being inclusive. Catholic schools, he argues, are caught in a situation of polarity. To be true to the tradition and to their mandate, they must uphold Catholic distinctiveness in terms of curriculum, symbols, rituals and practices. At the same time this very tradition calls them to be inclusive, not to serve the needs of an exclusively Catholic clientele but rather to be open to the world, with all its pluralism. Haldane, too, expresses the confusion and demoralisation experienced by teachers of Religious Education in the United Kingdom (Haldane, 2004). Indeed this dilemma is all the more compelling if Catholic schools are to be open to the ‘new poor’ (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998).

These core activities and attributes of principalship are situated in a broader literature relating to Catholic education and the nature of Catholic schools. Beginning with ‘The Catholic School’ and followed by three other documents, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1977; 1983; 1988; 1998) describes

the characteristics of the Catholic school including its ecclesial nature and its participation in the mission of the Church, the qualities required of teachers, a curriculum which attempts to integrate faith and life and a disposition to its students which make a special welcome for “the new poor” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998 n.15). The documents contain some challenges and contradictions, not the least of which is the provision of a religious education program which is catechetical in nature (a stance which presumes that the teacher ‘in faith’ is teaching students who are also ‘in faith’ as compared with a phenomenological stance which does not require a faith dimension on the part of either teacher or student) while at the same time making a special place for those most deprived of Christian formation – the ‘unfaithed’ and ‘unchurched.’ There is an enormous challenge for those leading such schools especially in an environment of secularisation, social and family disintegration and the absence of effective parenting for many students. If, as the documents strongly affirm, parents are the primary educators of their children (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977 n.73) and the role of the school is secondary and supporting, how can the school discharge this responsibility in the face of a collapse of confidence by many parents in their capacity to provide effective parenting?

McLaughlin (2000) picks up the tensions within the Roman documents and summarises characteristics which are common to both the Roman documents and other writing on Catholic schools. He concludes that schools wishing to claim the title ‘Catholic’ must be holistic, communitarian, welcoming, nurturing of religious and moral formation and promoting a distinctive view about the meaning of human persons and of human life. If the principal of the Catholic school has a responsibility to lead the school community towards this kind of reality, it would seem that principals themselves need formation as well as the development of appropriate knowledge and skills. The beginnings of the development of such programs of formation are described in Duignan (2002) but while these speak of professional learning in a context of Catholic tertiary settings, they seem to fall short of the structured introduction to the personal and spiritual aspects of such formation and rather emphasise interdisciplinary studies with a Catholic theological focus. This gives rise to the research question: ‘to what degree has the principal sought and/or experienced formation beyond academic study which

has enriched their practice of principalship? What has been the nature of this formation – content, process, duration, other aspects?’

If the role of principal is to witness to the Gospel and in so doing work to bring about the reign of God one of the goals of such work would be to promote social justice and so change the material reality of life here and now rather than in some future time and place (Collins, 1991). In this sense the principal is acting directly as an agent of change within the organisation and thereby impacting directly on the quality of life and the meaning of life to others. Especially in times of rapid change the leader is called to act with passion and soul and with a sense of authenticity towards self and others (Duignan, 1998). These are universally human challenges but they strike a particular resonance with those charged with leadership in Catholic schools.

The dilemmas facing head teachers in the United Kingdom (Grace, 1995; Sullivan, 2001) seem to be similar to those facing principals in Victoria – how to maintain Catholic schools which are faithful to the best in the Catholic education tradition while being open to the real pressures brought to bear by moral and cultural pluralism, increasing state involvement in curriculum and funding, just enrolment policy and the claims of the ‘new poor’ as against the need to maintain sound financial management, Catholic communitarianism as against liberal individualism.

This literature gives rise to the question as to whether principals in Victorian Catholic secondary schools are aware of these or similar dilemmas, whether they can ever be resolved satisfactorily and what means principals use, in the course of their work, to address them.

One final issue in relation to principalship in a Catholic school is that of dissent. This has been explored by Arbuckle (1993) in the context of the primacy of conscience and the need for the Church to hear from members speaking with prophetic freedom and from a stance of profound fidelity and by Prest (2000) whose concern is the apparent personal dissent by faithful lay Catholic teachers from major teachings of the Church, such as the prohibition on contraception found in *Humanae Vitae* (Paul VI, 1968). Prest describes how many faithful lay

Catholic teachers have struggled with the dilemma of maintaining their personal faith and eucharistic observance while conscientiously dissenting from major teachings of the Church. What are the implications of such a situation for those in formal public leadership roles for whom authenticity in leadership is a core value? I have not been able to source relevant literature on this question but believe it would warrant further consideration.

### **3.7 A note on supervision**

At a number of points in the preceding discussion, the aspects of ongoing professional learning, formation and accountability in the role of principal have been touched on or implied. While not wishing to introduce a topic which of itself is complex and broad-ranging and which merits a further investigation in its own right, it is important to acknowledge that professional supervision might be a means of providing principals with a structured and rigorous opportunity to continue their own professional learning, access appropriate personal support and become more explicitly accountable in monitoring the quality of their work. Through this process they would have the opportunity to develop further self-awareness, self knowledge and reflectivity. The term 'supervision' is used here as it is understood in the helping professions (Hawkins & Shohet, 2000; Kadushin, 1992) and described by van Ooijen (2003) who defines supervision as 'the craft of reflective learning.' This is to be distinguished from the industrial and organisational uses of the term to define the first level of management (Hunter, Luker, & Johnson, 1991) mentoring (Thody, 1993) and the quasi-inspectorial, bureaucratic process of school governance and administration which is part of the United States school educational setting (Garubo & Rothstein, 1998; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998)

### **3.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have reviewed three main bodies of literature, beginning with accounts of principalship either by observers or by personal recollection. I have tried to show that, considering the complexity and significance of the role of principal in determining the Catholicity of schools and the quality of their educational outcomes for students, there seems to be a lacuna in the literature

which invites the research questions I have formulated, namely; what is the understanding of principals as to the religious and spiritual meaning of their role? How have they experienced this aspect of their work? What have they found helpful and supporting to them? It is important to comment that given the intensely relational, personal and subjective nature of the principal's work which includes caring for others, advising, guiding, supporting, interpreting, challenging, communicating with staff and other members of the school community, it seems appropriate that my research is based on highly personal accounts from a number of informant principals rather than on a more conceptual or theoretical analysis of the principal in role, in setting or in systems.

I have also considered the literature around organisation theory and the characteristics of effective educational leadership and shown how the role of principal, in whatever setting, is evolving steadily to become more complex, more values-based, more relational and more heavily reliant on symbolic leadership as compared to a mechanistic managerial approach, focussed on measurement, efficiency and cost-effectiveness. I have also demonstrated how leaders have had to come to terms with the moral and ethical dimensions of the role at a time when society, culture and education systems are more complex, non-linear and unpredictable. I also demonstrated that Catholic school leadership shares many of the characteristics of good leadership in whatever setting, whether religious or secular but that reference to the Catholic Christian tradition compels leaders to address the fundamentally moral task of leadership in an authentic way.

Finally, I have shown how lay principals of Catholic secondary schools can understand their role as having a distinctly ministerial quality about it and that an understanding of the implications of this are still emerging, both within the awareness of principals themselves and the faith community, the Church.

I believe that these three strands or aspects of lay principalship of Catholic secondary schools are clearly articulated in LPUC and point to the research question I identified in Chapter 1. The next chapter describes a research methodology approach which, given what has been discussed in Chapter 3, seems particularly fitting in addressing the lacuna identified above.

*...loving their cool hardness in our hands...*”

## **CHAPTER 4 DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this research was to explore the religious and spiritual dimensions of the leadership of some lay principals in diocesan Catholic secondary schools in Victoria. The research seeks to investigate the degree to which principals understand their role as a ministry. This involves a consideration of the understanding principals have regarding these dimensions of their leadership. It also seeks to give an account of the experience of principals and the meaning they attribute to their work. Finally, it describes some of the supports principals have experienced, whether through significant relationships, further study, formation experienced and ‘system’ assistance which has supported them in the role and in personal and professional growth. In undertaking the research, I assumed the stance of a fellow traveller, having experienced principalship myself during a historically significant period in Catholic secondary schools in Victoria.

This chapter explains how the nominated inquiry was undertaken in the context of a specific epistemology which in turn determined the theoretical framework within which data were gathered and analysed. It briefly describes the epistemology and theoretical perspective adopted and shows how these informed the decisions as to what data were gathered, how they were gathered and from whom they were gathered. Finally it addresses verification and ethics issues and provides a summary of the research design.

### **4.2 Theoretical Framework**

#### **4.2.1 Epistemology**

The meta-theoretical position on knowledge I adopted in the study is attributable to a number of writers, including Bruner, (1986; 1990) and Schwandt (2000). Bruner argues that there are two modes of knowing – abstract and narrative. Abstract knowing is about verification of empirical truth while the narrative mode

has to do with exploring patterns of human intention and action with the purpose of establishing the believability of human experience or 'verisimilitude' (Bruner, 1986). Hence the work of the inquirer is to find patterns within the words and action of the informants for others to inspect, while staying as close to the construction of the world as the informants originally experienced it. Listening to people's stories enables the particularity of their lives to be recognised.

But whether abstract or narrative, all knowledge is tacit before it becomes articulate, (Greene, 1969). Michael Polanyi, in Greene (1969), explores the platonic idea of seeking knowledge by reference to the image of the cave. The inquirer is in a dark cave and has a stick which is being used as a probe. The inquirer's hand does not touch the walls of the cave directly but through use of the probe, the inquirer gradually learns more about the dimensions of the cave. We can come to know by interpreting the sensation as we use the stick. Just as we cannot see or feel directly what the cave is like, we nevertheless come to know the cave well enough to move around in it with the help of the probe.

To apply the metaphor of the cave to the present study, it is possible to see leadership in the Catholic school as the 'cave' being explored. The stick being used to explore this reality can be seen as the research methodology adopted for the study – listening to the accounts of informants and reflecting on them so as to better understand the nature of the leadership experience they are describing. It is not possible to experience directly what that has been for them but by immersing myself in their accounts, it is possible for me to increase my understanding of the characteristics and features of that experience.

Tacit knowledge is unarticulated. Explicit knowledge can be expressed in words, figures, diagrams, maps and formulae where it can then be subjected to critical reflection. Tacit knowledge cannot be so reflected on. Until it is articulated, it lies beyond the scope of the inquirer. Qualitative research involves both kinds of knowledge. As we articulate our observations and reflect on what we know explicitly, we begin to uncover tacit knowledge, which can in turn be subjected to critical thinking and thereby become more explicit.

People see the world as mostly background (or subsidiary) but bring objects (the situation being investigated) into the foreground (or focal). While focussing, the knower is still part of the world being observed. He/she can decide what is background and what is focal but cannot stand outside the situation being observed. So there exists a three-way relationship between the knower, the subsidiary and the focal (Greene, 1969).

As the inquirer focuses on the situation being investigated, there will be a certain degree of ambiguity and vagueness especially in the early stages. Ambiguity arises from the process of attempting to understand data as they unfold. Patterns are at first tentative and the inquirer must be prepared to give up early interpretations as further data emerge. Ambiguity means that there may be two interpretations of an event co-existing and the inquirer must be ready to hold both while waiting for further data which will clarify one or the other interpretation as having greater merit in the light of the data gradually emerging. Vagueness must also be tolerated by the inquirer since the situation may lack precision such as to require collection of more data or more precise data.

Often the inner world of the other is initially seen as ambiguous and one of the ways in which this ambiguity can be explored is through listening to the person's story. Stories unfold over time and the meaning of one event can often be understood in terms of what happened before and what comes after, in a complex interweaving of events – 'webs of meaning,' (Arendt, 1958). It may even be the case that the listener to the story may understand its meaning more clearly than does the person creating or telling the story. In this sense the relationship between the knower and the known is a dynamic one, having about it a quality of mutuality and dialogue. The viewer creates knowledge through interaction with the viewed. Reality is a socially and culturally constructed thing, hence there is no 'universal' truth, only the particular truth for each person, embedded in their stories (Bruner, 1990).

When viewed from this perspective it becomes obvious that knowledge is not passive. The human mind does something with the sensations and impressions it receives, forming concepts, abstracts, ideas, hence knowledge must be a constructed thing. We create concepts to explain what our senses perceive and

we continually modify and adjust our conceptual frameworks in the light of subsequent experience. All of this activity takes place within an historical, social and cultural context of shared understandings, practices, language and symbols, all of which are in a state of continual change. The term 'social constructionism' is used to describe this general condition of knowledge creation (Schwandt, 2000) and it can be appreciated that there is no absolute empirical knowledge 'out there' which can be grasped in an unmediated way. In this sense, all knowledge is mediated and cannot therefore be apolitical, or exclusive of the embodied aspects of human experience. Knowledge is always political, ideological and permeated with values. What distinguishes (social) human action from the movement of physical objects is that human action is inherently meaningful.

Thus to understand a particular social action (in the present case leading the Catholic school) the inquirer must grasp the meanings that constitute that action. This action has a certain intentional quality that indicates the kind of action it is and which can only be understood in terms of the system of meanings to which it belongs. Meaning-making is embedded in stories or narratives, (Bruner, 1990). Our stories are lived experiences to which we, in concert with others, give meaning. The role of the qualitative researcher is to examine the meanings of these stories because they are public and shared, hence a movement from tacit to articulated, from unexamined to critically reflected on.

The social constructionist inquirer thus has to confront a number of major issues: how to define what 'understanding' actually means and how to justify claims to 'understand'; how to frame the research project in such a way as to enhance valid interpretation; how to attend to the ethical issues which surround the research event.

#### 4.2.2 Theoretical Perspective

Given the socially constructed nature of knowledge argued for above, I believe the methodological stance or posture most appropriate to the nominated inquiry (an exploration of the meaning people give to their experience in terms of the religious and spiritual dimension of the role of principal) is interpretativist and constructionist, called here 'Interpretative Constructionism' after Denzin (1983).

This approach has a number of elements including theory of knowledge, methodological posture and methodology proposed.

I wish now to briefly explore some of the characteristics and qualities pertaining to this posture. Given what has already been said about the dynamic interactive nature of knowledge, the inquirer must adopt an empathic identification with the respondent's situation. To understand the meaning of human action is to require an ability to appreciate the subjective consciousness or intent of the actors from the inside- including their motives, desires, beliefs and values. The "discovered" reality we seek to explore arises from the interactive process in all its aspects; temporal, cultural and structural. Both I's meanings and the respondent's meanings have to be taken into account. It is necessary to go beyond 'surface' meanings or presumed meanings – "to look for views and values as well as acts and facts" (Charmaz, 2000, p.525). I believe that the posture of 'researcher as interrogatory fellow traveller' allows me the opportunity to acknowledge the subjectivity of stance and have empathy with the respondent group, sharing their joys and pains but adding something in terms of meaningful insights achieved, articulated and shared.

I have been using the term 'respondent' throughout this section but am aware that in some of the literature, the term 'informant' is favoured. I believe this is a better descriptor in the present study. It seems to imply more open-endedness and a difference in stance towards sources of data on the part of the enquirer in that the relationship between the enquirer and the other seems more two-way, dynamic and mutually cooperating rather than the more one-way, static implications contained in the term 'respondent.' Having adopted the stance of 'interrogatory fellow-traveller' in this study, I will use the term 'informant' to remain consistent with this stance.

Two further aspects of this methodological stance are the concepts of 'Indwelling' and 'Human as Instrument' as discussed by Denzin, (1983). Indwelling is a posture of being at one with the respondent, of being empathetic rather than sympathetic. This requires an approach to knowledge which is reflective. The inquirer is part of the investigation but at the same time stands aside to rethink the meanings of the experience (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Tacit knowledge

is gained by indwelling. When one lives within a situation, one learns to attend away from the object (words/action/situation being investigated) and towards the meaning of the object. In the posture of indwelling, the knower and the known are connected. Indwelling requires the researcher to invest sufficient time and interest to learn the culture, test for misinformation introduced by distortion either of self or informants and to build trust. Investing time allows the inquirer to be in the situation long enough to understand things as they unfold.

For indwelling to take place, two further qualities must be in place; the inquirer must allow for equality and distinction (Arendt, 1958). We are essentially equal; if we were not, we could never hope to understand each other or those who have gone before us. But we are also distinct; if we were not distinct, we would not need to understand each other. Equality allows us some access to the inner world of others because in some ways we are all alike. 'Distinctness' makes it necessary for the other person to attempt to communicate through words and actions what they experience internally because we are all different in other ways. It is because of this equality/distinctness plurality that communication is both necessary and difficult. Even if another tells us how he/she experiences a situation, this telling does not constitute direct experience of their world. The inquirer must translate and interpret this account and the interpretation is coloured by the inner experiences and feelings of the inquirer.

Because we need to understand and be understood, we insert ourselves into the world through speech and action. We create webs of meaning and we are drawn into already existing webs of meaning:

*“this revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are with others and neither for nor against them – that is in sheer human togetherness” (Arendt, 1958, p.180).* Indwelling allows the inquirer to see differences within similar situations and similarities within different situations.

### **4.3 Research Methodology**

Since the purpose of this study was to explore the understanding and experience of a group of secondary principals about the meaning of their work, I used an approach that honoured their insights and recognised the complexity and depth of their awareness. The most appropriate instrument for the collection of data

seemed to be the 'human as instrument' (Denzin, 1983) because only another human can be sensitive to the complexities, ambiguities and multi-layered meanings in informants' lives. The human-as-instrument is flexible enough and responsive enough to capture the subtlety and ever-changing nature of people's lives.

The approach of using 'human-as-instrument' is descriptive, its object is to identify or define a situation, it requires reflective thinking, it is based on a posture towards knowledge which is indwelling, inclusive and mutual, it builds on tacit knowledge and it is open to the research event and what may be learned from it. It also avoids the risk of simplifying or reducing the complexity of particular lives.

Elements of the human-as-instrument approach include the concept of the 'bricoleur' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2003). The bricoleur is a quiltmaker who uses scraps of seemingly disparate material to skilfully create a patterned quilt. In a similar way, the researcher deals with a multiplicity of elements and fragments, pieced together and fitted to the specifics of a complex situation. This approach is emergent, it recognises different voices, different angles of vision, it is self-reflective, pragmatic and dialogical. It also creates the possibility of continuing adjustment and mutuality of meaning making. In this sense the finished quilt is the meaning which emerges and is fashioned through the synthesis of a variety of differing perceptions and insights.

A number of major traditions of enquiry were considered for their suitability to the 'human as instrument' approach. Given the above theoretical background for the proposed enquiry, and guided by the five major traditions of enquiry postulated by Cresswell (1998), I adopted Case Study as the preferred method of enquiry. According to Yin (2003a), Case Study is particularly suited to investigations where the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context or where there is a complex interaction between the phenomenon and its context. In the present inquiry the phenomenon under investigation is 'leading the Catholic school' while the context is the systems and structures within which it occurs (Church, diocesan setting, etc).

A case study is defined by Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg (1991) as *“an in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, of a single social phenomenon. The study is conducted in great detail and often relies on the use of several data sources.”* (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991, p.2)

Case Study is a ‘bounded system’ (Burns, 2000; Stake, 1995) having the quality of an entity which is either very representative or very atypical. The present inquiry is studying elements which are common to principalship in whatever context while also having characteristics which make it extremely atypical (Catholic, Victoria, secondary, lay, late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, etc). The emphasis is not on generalisability but rather on seeking a deeper understanding of the phenomenon with an emphasis on process, not outcome, on discovery, not confirmation (Burns, 2000).

A Case Study research approach differs from a life history approach in that the emphasis is on the role, not the person (Lancy, 1993) hence anonymity is a clear value. It also recognises the complexity of real-life situations and allows for the development of a more nuanced view of reality as concrete and context-dependent (Flyvbjerg, 2004).

Collective case study occurs when multiple informants are used to construct a collective composite portrait (Lancy, 1993) although the term ‘collective’ seems to be used by Stake (1995) to mean what Yin (2003a) refers to as ‘multiple respondent’ case study. The benefit of multiple respondent case study is that the researcher is able to better capture the richness associated with the occupancy of a particular role as well as to enhance the trustworthiness of data gathered.

Of the three kinds of case study discussed by Bassey (1999) and Yin (2003b) - exploratory (theory-seeking/testing) descriptive (storytelling) and explanatory (evaluative) the present inquiry is descriptive. It has both intrinsic value and instrumental value (Stake, 1995) because it seeks to tell a story which is worthwhile in itself but which also has the potential to suggest change as a result of greater understanding of the case.

One of the other major approaches considered but not adopted was Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I was intending to let the informants speak about their insights without being unduly influenced by my own presuppositions so that the ‘theory’ would emerge from their accounts. On further reflection I was aware that I needed to ‘shape’ the task for informants by guiding the focus group discussion and provide a set of prompt questions for the life histories.

One of the strengths of a case study approach is that ‘foreshadowed questions’ (Wiersma, 1995) are identified and acknowledged at an early stage of the inquiry. Yin (2003b) refers to the need for the original objectives and design of the case study to be based on theoretical propositions which in turn reflect a set of research questions and prompt an appropriate review of the literature.

A summary of the theoretical framework for the research design research can be represented as follows:

<b>Epistemology</b>	Constructionism
<b>Theoretical perspective</b>	Interpretative constructionism
<b>Methodology</b>	Human-as-instrument “Indwelling” Stance of “interrogatory fellow traveller” Case Study
<b>Methods</b>	Focus group Biographical written statements Document analysis (LPUC) Personal reflection

#### **4.4 Data Gathering Strategies**

Stage 1 of the data-collecting phase involved the establishment of a focus group comprising researcher and three other principals. This took the form of an extended conversation structured around a number of tentative questions based on relevant sections of LPUC (see Appendix C). This session was audio-taped and transcribed then used to identify more specific questions around major

themes to be used as headings in Stage 2 (the five biographical statements). I believed that some understandings would be tacit and others explicit, already known by informants. I hoped that tacit understandings would become more explicit as responses were voiced and then discussed. One of the strong features of a focus group is that each participant brings a meta-cognitive reality to the conversation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Silverman, 2001). Individual worlds converge and new insights are generated (much as in field theory – particles going off in new and unpredicted directions) so my intention was that the focus group would be strongly interactive and designed to generate ‘rich’ data.

Another significant element of group discussion is the honouring of the plurality of voices, (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The concept of giving voice or listening to a multiplicity of voices was an important part of this approach. A further important feature of the focus group was the process of exploring themes, both researcher and informants together, in a way which ensured that the researcher’s presuppositions did not unduly influence the direction of the discussion, but rather, allowed insights to emerge in a movement from tacit to explicit. The invitation to participate required me to brief potential informants as to the purpose and intention of the research in such a way as to secure informants who were willing to invest quality time in the focus group, given that it could extend over a period of some hours (Silverman, 2000).

Stage 2 of the data-collecting entailed the collection of life stories in writing from up to five informants around a set of headings or questions and of approximately 5000 words in length (see Appendix D). While extended interviews would have allowed for greater spontaneity and dynamic interaction they would also have posed a practical challenge in the time necessary to have the data transcribed in preparation for analysis. The life stories made a heavy demand on informants but this approach lent itself to a more standardised form of analysis, given that responses would already be in documentary form and structured around a set of suggested themes. Written life stories also allowed informants to approach the writing task with a depth of introspection and reflection not achievable in interview.

One dilemma I faced on receipt of the written statements from informants was that each of them had approached the task in a very individual way. I had presumed that the structure of responses would follow the outline I had sent to them but in fact, this did not happen. I found that informants chose to emphasise some topics and ignore others. The responses to the outline provided were not uniform. I faced this reality as a necessary part of listening to the particularity of people's lives and perceptions and accepted the data as presented.

At the same time, the process of constructing meaning is a shared endeavour so I had to give some thought to a means of introducing a degree of dynamism and interactivity into the continuing relationship between researcher and informants. At a particular point the practicality of continued data gathering had to be considered – a line had to be drawn as to an end point for data gathering. This was a difficult decision especially in the light of the richness of the accounts being generated and the many further questions prompted by informants' accounts of their work and its meaning to them.

My stance in the collection of data was as a fellow traveller, familiar with the territory being explored but exploring my own experience as well as that of others. It was an interrogation-based study rather than one conducted by a 'participant observer' – participant interrogator, if you will, interrogating the text of other people's lives in person, in their stories and by reference to my own experience. Both the focus group and the life stories were regarded as 'negotiated text' where both interviewer and informant were shaped by the context in which the interview or contact with the informant was situated. This negotiated text took the form of a discourse or linguistic event in which the meanings of questions and responses were contextually grounded and jointly constructed, (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

#### **4.5 Informants**

The potential informants for the study were lay Catholic secondary principals in Victoria who were currently leading a regional diocesan secondary school rather than a school owned by a religious congregation. At the time of writing to potential informants, there were approximately thirtyfive eligible informants in

Victoria. I wrote to potential informants in the first instance and invited them to participate as research participants for either the focus group or the biographical statement. I had arranged with the Executive Secretary of the Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools that she would receive replies to this letter and choose three candidates for the focus group and five for the biographical statement. This is in fact how the final group of informants came to be established; three informants in a focus group with the researcher and five independent informants who, anonymously and independently, prepared a written statement of approximately 5000 words for the researcher.

My reason for seeking this assistance was in part to prevent myself, even sub-consciously, from selecting informants on the basis of my knowledge of them and their situations. Given that the principal community in Victoria is quite limited in number (approximately one hundred Catholic secondary schools in Victoria) and given that I had been a member of this collegial community for more than twenty years, I had reasonable familiarity with many of them and close friendships with a significant number of them. I asked the Executive Secretary to prepare lists having regard to factors such as gender of informant, school size, location and type (co-ed or single gender, suburban or rural) and number of years' experience to ensure that I was simply not choosing a group of colleagues with whom I was on friendly terms or with whose stories in principalship I was familiar.

The informants selected were not seen as a 'sample' but rather as individual who were *representatives* of the role of principal (Burns, 2000; Lancy, 1993). The anonymity of informants in the writing up of findings was assured, not only for theoretical considerations of the case study approach but also because their descriptions of events and situations would in some cases explore issues of sensitivity in relation to employers, diocesan authorities and colleagues. This anonymity was achieved by allocating to each informant a pseudonym and by removing from their accounts any references which might reveal their identity or that of their school. As already indicated, the secondary Catholic school community in Victoria is quite small and I was concerned not to create any difficulties for principals vis-à-vis their working relationships with employers, staff and communities.

#### **4.6 Analysis of data**

Here follows a brief description of the steps taken in chronological order:

- ⇒ Data collected by audio-recording (focus group discussion).
- ⇒ Transcribed audiotape of session as rtf format Word document.
- ⇒ Sent transcript to informants and asked for comment/confirmation/clarification.
- ⇒ Began to reflect on the story the data were telling as this transcribing process went on. In a very real sense, this was an immersion exercise in the lives of the informants, listening to their stories and beginning to identify patterns of intention and meaning embedded within the data.
- ⇒ Using NVivo qualitative data analysis software (Richards, 2002) began the process of coding by identifying obvious topics/themes. One of the strong advantages of NVivo over traditional manual approaches was the avoidance of the need for multiple hard copies of transcripts displayed in piles on the floor and on walls. A colleague had described the experience of coding data as a process which had required two rooms of the family home to be dedicated to the task for a number of months.
- ⇒ At this point I began to realise that this coding was not being done according to strict Grounded Theory method (allowing categories to emerge from the data). Rather, it was being guided by foreshadowed questions based on LPUC and the literature which provided a foundation for the three nominated research questions.
- ⇒ On the basis of the transcription I began to formulate a tentative set of questions to stimulate responses for Stage 2 – the five 5000 word biographical statements. These questions were not intended to be prescriptive but rather to prompt informants to respond in a personal and individual way.
- ⇒ Once the five biographical statements had been received, these were entered into NVivo as rtf format Word documents. (note: one of the informants chose to hand-write a response which I subsequently transcribed for entry in NVivo. While on one level this was an unwelcome inconvenience, at a deeper level, I was able to more richly appreciate the story this informant was telling about the meanings he attributed to his work).

- ⇒ Began coding of these statements using categories already established from interim analysis of focus group transcript and identifying new categories 'Coding is analysis' (Miles & Huberman, 1994).
- ⇒ Repeatedly went back to focus group data and recoded in light of themes emerging from analysis of five biographical statements. This was a tentative application of the iterative process described by Dey (1993).
- ⇒ At this point I revisited the literature on Grounded Theory and became convinced that what I was doing was indeed constructivist (Charmaz, 2000) but did not strictly conform to the Grounded Theory method of data analysis as formulated by Strauss and Corbin (1990).
- ⇒ During this process the hierarchy of categories (codes) was continually rearranged and reordered, with a continuing sorting and combining of categories around the major research questions.

I had a number of compelling reasons for using NVivo QDA software:

- ⇒ The convenience of having all data at my fingertips. All the raw data, the rtf documents entered in NVivo, the NVivo audit trail of handling data, tentative conclusions reached and memos about the data were all available on the computer at which I was writing up the account of the data.
- ⇒ Security of data via login and password on computer was a high priority, given the undertakings of the Ethics clearance process.
- ⇒ Raw data were stored as 'Word' documents in RTF format.
- ⇒ The import of the raw data into NVivo was rapid, accurate and convenient
- ⇒ The coding process could commence immediately around themes presented in the raw data.
- ⇒ In-vivo coding of text which did not fit any existing themes enabled the easy creation of new themes to create new codes.
- ⇒ The capacity to search for all text coded at a particular 'node' – the term used in NVivo to describe a code or category.
- ⇒ The capacity to generate reports; e.g. the frequency or significance of a particular category.
- ⇒ The capacity to view text with coding stripes indicating single or multiple coding of particular segments and also to view text which had no codes attributed to it.

- ⇒ The capacity to reorder the hierarchy of the 'node tree' without losing links of particular nodes with the text that had generated them.
- ⇒ The capacity to generate comments and memos relating to my thoughts about and reactions to text and attach these comments to particular segments of text under consideration. NVivo enabled the visual tagging in text for all memos so generated.

NVivo also presented a number of challenges and drawbacks. It was necessary to devote some time and energy to learning how to use this complex software to best effect and I attended an intensive training session presented by the authors (Richards, 2002) of the software to assist with this.

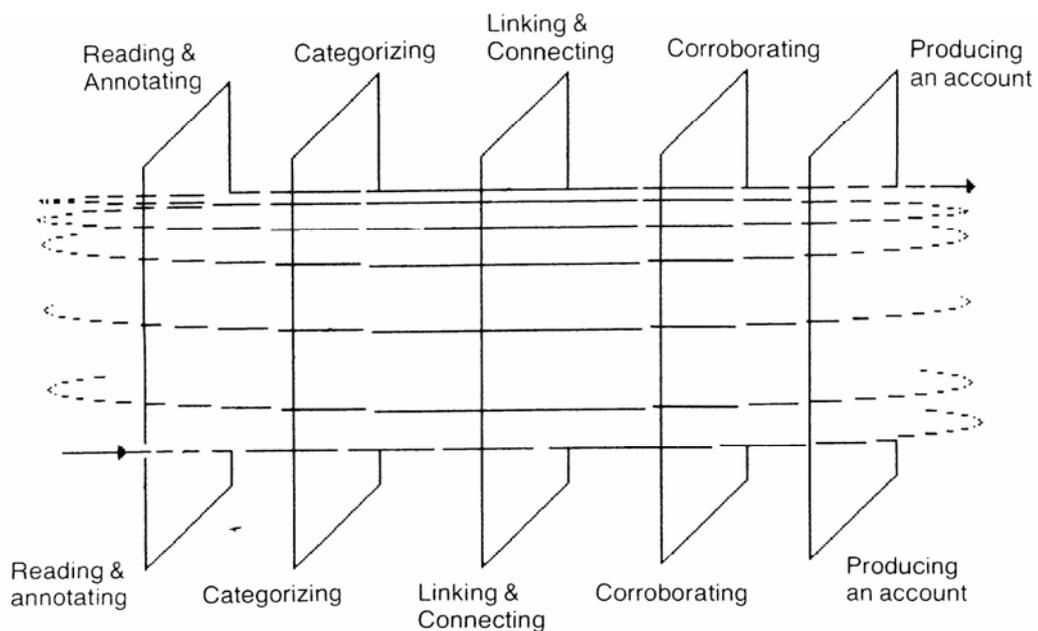
- ⇒ As with any major software package, effective use depends on regular and frequent contact. I discovered that loss of memory of and familiarity with specific procedures occurred as a result of gaps (perhaps of some weeks' duration) between data analysis sessions.
- ⇒ NVivo seems to have been designed around Grounded Theory method and so 'prompts' the user into a grounded theory approach (Welsh, 2002) but also allows a more 'generic' approach to qualitative data analysis. I had to find ways of using the software which did not accord completely with a conventional Grounded Theory data analysis approach since I was using the software as a 'code and retrieve' process rather than as a 'code-based theory builder' (Weitzman, 2000).
- ⇒ There is a risk, identified by Miles and Huberman (1994) that use of software can sometimes be a barrier to the researcher's direct immersion in the data. I was very conscious of this warning during the data analysis process and took pains to frequently refer to the primary data – the informants' own initial accounts.
- ⇒ Intuitive interrogation of the data proved not always to be successful using the 'search' facilities of the software; I found that actual reading of text was more effective in identifying complex clusters of associated categories, especially where informants used differing terms to describe similar categories or experiences.

The use of NVivo was helpful and convenient in managing a large and complex data set but it did not replace the need for me to read the data manually,

immerse myself in the accounts of informants and make use of both approaches in complementary ways.

I have adopted a general inductive approach to qualitative data analysis (Dey, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994) with a mixture of 'a priori' codes determined by LPUC and the nominated research questions and inductive codes which have emerged during the data analysis process. Note also that a significant number of co-occurring codes (segments of text with more than one code assigned to them) have been identified. I have also coded the data by informant (each informant as a 'code') mainly for the purpose of quickly accessing the contributions of focus group participants by person.

In analysing the data, I have followed the iterative process described by Dey (1993) and represented diagrammatically as follows:



*Figure 2 Analysis as an iterative process (Dey, 1993 p.265).*

I have also been conscious that the data comprise 'thick description' (Denzin, 1983) which includes the context of the action being described, the intention of the actor (informant) and the process in which the action is embedded, presented in a non-linear way rather than in a simple sequence. This allows the reader to make decisions about the transferability of what is being reported to another context.

#### **4.7 Validity and reliability issues**

One of the basic questions confronting qualitative research is the degree to which the research can be both intellectually challenging and rigorous and critical. Silverman (2001) points out that knowledge can never be fully objective, even when it is subjected to every possible test. It is always provisional, always subject to a subsequent study which may produce different findings. He argues that one of the ways in which validity can be enhanced is to compare different kinds of data to see whether they corroborate one another. Another way is to take the findings back to informants so that informants can verify the findings although for Silverman this is not always appropriate for qualitative studies. In the present study, it was found to be impractical, because of time and other constraints to subject the data to 'respondent validation' (Silverman, 2001).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) acknowledge the problem of validity in qualitative studies and propose triangulation not as a strategy for validation but rather as an alternative to validation. The metaphor they use for triangulation is the montage or the bricolage, a composite of multiple refracted realities around a central theme which invite the reader to explore competing visions of the context and so be enabled "to become immersed in and merge with new realities to comprehend" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.6).

In the present study, triangulation has been achieved by the use of three different data-collecting perspectives; the focus group, the five independent informant statements and my own responses to the data provided by the other two perspectives. The focus group provided an opportunity for informants to express their unique view of the world while also being stimulated to further deep reflection by listening to the accounts of others. Another aspect of the focus group was that participants were able to validate their own experience by checking and comparing this with the experience of others. An important aspect of the focus group was that it was semi-structured in terms of questions used to frame the discussion but also open-ended in allowing responses to range freely and individually. The focus group was highly interactive, with the researcher assuming an active participatory role rather than remaining aloof as an uninvolved observer so in one sense, the process of triangulation between the

first and third perspectives was happening simultaneously. The process used seems most closely to conform to what Jick describes as 'within method' triangulation (1983) – a process of cross-checking for internal consistency.

The second perspective was provided by the collection of five extended written statements, (5000 words) each provided independently and in isolation from others. While these were shaped to some degree by a series of guiding headings (see Appendix D) each informant was free to respond to the task individually. The collection of statements from individuals without conferring/communication between informants also ensured that any possible convergence of accounts and insights gained had not been 'pre-constructed' according to the expectations of the researcher.

The third perspective was my own responses to the data being presented in the other two perspectives. While validity has largely to do with the researcher's assumptions, the independent informants each gave accounts of situations which indicated a high degree of convergence of similarity of experience without there having been any evidence of undue influence or collusion.

In these ways, the trustworthiness of the data was enhanced. It is important to acknowledge that I was unable to subject the data to 'inter-rater' reliability checks (by giving the data to a number of independent analysts and asking each to code the data using an agreed set of categories) (Silverman, 2001) for the very practical reasons of ensuring confidentiality of the data and also because time did not permit others to undertake the intensive coding process used in analysing the data.

#### **4.8 Ethical Issues**

This research has been conducted within the conditions set out by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Australian Catholic University. Ethics approval notification was issued on 17 September 2003. Access to informants was gained by writing to a group of potential informants inviting their voluntary participation and informing them of the conditions of ethics clearance and procedures. See copy of letter to potential participants (Appendix E).

### **Overview of Research Design Timeline**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Analysis &amp; Interpretation</b>
Jul-Oct 03	Formulate research questions	
Nov 03	Stage 1 Focus Group	
Feb 04	Transcribe focus group data and forward copies to informants	Listening to audiotape record Immersion in 'story'
		Multiple readings of transcript and tentative thematic coding Preparation of bio statement guidelines
Mar 04	Stage 2 five bio statements invited	
Jun – Dec 04	Bio statements received	Multiple readings of texts, further coding of bio statements and recoding of focus group transcript Clustering of codes according to the three research questions Rearranging codes and re-ordering of code hierarchy Continuing reading of data and refining coding Tentative identification of 'theory'
Feb-Jun 2005	Establishment of a tentative 'meta-narrative'	Process of writing an account of the data and coming to tentative conclusions
Jul 2005 - Mar 2006	Drafting of thesis	Writing up conclusions and recommendations

In the following chapter, the research findings are presented in a way which is consistent with the design of the research. Having collected the stories of informants' experiences in principalship, the findings are presented in such a way as to allow informants to 'tell their story' in a strongly narrative way. I also intersperse the informants' stories with discussion and comment, thus mirroring that stance of 'fellow-traveller' nominated above.

*“...going down and down  
For the good turf...”*

## **CHAPTER 5 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

*“ but I've actually been on the receiving end of two phone calls in eighteen months where I found out that the parent of one of my staff members has died and I've been the one who has had to pass the message on and I've found that particularly difficult then the aftermath of that, working with people and I was with a couple when his wife miscarried and I've been selecting caskets with staff members and I would never have pictured myself as the sort of person who would be doing that kind of work...it's an extension of the role and it's because of faith, through your faith commitment or your ministry, you're walking with people and you end up walking with them through incredible joys and also through incredible sadnesses...”*

(Jane)

### **5.1 Introduction – the purpose of the research restated**

The purpose of this study is to explore the understanding and experience of a selected number of lay principals in Victorian Catholic diocesan secondary schools in the discharge of their responsibilities in the specifically religious and spiritual aspects of their leadership as school principals. While principals are appointed under a contract which uses explicit religious language to describe the responsibilities of the principal, informants tended not to use this language in describing their work and its meaning. Part of the purpose of this study is to name the meaning of principals' work in a language that describes the religious and spiritual dimensions of the principal's role.

This chapter presents the findings of the research and provide discussion and commentary on these findings. It will present some selected verbatim accounts from the informants themselves, interspersed with discussion and comment and arranged in a way which follows their experience in principalship, commencing with first beginnings, experiences on the journey in principalship and some insights gained by reflecting on those experiences. Some of the experiences narrated by informants were significant and major, others were relatively more routine or mundane (if any human interaction can ever be regarded as mundane). While this is a relatively straightforward narrative arrangement, I believe it is faithful to the self-perception of informants who see their role as 'walking with' the people they serve.

## **5.2 Design of the Research**

In the previous chapter I discussed two modes of knowledge - abstract and narrative - and indicated that for the purposes of the present study, I was working within the narrative mode (Bruner, 1986, 1990). As already discussed, narrative knowledge is oriented to exploring patterns of human intention and action. It seeks to establish the believability of human experience or 'verisimilitude' (Bruner, 1986). In allowing particular stories to be told, knowledge which has hitherto been tacit and therefore inaccessible to critical reflection, is able to be brought to the surface or into the open in a way that allows both the distinctive and the common characteristics of understanding and experience to be identified.

For this reason, my approach in gathering data was to look for patterns within the words and actions of informants which could be critically inspected and reflected on. My task was to stay as close as possible to the construction of the world as the informants experienced it so as to better understand the reality of that world. While doing this I was also aware that their stories intersected in many ways with my own and the process of critically reflecting on others' stories, prompted me into significant self-reflection. I was indeed a fellow-traveller with them through the landscape of their experience.

It seemed important also, to allow the informants' stories to be told, not only because they give a glimpse into a significant but unrecorded aspect of the history of Catholic secondary education in Victoria in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries but also because this approach allowed the voices of principals to be recognised and honoured.

Given this intention, I resolved to gather data using methods that seemed to 'fit.' The first stage of data-gathering was to draw together three informants for an extended focus group discussion around a number of nominated headings. It was noted that some understandings about the nature of lay Catholic secondary principalship were tacit and others explicit, already known by participants. It was intended that tacit understandings would become more explicit as responses

were voiced and then discussed. It was also my intention to ensure that the plurality of voices would be honoured and that my own presuppositions would not be allowed to unduly influence the direction of the discussion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I requested permission from the three focus group participants to audiotape the discussion. This afforded me the opportunity to attend to full participation in the discussion rather than be preoccupied by trying to note down insights and understandings emerging from the discussion 'on the run.'

Initially, each person was invited to make a personal statement in response to the stimulus questions (see Appendix C). Once each participant had completed this initial response uninterrupted, the ensuing discussion was free-flowing and spontaneous, needing very little specific questioning or probing. I was very aware, through this experience, of the extraordinary privilege of being allowed a glimpse into the inner world of the three informants as they described their work and its significance, as they understood it. One of the things that struck me most forcibly is how eager informants were to listen to the experience of others and so be prompted to deeper reflection on their own experience as the discussion proceeded.

I was conscious too of my own role, not as a dispassionate interviewer but as a fellow traveller, whose own insight into my experience in principalship was much enhanced. While the unique particularity of each of the informants was clearly in evidence, there was a deep sense too of a rich and complex bond through the sharing of experiences, insights and situations encountered.

I transcribed the focus group audio-recording myself and although this was time-consuming and painstaking, it enabled me to immerse myself in the data as I transcribed, phrase by phrase. A further benefit was that I was able to forward copies of the transcript to informants with a request to confirm/comment as necessary. While informants chose not to make major comments on the transcript or seek to add significantly to what had been said at the focus group, one significant by-product of this experience was that informants expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to reflect on their practice in this setting and observed that such conversations had the potential to provide ongoing sustenance and support to them in their work.

Having transcribed the focus group discussion, I began coding the data around some of the prompt questions used and also through categories and themes that were emerging from the focus group transcript. I used these tentative categories to prepare some of the prompt questions for stage 2 of data-gathering, the five biographical statements from selected volunteers.

I did not wish to be overly prescriptive in the instructions given to stage 2 informants but at the same time invited them to comment specifically on some of the questions posed. The resulting five statements were as different from each other as any five statements could be, reflecting accurately, as they did, the uniqueness of each principal's situation, conditioned by so many factors such as the background, experience and personality of the informant, size, history and circumstances of the school, issues and difficulties apparent on appointment, quality and nature of the leadership team inherited, quality of Canonical Administration (see glossary) found or provided and so many others. This variety confirmed the particularity of persons while also supporting the common experience of principals, regardless of their unique setting.

### **5.3 How the findings have been presented**

In keeping with the narrative approach nominated above, I have presented the findings in an arrangement which mirrors the actual experience of informants, commencing from their appointment, accompanying them on their journey, exploring the support they received and finally naming the understandings arrived at by reflection on their experience. This approach does not correspond to the numerical sequence of the three research questions but rather uses the following schema, commencing with the reality of the primary experience before moving to an explanation of the significance of the experience. It seems to provide a more 'realistic' narrative account, in the sense that the work of principals does have a beginning point (the appointment and commencement of period of service) and follows a linear time sequence through the period of appointment. Under the terms of LPUC, the initial period of a first contract is seven years with subsequent re-appointment contracts typically of five years' duration.

To be consistent with the nominated mode of knowledge (narrative) and accepting that knowledge is tacit before it becomes explicit, it seems fitting to begin with accounts of informants' own experience, before moving to a discussion of the meaning of that experience. Hence:

- First beginnings – Research Question 2 - experience
- On the journey – Research Question 2 – experience
- Water from the well – Research Question 3 – what has enriched practice?
- What does it all mean – Research Question 1 – understanding

This dual movement through the data reflects the iterative nature of the method used to interrogate the data.

#### **5.4 First beginnings**

A number of informants described their experience of appointment as not entirely positive. This was especially significant in the case of those principals taking up their first appointment. A number of them had worked as deputies with effective principals and had formed an expectation that the outgoing principal at their new school would be helpful and welcoming as they commenced.

*My induction to the College was somewhat bizarre. The outgoing Principal... was keen to be gone and once in December for about 15 minutes she spoke with me. Here in the corner of the Principal's office sat this woman with cardigan and radiator on in December! She left me a few brief, poorly constructed handbooks, a part-time secretary, a radio cassette player and a coffee maker. Nothing else. I was offered a visit during the school day not hosted by the outgoing Principal but by the Campus Directors (who did not get along.)*

*Bernard*

In another case the previous principal had been an unsuccessful applicant for renewal in the position and the post-interview debriefing offered to that person appears not to have been positively received. This is an important point in the contest of the informal allegiances built up with an outgoing principal by continuing staff; no effective counselling for that person had been arranged:

*There was no formal or prepared induction into the school. In fact I only came to the school on one occasion prior to taking up the appointment and that was for a meeting with the outgoing Principal and the Heads of school. You*

*will be aware that (n.) my predecessor was an applicant for the position and I understand that he was disappointed at not being re-appointed and believed that he had received some mixed messages in this regard from the Parish Priests. This of course made the situation of my welcome from the staff community in particular quite ambivalent...*

*Paul*

In yet another, the previous principal had had to resign and morale in the school community, and especially among the staff, was extremely low.

*It was the end of Semester 1 when I took over. During the holiday I was much in the company of the librarian, maintenance man and my new secretary. We were a small enough group but I remember with affection having morning tea and sharing lunch with them.*

*Frank*

These instances matched my own experience of my first appointment, where my predecessor, the founding principal of the school, offhandedly told me that the position no longer challenged him. He offered only the most grudging and minimal assistance in handing over. In contrast, my predecessor in my second appointment could not have been more helpful and obliging. He has continued to remain in touch and sees himself as committed to ongoing support of me in the role.

For most informants, there was no induction or commissioning process:

*...I commissioned myself...*

*Julian*

although two informants did report that services of welcome and commissioning were arranged to mark the appointment of the new principal. For most, however, people simply got the keys to the office and began work.

It may be a characteristic, in many diocesan secondary schools, that ritual and symbolic forms of commissioning have not been recognised as significant or important. This may be the result of longstanding patterns of diocesan clergy moving from one parish to another with minimal ceremony, although it seems more common, in recent years, for a new parish priest to be inducted at Sunday Mass by the regional bishop. If principalship can be envisioned and understood

as a ministerial form of leadership, within the context of recent writing on lay ministry and leadership, ("Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: a Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry," 2005; "Lay Principals Under Contract," 1993; McMahon et al., 1990; O'Meara, 1983; Osborne, 1993; Rademacher, 1991) it would be fitting, in theological terms, for this to be recognised in a public way in the local community. It is to be noted that a new draft CECV policy on lay principals under contract, currently at the final stages of being ratified by the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, specifies a number of steps for the induction and commissioning of newly appointed lay principals which include both systemic and local school elements. These new elements contain guidelines for employers and school communities relating to the effective handing over of school business to the incoming principal as well as suggestions for liturgical and other commissioning activities.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that at least some of the religious congregations have become more attuned to the importance of a formal induction for lay principals appointed to congregational secondary schools and there appears to be an increasing incidence of the formal commissioning and installation of principals in these schools. This is a relevant consideration in the discussion below relating to school charism and identification with a religious congregation.

One of the issues some informants identified at the commencement of their term of office was the struggle to become accepted in their new school community. A frequent comment of informants from the focus group and from the written statements was that informants had encountered significant opposition from key members of the leadership teams they had inherited, and in some cases from the staff community as a whole:

*...The year I commenced, I was the only new face at X College. A number of staff had been at the school 30+ years. Since the establishment of the school, Deputy had succeeded Principal in an unbroken line, so change had been minimal. An early indication of what I was to face took place at the year 12 retreat during the first week of school. I arrived at the venue, Y Ocean Beach, a couple of hours after the buses and was told the students were down at the beach. I strolled down to find 60 or so students and a couple of teachers swimming in rough surf with no consideration given to ratios, lifesaving qualifications, etc. When I raised safety and legal issues I encountered hostility and responses along the lines of "we have always done it this way.*

*Barbara*

Another informant spoke of the difficulty experienced in establishing a positive working relationship with continuing senior staff:

*My main difficulties were an uncooperative junior Campus Director whom I removed from that position by the end of the first year...*

*Bernard*

My own experience, on taking up my first appointment, was to be confronted with a seemingly entrenched attitude of complacency and resentment towards change on the part of staff. The source of the change was perceived as having come about as a result of the resignation of a long-serving predecessor and the appointment of the new principal. My predecessor had been the first principal of the school and the early years had been characterised by a basic struggle to get the school up and running; attracting enrolments, providing facilities and engaging staff in a relatively remote rural area. Much of this had been achieved by the energy and personality of the founding principal and some staff found it difficult to imagine how the school could continue without him.

A certain amount of resistance to change seems common in organisations (Randall, 2004; Shaw, 2002) and this can be understood, in the school context, in terms of the comfort and familiarity staff communities may have developed with each other and with the principal. The informal networks of power and influence, complex and largely invisible, are disrupted when a central figure in those networks (the principal) disappears and a whole new set of arrangements has to be established. The departure of a principal prompts the renegotiation of networks, rituals, relationships and procedures within the staff community. Some of these consequences of change can be foreseen but many cannot. These cases seem to accord closely with the experiences described by Brooke-Smith (2003).

The arrival of a new principal, especially if mandated by the employing authority to address significant issues that have been identified during the selection process (e.g. falling enrolments, a perceived decline in school's standing, curriculum reform, financial difficulties, etc.) may be understood by the teaching

staff as a 'threat' to which they may respond with a degree of anxiety, uncertainty or resistance.

*However it was painfully obvious to me that this community expected direct interventional leadership from the start...*

*Frank*

A number of informants who were already principals found themselves in the difficult situation of attending to the demands of their current appointment and the necessary preparation for handing over to an incoming principal while also becoming aware of urgent needs in their new school:

*My predecessor was off (overseas)...so the few occasions I had with him had to be good. They weren't. He kept a book of notes for me but what one Principal considers of note may not impress another, similarly with conversations. Really, I had to find it all out for myself. At the same time I had been trying to do a better job with my successor in....*

*Andrew*

All informants remarked on the sense of loneliness of the responsibility of their appointment as principal while also expressing excitement about the challenges facing them.

It was also commonly reported that even where there had been a positive and helpful handing over from the outgoing principal to her successor, the incoming person found that the priorities, issues and concerns expressed by the outgoing person were sometimes very different from the perceptions of the incoming principal, based as they were on different background, experience, knowledge, skills and leadership style:

*My induction consisted of two visits to the school in the company of the current Principal. I have since realised that her perspective is quite different from mine, so while these were of some assistance, it was not until I actually took up the position that I began to realise what I had actually taken on.*

*Barbara*

The terms of LPUC indicate the need for the incoming principal to have a number of major goals, mutually agreed with the employer at time of appointment, which would form the basis of the principal's first contract, currently seven years in Victoria, but for some informants, this has not been their experience:

*It certainly would have been very helpful if the Canonical Administrators or the College Board had set a clear charter of what was to be done.*

*Paul*

Randall (2004) suggests a 'project management' approach to organisational change. It could be helpful to consider the appointment and induction of a new principal as a 'project' in Randall's definition, requiring a designated project manager, and an agreed set of tasks and an identified concluding point. From the accounts given by informants such a process could be of significant assistance, both to the principal, to the school community and to the system.

### **5.5 On the journey**

Informants unanimously describe their work as principal as requiring them to attend to a very wide and complex range of duties and responsibilities. This confirms the observations of writers who have identified increasing complexity as one of the major challenges facing principals (Grieves, 2000; Turney, 1992). Each school, at each phase of its growth and development, presents challenges which demand the full involvement of the principal across so many facets of the life of the school (Thomas, 1997). For some, enrolment and financial issues have been immense; for others, the implementation of curriculum change has had to assume priority while for yet others, it has been the handling of major traumatic incidents or complex personnel and/or industrial issues that which have demanded the greatest portion of the principal's energy and attention. Of particular interest are those many situations which arise unpredictably, for which there seem not to be any prepared-in-advance policies or procedural guidelines, when people seem to be thrown onto their own inner resources. What I wanted to do, as researcher, was to prompt informants into talking about those events and incidents in which, either during the experience or on reflection afterwards, threw into sharp relief the need to name or define some sense of purpose or meaning in the situation which had about it something of the spiritual or religious. At such times, the principal can be seen to be an agent of change whose leadership behaviour has a direct, positive and beneficial effect on the lives of others and is thereby bringing about the 'reign of God' in a specific way (Collins, 1991; Duignan, 1998).

In using the terms 'spiritual' and 'religious' I broadly mean 'spiritual' as referring to a way of seeing and meaning while 'religious' denotes a particular way of behaving, guided by an identified tradition, practices, texts, as well as recognised ritual and symbolic words and actions (O'Murchu, 2000).

The following comment related to the decision of one principal to terminate the enrolments of a number of students in response to a serious incident at his school, a decision which caused him considerable anguish and soul-searching:

*I have had to be tough, very tough, and this has not been without personal cost.*

*Frank*

All informants spoke about how surprised they were to realise, after some time as a principal, that one of the frequent duties of principals was to attend funerals, of family members of staff, of family members of students and sometimes, indeed, of students or colleagues. They also spoke of the privilege they felt at being involved in such an intimate way with families experiencing grief and loss. This was especially the case in dealing with the deaths of young people. Informants identified the capacity of the Catholic school to offer a network of support and meaning in very difficult circumstances.

*...and our school has almost become the Church for some of those family funerals too...our faith and ministry team will often take charge of things, organising the musicians and the booklet for the liturgy and so on...it's really interesting that extension of kids' lives...*

*Jane*

There are also situations confronting principals which place an extraordinary burden of responsibility on them to be for others exactly what the school community needs in a particular moment. Such situations often arise in the context of duty of care for students and professional conduct of staff, especially where there has been a blurring of boundaries between professional conduct and professional misconduct:

*...an example of the complex issues that can face secondary principals and while this is a particularly dramatic one there have been some other quite involved situations. In dealing with them they require judgment, courage and*

*an ability to seek wise counsel and also to be confident in listening to one's inner voice.*

*Paul*

What is the inner voice referred to here? How does it speak and in what circumstances can it be heard? Another example of complex responsibility is provided in this informant's story:

*...in my first week I had a call from Human Services asking me to hold a student back after school so they could take him into protective custody because of the drug addiction of his mother, who was the sole parent of this Year 7 boy.*

*Andrew*

or this very difficult scenario confronting the principal of a Catholic school whose staff, because of the Catholic ethos, are expected to model the highest standards of personal and professional conduct:

*I had a case of misconduct by a female teacher wherein I had to stand her down and negotiate her resignation and manage the process of police, parents, staff and gossip...*

*..there have been the usual array of births and deaths that contribute to the narrative of any community and I have often had a role in those. Probably no point in listing all these.*

*Andrew*

I wonder, in that last comment, whether the informant is being somewhat self-deprecating. Has he become so habituated to dealing with incidents and events, both joyful and sad, that he is downplaying the significance of his presence in the lives of others or simply failing to recognise this significance? 'Andrew' seems to be displaying here exactly the kind of leadership which is spiritual in nature (Whitehead & Whitehead, 1991). Another informant gave some revealing comments about a major traumatic incident at his school and his reflection on his own role in the matter, a reflection that had the capacity to move him to tears, years after the event:

*I'd be wanting to talk a bit about community, I suppose in terms of spirituality... I talk briefly about the day the (major traumatic incident involving injury to a significant number of students). I was not there at the time, I drove to the event, had been told that an emergency had happened and the emergency was evident when there were more than two or three ambulances on site and...three were seriously injured, one very seriously, the others were discharged before nightfall but the impact on the school at large is what I*

*want to talk about and that was that a terrible thing had occurred and the pain of the bulk of the community...the sharing...the time when there's this unwarranted blame that goes on..."it was my fault because..." "had I not been sitting there she would have been sitting over there" and so on. So in times of difficulty like this there's a drawing together, a good community pulls together, they lean on each other, they work through those difficulties and I suppose you can't help reflect on the truth of as we're taught about developing community and whatever it is that Christian spirituality and for that matter other spirituality is on about.*

*in a sense I'll never forget... mind you I'd only been in the school for about a month... how I disengaged, if you like, from the awfulness of the thing, just sitting in my office on my own, just very clearly thinking what needed to be done, very clear, I can't get over how clear my mind was about the actions, step by step, to be taken and ...  
...I remember when the pressure was off then, I still cry about it...but what the learnings are are things like you're right...people pull together, the priest came out, there's some kind of paraliturgy and there's just this terrific sense of mutual support, love for each other, whatever it is, it came out so beautifully of support for each other...*

*James*

This story, spontaneously told during a focus group discussion, sparked off in me a powerful memory of a most traumatic incident that befell my own school, and which related tragically to one of the senior students:

*...that's what happened with me with (traumatic situation). I remember as clear as a bell about getting the phone call around midnight Friday and thinking 'OK, who should I tell?'... and I told my leadership team and arranged for them all to meet the following morning at 7am and over the weekend organised everything that needed to be done for the reception of staff and students on the Monday- trauma counsellors, extended briefings, dealing with the media, temporary offices, etc. Somebody said afterwards "how did you know how to do all that?"... I just don't know, I was just flying blind...*

*Liam*

One of the very significant insights gained from this experience was the power of ritual in helping a grieving community to come to terms with the reality of a traumatic incident in a way which leads the community forward towards eventual healing. Another insight gained, and indeed agreed among informants, was that at these extremely difficult times, the principal seems able to tap into reserves of tacit knowledge about what to do, what to say, how to organise things in a way that gives pastoral support and strength appropriate to the needs of the various members of the school community, each according to their own need.

This pastoral care is not only exercised within one's own school community. One informant spoke of an occasion when he was able, by virtue of his position at the time, to offer support to a colleague in need:

*...I've had a bit to do with supporting principals a few times with traumatic incidents, spending time with principals, I remember spending time with (n) the time that girl threw herself in front of a train, and so on and you could see why he could never recover from that and you could see that this was a wonderful community, full of love but by God the other side was there too, as strong as the love was so was the hate...in other people, 'who's fault was it that this kid did this?'. I was really privileged to be there.*

*Julian*

So far I have been commenting on some of the more demanding and complex situations which evoke deep reflection. Another part of a principal's responsibilities, as spelled out in CECV policy ("Lay Principals Under Contract," 1993), is to *'facilitate the faith development of the staff'* and indeed to *'nurture a community where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is genuinely cherished and lived.'* Here are some informants describing specific examples of how they are discharging those responsibilities:

*We hold a mass each year for deceased past pupils, staff and (religious order members). It is well attended and this year we have commissioned a sculpture for the memorial garden in consultation with the bereaved families. They have also purchased memorial plaques for their children. This is a Catholic event for us all and a moving night for me.*

*Andrew*

One informant replied in answer to the question "Do you lead prayer in your staff community?"

*I even sing prayers with my staff because that's an area that speaks to me.*

*Jane*

Another spoke of the importance of witnessing Catholic faith practice to his community:

*You're even aware, as you take communion it's a very self conscious thing – "here's the principal taking communion as the leader of the community" They'd be more interested if I didn't! I think we have a responsibility for that side of things. Recently at an assembly a small group of us sang a beautiful hymn together just as a small staff group and I think it's important symbolically that I'm prepared to do that...I'd want to do it.*

*James*

Here again, an informant describes an active leadership role, underlining the faith leadership dimension of the principal's work:

*and one of those is the faith and ministry team and we deliberately have that faith and ministry team working in the school to try to take account of the faith development of the students and the staff. I run workshops for all the leaders in the school, once a term, in faith formation of leaders in a Catholic school and that's part of communicating to them their role as leaders and that's been effective in them beginning to see the message that they are not just there as an educational leader but as a leader in a Catholic school. I find it takes a lot of psychological and emotional energy to actually put yourself on the line in that way because in a sort of way leading prayer is a very...you make yourself very vulnerable.*

Jane

and from another informant for whom the interpretive/prophetic dimension of leadership is significant, (although note the ambivalence and seeming self-deprecation):

*We regularly have liturgies to mark different times of the year and when we're planning those, I inevitably end up with the pseudo-homily and I find that to be one of those moments... I speak to the student community because that's the audience on those occasions and I'm able to speak to them in a way which I guess is overtly religious and I think that's part of the role too.*

Jane

Another expression of giving witness as a religious leader is to support the teaching of Religious Education in the classroom:

*I have also taught Religious Education in order to witness its centrality to the curriculum of the College. Despite having an excellent REC, I personally oversee the RE curriculum in a way I do not with other Learning Areas. Religious and Spiritual development is given a priority in professional development planning for the college.*

Barbara

*I've tried to very actively recruit staff, for example I would tend to recruit RE staff first each year and make sure they were the people in place for teaching each year so that we've got higher quality RE staff, and by and large, with their assistance, that can be a manageable task. It's still very challenging, but manageable, if you can get quality staff in that area.*

James

This kind of active leadership seems to me to be all the more significant in the context of declining religious observance in the community at large and certainly within the Catholic community, especially as it relates to adolescents and young adults (Dixon, 2005). All informants reported the increasing difficulty of securing the services of active faith-committed teachers and the need to provide more and

more faith-development opportunities for staff. Some informants spoke of the 'critical mass' of faith-active staff needed to carry the Catholic nature of the school. It could be argued that when schools were predominantly in the care of 'religious' principals, the majority of lay staff in schools and the presence of significant number of 'religious' on staff, it was possible for the Catholic ethos to be strongly identified and transmitted. It is ironic that lay principals, arguably less theologically prepared than their religious predecessors and often working in schools with a less clearly defined mission and vision based on a particular congregation's charism, are dealing with a much more challenging environment than pertained in the past - one where adherence to faith is less and less guaranteed (Sharkey, 2002). The question is well put by this informant, in the context of the professional development of staff who may be well-meaning but are not 'faith-literate':

*...evangelising not just the students any more. I feel that part of my faith journey is evangelising to our staff as well. I think that's one of the keys to the future...which makes me wonder if we get to a point where there are hardly any Catholic educators left where do we go then?*

*Jane*

This indicates the importance of appropriate theological education and formation for lay principals both pre- and in-service if they are to meet these challenges.

## **5.6 "Water from the well"**

The principal's role is broad and complex. Particular aspects include providing advice to colleagues, pastoral care to staff, students and community members, setting Religious Education priorities and developing strategies to nourish authentic spiritual life within the school community, expressed in appropriate symbolic and sacramental ways. Given this breadth and complexity, what is it that sustains principals in this work? What are the wells from which they drink, the oases at which they find confirmation and renewal of vision? (Ex 15.7, Jn 4.5-29).

Significant sources of support include systems, networks and relationships as well as formal study, and retreat experiences. There seems to be a high degree of support from Canonical Administrators with most informants reporting that the

overwhelming number of canonical administrators they have had dealings with have been effective and practical in the types of support given, either in terms of trusted delegation to the principal or in the provision of good advice in dealing with difficult or sensitive situations.

*Board Chairpersons have been truly wonderful and very supportive. It has been my determination to keep the Board relevant, informed and ensure that each member is respected. The results have returned to me a hundredfold.*

*Bernard*

In this informant's school, the Board Chair was frequently also the President of the Association of Canonical Administrators.

What was also noted, however, was that some canonical administrators rarely gave affirmation to their principals, and even when prompted, they were, as one informant reported "masters of understatement." This informant's comment was made in a context where the canonical administrator, usually silent at public events, made a speech which indicated grudging praise for the way the principal had administered the school and its facilities:

*...Fr (N)...got up actually - I was shocked too it was at an opening of one of our buildings he actually said,- you know, the place has been well looked after...*

*James*

although the experience of another informant was quite the opposite:

*...one of my two greatest sources of support, initially and in the years to follow, have been the President of the Canonical Administrators who has also been Chair of the College Board for over twenty years and...*

*Barbara*

Colleagues form another significant support source for most principals, both informally in a collegial way and formally through the Principals' Association, although one informant reported feeling excluded and ignored by that association. Catholic Education Office personnel were seen as a valuable support but seem to have been 'called in' only in very specific circumstances to give assistance as needed. Family and friends were also identified by a number of informants as significant sources of support. Starratt (2003) strongly urges the formation of small collegial groups of principals, numbering three to five, to allow

participants to "...take stock of what is happening to our insides..." (Starratt, 2003, p.243).

As well as support from those sources, many informants spoke of the personal and interior sources of support they regularly drew on. Most struggle to find a balance in time and energy, to attend to their inner journey of prayer and reflection on practice. They reported the sense of tension between conflicting demands - family relationships, leisure, exercise and opportunities for renewal such as retreat experiences. Many had found the 'pilgrimage' experience offered by the religious congregation associated with their school invaluable as an ongoing source of support. It would seem that for many principals, part of the struggle in spiritual leadership is to achieve an integrated, balanced core of spirituality, drawing from Dreyer's definition (1994) and including prayer, contemplation, work, sexuality and relationships. She argues that an authentic spirituality of ministry or leadership must be based in the reality of one's everyday work and ordinary life and must avoid modelling itself on a clerical spirituality. Most informants seem aware of this but acknowledge the complexity and difficulty of achieving an appropriate balance.

*I have a number of resources; friends with whom I discuss various issues that energise me, my writing which serves as a restorative and clarifier, my own faith and prayer life and my marriage and family.*

*Andrew*

In contrast, principals have also reported experiences of the absence of significant support from key people. Principals also report 'sinking into the mud' like Jeremiah (and maybe for similar reasons!) on some occasions, perhaps as a direct consequence of 'truthtelling' (Shaw, 2002).

*So they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king's son...letting Jeremiah down by ropes. Now there was no water in the cistern but only mud, and into the mud Jeremiah sank.*

*Jer 38.6*

These experiences usually seemed to originate from difficult relationships with senior staff such as deputies who resented the appointment of the principal and whose loyalty to the incoming principal was grudging or non-existent. A number

of examples from informants' experience have been cited already. The common thread in such accounts seems to be the resistance to change, experienced by the incoming principal as personal rejection. Informants reported how much they need and value open and collaborative relationships with their senior staff and how the quality and enthusiasm of their own leadership is sorely tested in these difficult circumstances:

*I had a difficult working relationship with the initial Business Manager who had been in the position for 15 years and was not used to keeping the Principal informed. He appeared to resent what he saw as my interference in his area of expertise, eventually resigning after 18 months with minimal notice. His replacement has taken a couple of years to really come to grips with the role. The second Deputy Principal faced major opposition and extensive undermining from the Level Co-ordinators who had very much controlled their own areas prior to her arrival. She has required considerable support. I did not reappoint the Director of Curriculum this year, as explained later. I have a strained relationship with another longstanding member of staff who remains on the Leadership Team. She regularly undermines our efforts, at times deliberately, but for a number of reasons I have kept her there. I have expended considerable energy supporting members of the Leadership Team when I might reasonably have expected to look to them for support, but this situation is improving all the time. I have certainly come to appreciate the value of strong support.*

*Barbara*

Apart from support from significant relationships and systems, informants reported that academic study in theology and Religious Education were an important source of confidence to them in a situation where principals are being expected to adopt a more specific and public profile as religious leaders of their communities (Carlin, d'Arbon, Dorman, Duignan, & Neidhart, 2003). This was seen by informants to be of assistance in helping them to understand and communicate the theological and ecclesiological issues associated with the process of evangelisation through education for which they have a specific responsibility but also in giving them confidence to play a leading role in the public liturgical life of their schools.

*...but it's not just religious but genuinely spiritual in the sense of interpreting, making connections, linking our lives to the life of God in scripture, you're actually doing a very spiritual work...*

*Liam*

## 5.7 What does it all mean?

In giving an account of their work, some informants frequently made reference to their work as a 'ministry.' There appeared to be a quite strong and intentional understanding that leadership behaviours included many acts which have a ministerial character about them. The following examples were described by informants; speaking at assemblies, especially in making explicit links with Scripture and Catholic doctrine – one informant used the term “pseudo-homily” to describe this activity; exercising leadership in the development and delivery of Religious Education programs; providing pastoral care to colleagues, students and families especially in times of trauma or grief; being an 'interface' between the school community and the wider ecclesial community of the institutional Church, participating in staff personal and spiritual development activities. These experiences of ministry seem to be closely in accord with the definitions and descriptions provided by various writers (Collins, 1992, 2002; Dreyer, 1994; Lawler, 1990; O'Meara, 1983; Osborne, 1993; Rademacher, 1991).

For many informants, the awareness of their school as the major or only place of contact between families and the official Church was keenly felt. This perception has been identified, especially in relation to schools in regional and rural settings, in a recent major research project known as the VSAT Report (Carlin et al., 2003). The anecdotal information provided by informants about the place of the school as a contact point with the institutional Church would seem to be validated by the findings of the VSAT Report.

*...it (the Catholic school) may be perceived by many if not a majority of its students and staff as symbolic of a church experience and certainly in the regard the school has a vital role to play in a world where religious commitment and practice is clearly moving to the indifferent. This is not to say that commitment to spirituality is not central but it is certainly not seen by the majority of our client group as something that is best expressed in being part of a regular worshipping church community. However, I do understand my role as Principal, and as leader of a Christian community that is the catholic school, to be exercising a ministry of leadership that is in harmony with other ministries as exercised within the general church community.*

*Paul*

It is noted however that these observations are made in the context of a theological debate within the Catholic Church about the definition and meaning of

'ministry' within the Catholic Church, especially in relation to debate about the distinction between ordained and non-ordained ministry (Collins, 1992; Lawler, 1990) and whether the term 'ministry' can even be used in reference to any non-ordained service in the Church, notwithstanding the language used in Lay Principals Under Contract ("Lay Principals Under Contract," 1993).

Principals also comment on the delicate nature and complexity of their role in dealing with the moral and ethical dimensions of situations which regularly arise within their communities. These include the questions posed in providing pastoral care to Same Sex Attracted students within their schools and the even more fraught situation of dealing with gay staff. A number also spoke of the difficulties presented in resolving a range of other 'lifestyle' situations within their staff communities.

*...I interviewed six or seven people for an art position and one of them was a gay man living in a permanent like 20 year relationship and I had a delegation from some of my Art staff come and tell me that that man was well known in the community for his homosexuality and that meant that I couldn't employ him and so I had two issues there, one I had already decided not to employ him because he wasn't the best candidate and there was somebody who was a very active Christian, but not Catholic, applied for the job and had great references so she got the job but I also had to do the quiet education of the staff about what the Church was teaching about homosexuality these days and what we might be doing as far as staffing and how that would always come into the consideration and I think we ...I come across challenges all the time with church teachings and certainly ...there were many teachings I had trouble with and will continue to but I'm saying to people I'm not sure the Church has quite got a handle on it either and that's part of what it means to be part of this faith community...always to be weighing it up and battling with the teachings and trying to come to terms with teachings which might be quite removed from us...and that's what we're doing with young people all the time is trying to witness to them a life that takes account of the society we live in and the faith we believe so strongly in and how you make that all work today.*

*Jane*

Principals were very conscious of the dilemmas posed by attending to the natural justice rights of various parties while maintaining adherence to official Church teaching and diocesan policies. This would seem to be an important area for further study, especially in the context of dissent and the primacy of conscience as explored by Prest (2000).

They were also aware that they occupied a privileged role in that while they were not subject to ecclesiastical authority in the way that Religious would have been 'vowed' to obey superiors in a previous era, they nevertheless were trusted to a very high degree to 'follow the official line' as closely as possible. Many of them felt keenly the tension between their freedom of conscience, as informed by church teaching and their own sound professional judgement on the one hand and the various diocesan policies, guidelines and directives on the other.

Much of the thinking and reflection of principals in these complex situations is not necessarily couched in conventional theological terms but tacitly, there is a clear understanding for many of them that these are profoundly religious and spiritual questions that they are dealing with constantly in the course of their work. In the light of all of this, principals report that their work has profound spiritual and religious significance for them. They see themselves very much as exercising a role of service, inspired by the Gospels and often supported by the vision of a founder.

*I do understand my role as Principal, and as leader of a Christian community that is the Catholic school, to be exercising a ministry of leadership that is in harmony with other ministries as exercised within the general church community. I believe this ministry is best exercised in ensuring that the processes at use within in the school and the important symbols on which the school, staff, students and families draw inspiration are traditionally and soundly Gospel based.*

*Paul*

*I see my role as having a lot of symbolic significance. The community needs to be able to see in me the values of the College, of the Church and of the (congregation). This is oppressive at times. Not because of any great character flaws (I hope) but because it means that you are under the microscope all the time. Some simple things in life like having a drink, being relaxed at College events, sharing a joke, or just expressing some human emotions all are examined under the microscope. Was he too much of this? Or not enough of that? And so on. Being in the role should mean you are capable of these things but the relentlessness of it all needs to be acknowledged.*

*Having said that, I try to articulate all the values etc of school, Church and congregation through my writing to the community and beyond. I see this as an opportunity to engage in educative correspondence with people who may not have other voices in their lives helping them make sense of the gospel message and the call of Jesus. It is quite a priestly role, and not gender*

*limited. I have to present an example of a life informed by all these things in all I say and do. Parents especially expect this of me, as do staff...*

*Andrew*

*One of the distinguishing marks of a Catholic school is the quality of relationships modelled on the person of Jesus Christ. As a school in the Mercy tradition we also focus very much on the qualities of mercy and compassion in our dealings with others. I would see my role in this respect as two-fold: modelling the virtues I would want to develop in the girls in my dealings with them and the staff, and ensuring that decisions taken by the College and the general direction it follows are underpinned by these values. I am very conscious of the need to make this quite explicit, both to the girls and to the staff.*

*I see my role as one of service to others, providing opportunities for them to develop spiritually, socially, academically and emotionally on their life journeys. I try to do this both individually and by establishment of structures which foster growth. I try to be very much aware of the needs of others and respectful of these.*

*Barbara*

It is also significant that principals are seen to be exercising leadership in the Church through the role of principal, regardless of gender. As Gallagher (1997) has noted ours is an age of rapid secularisation within which there is a certain ambiguity in role responsibilities within the Church, especially in relation to the laity in general and women in particular. The further development of a clear theology of ministry as it relates to principalship may well be assisted and supported by the study of lay principalship as it is currently being exercised in Victorian diocesan Catholic secondary schools.

There was significant divergence of experience among informants in relation to the influence of a particular founder or tradition. Some informants were in schools which had maintained (and in some cases reappropriated) the identity and character of the religious congregation which had previously had historical and formal links with their school. For others, who had worked in association with a number of different religious congregations across a variety of schools, it seemed more a matter of an eclectic choice of particular characteristics which inspired them or which seemed appropriate to their school at a particular stage in its life. What seemed clear was that they did not understand this deliberate and intentional linkage with a founder or congregation as any kind of nostalgic or romantic looking back to a golden age but rather an opportunity to develop and maintain qualities and characteristics which continued to give life to the Catholic

school they were currently leading. One informant in particular described a process of rediscovery of links in such a way that the charism of a particular congregation has been used creatively to breathe new life into the spiritual direction of that school and enhance its sense of identity within a rich tradition of Catholic education. Rather than seeking to look back and try to 'preserve' the tradition in a curatorial way this principal has led the application of the vision in a new way for a new time.

But what of those schools where no such strong link exists or where there is a risk of falling into a sort of nostalgic revisionism or restorationism? One of the realities for most current principals of Catholic secondary schools is that they themselves are 'cradle' Catholics (see glossary of terms) and also the products of the congregation-run schools which until the mid 1960's were the main providers of Catholic secondary education in Victoria. Another reality is that a small (but possibly growing) number of currently practising principals in Victoria are adult converts to Catholicism, bringing to their role a perspective and faith experience which is very different from that of a person who has been Catholic since birth. One of the informants in this study is an example of this development. Within the Catholic secondary principal community of Victoria, currently numbering some 97 persons, I am aware of one other such principal.

This situation may call for a renewed effort to define the core of an appropriate spirituality and charism for regional schools based on Scripture and Tradition, Word and Sacrament – the very elements which have always inspired founders in their own time and place, to respond to the needs of the people of that time and place.

It was interesting that a number of informants commented negatively on what was perceived as the colourless generic school name 'Catholic Regional College (location)' and sought instead a college name which identified the charism of that school as they wished it to develop, with a specific identity and access to a (perceived) rich tradition in education:

It may be that where a school is 'regional' but has had a longstanding level of involvement and support from a particular congregation, it seems to be able to

access resources more typical of congregational schools. This was true for a number of informants:

*(location of school) would be the same even though it's named (n.) Catholic College the (---) charism has been quite present there, up until a few years ago there were always (---) sisters in the school in some form. Well now as part of parish the sisters are still there and the (---) parish primary schools associated with (n.) College were founded by (---) sisters.*

*I've been much more aware of it strangely enough since I did the formation program at the (founder's original place) but even prior to that it's part of our vision and mission, that whole concept of a more modern version of (founder), that outreach to the community, very much thinking of the value of the individual and the compassion that goes with us reaching out to others, it's been very much part of the school and I think knowing more about (the founder) has certainly influenced my leadership and influenced the leadership team and the Board possibly because of the work I've done with them.*

Jane

Another informant, in referring to the generic term (N) Regional College had this to say:

*So what about regional schools? These are unique as they draw their reason for existence from the local Church and that's massively powerful. A good regional school reflects the traditions, diversity, culture, aspirations of its region. In a sense they emerge from the people into being and I find that invigorating.*

*It is important for regional schools to identify a charism. I have always been pleased that we are called St (n.'s) College I use the person of (n.) consistently as a person of prayer and perseverance. From (n.) we can learn lessons about life, saintly ways, the value of faith in Jesus Christ. To be honest, I am pleased that we are not 'Catholic Regional College' by name though I suppose they are dedicated to a saint or worthy person too.*

Bernard

## **5.8 Summary**

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

**What understanding do lay Catholic secondary principals in Victoria have of their role as a ministry within the Catholic Church?**

Having chosen to adopt a Case Study approach to the research and specifically to the collection and analysis of data, I had already identified a number of

'foreshadowed questions' (Wiersma, 1995) – questions which would be the basis of a 'working hypothesis' and which would give rise to the Research Questions.

I had used as a starting point the terms and conditions of the contract of employment ("Lay Principals Under Contract," 1993) which explicitly defines the principal's role as a ministry – a commissioned service - within the official educational ministry of the Church.

From reflection on my own practice and having listened to the experience of colleague principals, I had formed a view that many principals of Catholic diocesan secondary schools in Victoria, while generally familiar with such an understanding, had not tended to see their work in explicitly ministerial terms.

What the data seem to indicate is that their understanding of their role as a ministry, while not fully articulated and explicitated as such, is indeed understood as giving spiritual and religious leadership within their school communities through sacramental and general witness to the ministry of the Catholic Church in education. While it is not possible to generalise this finding to all principals in Catholic diocesan secondary schools, the data represent some understandings which are common to the informants who participated in this study.

#### **5.8.2 Research question 2:**

#### **In what ways have principals experienced the spiritual and religious dimensions of their leadership role?**

Principals spoke of a wide range of experiences and aspects of their work with colleagues, students, families and communities. This included specifically religious words and actions in settings such as school assemblies where they saw themselves as interpreting and clarifying the meaning of particular situations and events in the life of the school within the context of Scripture and the Catholic tradition. They saw themselves very much as 'witnesses' or representatives of the whole ecclesial community at such times.

On other occasions, principals became deeply involved with staff-members, students and families in times of grief and loss or in circumstances of significant personal difficulties being experienced. At these times, principals provided

sometimes pastoral care and sometimes personal counselling, very much motivated by the gospel. They described this in terms of 'servant leadership.'

In yet other circumstances, principals found themselves in the midst of complex and delicate moral and ethical issues where the appropriate response was wise and compassionate counsel. What was also very evident was that principals took a direct interest in, and sometimes involvement in, the planning and delivery of Religious Education curriculum and/or the liturgical life of the school.

A further area which seems to be developing as the number of faith-active teachers is in apparent decline, is the need to give spiritual and religious leadership to the staff. A number of principals actively present spiritual and formational programs to their staff but all informants reported their sense that this is rapidly becoming a more critical and urgent responsibility for them. One side-issue with this context is the struggle principals have in dealing with the complexities of Eucharistic hospitality within a multi-faith and pluralist staff community.

### **5.8.3 Research question 3**

#### **In what ways have principals sought and/or experienced formation beyond academic study which has enriched their practice of principalship?**

Principals reported that one of the most difficult aspects of the 'inner journey' was the achievement of a healthy balance between family relationships, personal space, leisure and opportunities for professional and personal renewal and growth. Indeed this was identified in the VSAT report as a major reason for the reluctance of many capable and qualified potential leaders to apply for principalship (Carlin et al., 2003). Where principals had taken advantage of study leave to undertake various kinds of formational activity (retreats, pilgrimages, enrichment programs and the like) these proved to have immense value as ongoing sources of energy, vision and continued spiritual deepening.

Professional conversations with colleagues at principals' conferences were also a clearly identified source of enrichment. Informal networks of close colleagues also proved invaluable as did, for most, involvement in the Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools and the Regional Colleges Principals'

Association. These two organisations are the main professional organisations to which Catholic secondary principals in Victoria automatically belong, by virtue of office. Not all principals attend meetings and become involved in the leadership of these organisations but all of the participants in this study, except one, are regularly involved in the life of these associations and identify their membership and involvement in these associations as a significant support to them in their role.

It was interesting to note that those informants who had participated in the focus group (stage 1 of the data collecting for this research) specifically mentioned the benefit to them personally of the rich conversation and sharing of stories that that focus group experience had prompted.

*Though I have faith that the spirit will guide us so that's not such a big issue. Another of the things I'll be I think is fairly needed is a really inclusive way of witnessing to the faith and inviting people to the table, really starting to wrap people in and if that means all of those unchurched Catholics or nominal Catholic kids...it probably means all of those kids from practising Christian families and all the others who are searching for something and that means some significant changes in the eucharistic community, some significant changes in the way we celebrate liturgy.*

*Jane*

It can be seen, from the accounts informants have given of their experiences and insights, that the role of principal is indeed complex and challenging. Principals are called on to draw from the depth of their own integrity as they respond pastorally and faithfully to the enormous range of situations they confront on a daily basis. The final chapter makes a number of recommendations in the light of the heavy demands made on principals in the course of their work.

*Between my finger and my thumb*

*The squat pen rests.*

*I'll dig with it*

## **CHAPTER 6 REVIEW, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Purpose of the research restated**

The purpose of this study is to explore the understanding and experience of a selected number of lay principals in Victorian Catholic diocesan secondary schools in the discharge of their responsibilities in the specifically religious and spiritual aspects of their leadership as school principals. While principals frequently reflect on their work and its significance, many of them are reluctant to express their thoughts in terms that are accessible to others. Part of the purpose of this study is to give expression to some of the reflections and insights of principals about their work and its meaning.

### **6.2 Design of the Research**

In Chapter 4, I discussed two modes of knowledge - abstract and narrative - and indicated that I was working within the narrative mode (Bruner, 1986, 1990). In summary, the narrative mode of knowing has to do with identifying and exploring human patterns of intention and action so as to establish 'believability' (Bruner, 1986). In allowing particular stories to be told, knowledge which has hitherto been tacit and therefore inaccessible to critical reflection, is able to be brought to the surface or into the open in a way that allows both the distinctive and the common characteristics of understanding and experience to be identified.

The data were gathered from informants in two stages; firstly by participation in a focus group discussion which encouraged the three informants involved to tell their story of principalship in response to a number of 'foreshadowed' questions. The responses from this focus group were described and coded by theme. This enabled me to prepare a further set of questions which were the basis or outline of a writing task for five informants, each of whom was asked to prepare a brief biographical statement, using these questions but not constrained by them.

My approach in giving an account of the data was to seek patterns within the words and action of the informants, as made available through their verbal or written accounts, which could be critically examined. My purpose was to give an account of reality which was as close as possible to that experienced by the informants. The honouring of participants' stories was an important element of this approach, since each world so described was at once, unique and similar in experience to the stories of others. While this initial critical reflection on the data was proceeding, I brought my own experience in principalship alongside the accounts of others, again identifying patterns of words, actions and insights gained and assuming the stance of 'fellow-traveller.'

## **6.3 Research questions answered**

### **6.3.1 Research question 1 answered**

In chapter 1, I indicated that the starting point for this research was the document known as LPUC ("Lay Principals Under Contract," 1993) and showed that sections 2 and 6 of that document defined the role of the lay principal in Catholic secondary schools in Victoria as having religious and spiritual responsibilities in addition to those responsibilities pertaining to principals of schools generally. In chapter 2, I reviewed some of the context within which lay principals in Catholic secondary schools have been appointed over the past thirty years.

I also noted in chapter 1 that in conversations with colleague lay principals of Catholic secondary schools, it was frequently the case that principals were unfamiliar with the wording of their contract of employment. Some informants spoke about their work as a ministry but not in specific detail. While they clearly understood their role as principal to be a significant leadership role within the faith community of their school and region and within the wider Catholic Church community, they did not typically describe their work in the explicit categories and language contained in LPUC.

In chapter 3, I reviewed the use and understanding of the term 'ministry' within the Catholic Church and noted that there was an evolving understanding of the

meaning of ministry beyond the traditional association of the term with ordination to priesthood.

It was in this context that Research Question 1 was framed; What understanding do lay Catholic secondary principals in Victoria have of their role as a ministry within the Catholic Church?

What the data seem to indicate is that the principals who participated in this study were able to see their role as a ministry, without using specifically theological language to describe their understanding. All of them recognised their appointment as principal of a Catholic secondary school as a significant public appointment, approved by the diocesan bishop, even though in most cases, this public appointment was not formally recognised in a liturgical ceremony of commencement or commissioning.

They saw their ministry as one of leading an educational community, not only in terms of Religious Education and catechesis, but also in a whole range of pastoral and faith development activities directed towards staff, students and families. In a very real sense, they saw themselves as representatives of the Church in the way that they participated in the celebration of the sacraments, proclaimed the word of God at assemblies and other gatherings, led prayer at staff and student gatherings, administered pastoral and welfare policies, conducted enrolments according to school and diocesan policy, attended to the faith development of their colleagues and exercised pastoral hospitality especially to those who were in some way in deep need. One example of such pastoral hospitality was the way in which principals dealt sensitively with staff members in relation to lifestyle and relationship issues. Another was the way in which principals saw themselves as representatives of the whole faith community in assisting bereaved families. Enrolment interviews were seen by some of the principals as an opportunity to assist families to reconnect with the Church after a period of absence or separation.

In some cases, the principal was aware of his/her role as a significant faith community leader, especially in situations where other resources such as parish clergy and pastoral staff were less than fully available. They perceived a sense

in which the community looked to them for leadership beyond a narrow educational definition.

### **6.3.2 Research question 2 answered**

In framing Research Question 2, I had presupposed that not many principals would readily describe the ministerial nature of their role in fully developed theological language. This presupposition was based on the admission by many of my colleagues over a number of years that they had not really looked at those parts of their contract of employment which spelled out the ministerial dimensions of the role since beginning their term of office. I was also aware that some of them operated from the basis of just getting on with the work rather than thinking too much about the theoretical background to it. This led me to adopt the theoretical stance described in chapter 4 – that of interpretative constructionism – a stance which involved the uncovering of tacit understandings through shared communication and reflection so as to subject these tacit understandings to critical reflection and so move them more and more into the field of explicit understandings. It was for this reason that I chose to use the poem ‘Digging’ by S Heaney (see Appendix F) as a metaphor for the sort of exploration that I wished to conduct. Heaney’s theme is a reflection on the poet’s craft as a maker or retrospective meaning, creating linkages and impressions, based on childhood memories of significant people and events:

*“...the curt cuts of an edge  
Through living roots awaken in my head.”*

(Heaney, 1969)

I hoped that by asking informants to describe the work they did from day to day, both in the relatively mundane moments and in events of major significance, it would be possible to draw out meaning from the totality of experience, much as the children depicted in ‘Digging’ were able to actively seek out and hold the newly dug potatoes and appreciate their cool hardness, the specific quality and character of insights gained.

Another part of the purpose in framing the second research question had to do with the meaning of sacraments and sacramentality. While there is a specific theological definition...

The sacraments are perceptible signs (words and actions) accessible to our human nature. By the action of Christ and the power of the Holy spirit they make present efficaciously the grace that they signify (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, p.282).

...it is possible also to speak in broader, less technical terms, of a “gracious outlook on the world, that experiences life as gift, seeing the more in the midst of the ordinary...” (Groome, 2001, p.120). While I believe that LPUC’s use of the term ‘sacramental’ referred primarily to the practice of faith by observance of the sacraments and regular participation in the Sunday Eucharist, this broader meaning of sacramentality needs also to be acknowledged, in that the mystery of God’s life lies within and often veiled by the seeming prosaic quality of our daily lives. In asking principals to describe their work, I hoped to generate data which could be interrogated for signs of the sacramental in the midst of the mundane and so demonstrate the spiritual and religious character of many of the principal’s actions in their leadership role. Hence, research question 2 was framed as follows;

In what ways have principals experienced the spiritual and religious dimensions of their leadership role?

In response to this question, the data indicate that principals routinely engage in leadership behaviours which they believe to be religious and spiritual in nature. Many of the informants spoke of the occasions on which they believed themselves to be acting in a spiritual or religious way. At school assemblies and other major community gatherings, for example, many informants spoke about the experience of interpreting and clarifying the meaning of particular events and situations in the life of the school within the context of Scripture and the Catholic Tradition. In this capacity they saw themselves acting in a formal teaching capacity on behalf of the faith community. They also reported an awareness of being ‘witnesses’ or representatives of the whole ecclesial community at these times. This same awareness was present when principals acted as special ministers of the Eucharist during school liturgies. There was a clear and overt link between their personal faith, their ministerial activity and their professional role as principal.

On occasions of grief and bereavement in families, principals were frequently called on to respond, on behalf of the school, to the needs of those affected. On some occasions this took the form of active involvement in funeral arrangements. On others, it was a matter of providing support, comfort and pastoral care for students and family members. While it is clear that Catholics can claim no monopoly on human kindness and care, the principals spoke about their actions as being inspired by and expressive of the values of the Gospel.

Principals reported many experiences which, although not related only to principals of Catholic schools, took on an additional dimension within the Catholic context. For example, informants describe their experience on first taking up their appointment as a time of nervousness, excitement, anticipation and loneliness. For some, the realisation of the enormous responsibility they now bore, weighed heavily on them. They voiced an expectation that, given the religious and ethical character of the schools to which they had been appointed, there would be a degree of induction, support and affirmation provided at the time of their appointment. For many, their experience fell far short of this, proving instead to be a time when they felt obliged to push themselves into the situation without much practical or moral support.

One significant aspect of this phenomenon which emerged during the research was the common experience of the principal finding a difficult situation which involved some or all of the following; attending to the unfinished business of a predecessor, an absence of effective handover information, meeting resistance from senior staff who may have been unsuccessful applicants and resentful of the changes a newly appointed principal would bring to the organisation. While this may not be unique to Catholic schools settings, informants expressed the view that the ethical claims of Catholic education called for a higher level of adherence to effective induction and commissioning procedures.

I had not anticipated, when framing the research questions for this study, that informants would have experienced so strongly the phenomenon of 'resistance to change,' with all the aspects of that as described by a number of writers (Brooke-Smith, 2003; Randall, 2004; Shaw, 2002). While wishing to listen to informants'

accounts and pay due attention to them, I was unable to give this issue the attention it seems to warrant as a research question in its own right. I simply wish to acknowledge here that the issue did emerge strongly from informants' accounts but that I was unable to pursue it in depth.

Many informants spoke at length about the moral and ethical complexities of working with staff through difficult lifestyle and relationship issues. This became a particularly difficult challenge when the behaviour of the staff member contravened school, diocesan or CECV guidelines relating to the standards expected of teachers in Catholic schools in regard to lifestyles, the risk of giving scandal or living in a way which contradicted Church teaching. The principals in such situations were called on to simultaneously be advisor, counsellor, mentor AND supervisor and employer's representative.

Another aspect of this complexity lay in the way that principals oversaw educational programs such as relationship education, drug education and other morally sensitive areas. They reported that at times they found themselves in the dilemma of conforming to diocesan guidelines and directives while at the same time ensuring sound and ethical educational practice at their schools. They spoke of themselves as a sort of two-way filter, interpreting policy and applying it, directing staff and implementing programs while ensuring that they complied as fully as possible with the requirements of local, diocesan and statewide system authorities.

Principals described their experience of supporting the work of the Religious Education faculty in their schools and identified their relationship with the Religious Education Coordinator as a significant one. Some principals opted to teach Religious Education classes, not only because they were often qualified to do so (Theology and Religious Education qualifications) but to give encouragement and support to the staff working in Religious Education. Many of the principals reported the difficulty of finding suitably qualified and experienced staff in this area and how their presence in the classroom strongly signalled to students and staff that the teaching and learning of Religious Education was a significant priority in their school. Other principals, who did not teach Religious Education as a timetabled class reported that they occasionally made

themselves available to Religious Education staff as a support person. In this way they saw themselves as validating and encouraging the work of the Religious Education program as well as enjoying direct positive contact with students in the capacity of 'witness.'

In relation to their collaboration with parish clergy and diocesan personnel, principals reported their clear understanding of the intensely cooperative nature of their relationship with parish clergy and Canonical Administrators. Some principals reported extremely effective, mutually respectful collaboration, especially with the President of the Association of Canonical Administrators of their school. For others, they regretted the lack of public affirmation and support given by Canonical Administrators. The principals reported that they did not need affirmation for their own sake but believed that public statements of support were a strong sign to the community of clergy and laity working together to advance the cause of Catholic education and witnessing to the shared responsibility for the evangelising mission of the Church.

The provision of leadership in faith education of staff was identified as a significant and specific contribution principals could make to the faith development of their school communities. Some principals reported that they frequently provided direct input on opportunities such as staff retreats and faith development days. In this capacity they saw themselves as teachers, mentors and guides who through their willingness to share part of their own spiritual journey, acted as witnesses to the message of the Gospel. Principals also reported that they were directly involved in the planning and design of staff faith development experiences. This was especially significant in a climate where the numbers of faith-active staff are difficult to maintain. Some principals spoke of the difficulty of securing staff who were both faith-committed and competent in their subject area.

Perhaps one of the most significant moments in the life of principals was the management of a major traumatic incident at their school. Such events challenge principals on every level, personal and professional, and in every aspect of their leadership role – managerial, pastoral, organisational, collaborative, religious and spiritual. Of particular interest in the present study is

the convergence of the religious and spiritual elements of the event and the school's response to it.

When major trauma occurs, (such as the sudden death of a student either through illness or in other circumstances) the principal is thrust to the centre of the event as 'event-manager.' This involves making all the necessary arrangements to support the community in appropriate ways. In specifically religious terms, it involves calling on the symbols, rituals and forms of prayer to ensure that the community uses the best of what the tradition offers to help people express grief, sadness and shock and also to provide consolation and comfort. It also enables the community to process the experience in a way which is both rationally and emotionally authentic.

In spiritual terms, such events require the principal to be a 'still-point' at the centre of seeming chaos by reassuring and supporting those community members undertaking key roles as well as community members at large. Principals reported that at times of tragedy, members of the community allowed themselves to be led through the crisis. This was a profoundly humbling experience for principals, who found themselves, supporting, reassuring, consoling, interpreting, being alert to processes that induce healing and avoid re-traumatising, making meaning by reference to the tradition, as well as managing the agencies and forms of assistance available externally. Principals reported that after the immediate crisis had passed, they experienced a 'let-down' part of which was a realisation that in the crisis, they had been able to call on extraordinary depths of spiritual, psychological and emotional strength as a gift to others. For those who had experienced this, they reported that it was a profoundly spiritual experience for them. Some described it in theological terms as having been "guided by the Holy Spirit" in knowing what to do. This quality of being able to respond according to the needs of the community at critical times is partly described by Starratt (2004) as 'presence.'

They reported that when they had acknowledged their own vulnerability and helplessness, this extraordinary strength, clarity of purpose and calmness seems to have welled up from within them. It was this strength, clarity and calmness that others recognised as leadership. It provided a secure environment within

which each person could attend to their duties in a spirit of collaboration and cooperation, confident that they were contributing to a shared moral enterprise of great significance. My own belief is that humility, self-awareness and truth all come into play to provide the basis of authentic spiritual leadership.

### **6.3.3 Research question 3 answered**

Having considered the understanding of principals as to the spiritual and religious significance of their role, I explored the experience of principals with particular reference to these dimensions of the role. In chapter 3, I discussed the nature of the principalship in Catholic schools as a sub-set of principalship in general and pointed out some of the specific characteristics of Catholic school principalship. I also discussed, in chapter 2, the recent history of principalship in Catholic secondary schools in Victoria in terms of the rapid change from religious to lay principalship and how this was partly understood in the context of the new emphasis on the apostolate of all the baptised for the mission of the Church as a result of Vatican II. Given that many lay principals were appointed on the basis of their professional competence and faith commitment but without having had the opportunity for appropriate theological education prior to appointment, I was interested to know how well principals had compensated for the lack of formal theological education as they undertook their work. I was also aware that a number of lay principals had previously spent time in religious life and were able to call on a tradition of prayer and spirituality that might enhance their role in lay principalship. It was in this context that I framed the third research question; in what ways have principals sought and/or experienced formation beyond academic study which has enriched their practice of principalship?

Principals reported that they recognised the importance of continuing formation and learning and so were disposed to undertake further study of a theological nature. They also reported the difficulty in apportioning time and energy to their many roles as family members as well as their professional relationships and as members of the faith community. The research question did not define 'formation' and most informants responded by including their quality relationships and their leisure time as an integral part of their formation. They also recognised the need for more specific spiritual experiences such as retreats. Those

principals whose schools retained links with a particular religious congregation spoke very strongly about the powerful effect on them of participation in programs and study tours organised through the congregation's own networks. They emphasised the personal deepening of their spiritual life as well as the establishment of networks of like-minded principals through religious congregation contact. They also reported that the link with a religious congregation enriched their understanding of the need to articulate a strong vision for their school, based on the vision of the founder and the particular educational tradition established by that congregation. Others, whose experience was mainly in schools which did not have such explicit links, tended to source opportunities for personal growth and enrichment according to their own perceived needs and interests. For them, the enrichment so gained enlightened their practice and enabled them to more fully appreciate the missionary nature of their work as lay principals.

All informants reported that they struggled to apportion time for personal prayer and reflection and found themselves frequently frustrated and dissatisfied with the quality of their prayer and spiritual life. It is possible that lay principals are judging themselves negatively by comparison with those forms of spiritual practice typical of religious communities and/or diocesan clergy, such as the Liturgy of the Hours (see glossary of terms). It is also possible that in addition to some form of professional supervision, principals may well need assistance from a spiritual mentor or guide in continuing the 'inner journey.'

As previously mentioned, principals included their relationships with family members and friends as a significant support to them in their work. Those who enjoyed positive and collaborative relationships with canonical administrators spoke positively about how affirming it was to be trusted and respected in this way and how much this contributed to the effectiveness of their leadership. Professional support from principals' networks was also significant for most informants. The care and support of family members was seen as a critically important support for their work, although many informants acknowledged how they often had little to give back to partner and family members through exhaustion and pressure of work. The struggle for 'balance' seemed to be a constant in the lives of many informants.

#### **6.4 Conclusions of the research**

This research has nominated a quite specific and narrow field (selected lay secondary principals in Victorian Catholic secondary schools) for investigation. It has found that the principals who were informants in the study do understand their role as principal to be a ministry in the Catholic Church according to current and emerging understandings of the term 'ministry' within the Catholic Church. This indicates that they do have a clear understanding of the religious and spiritual dimensions of the role and perform their duties in the light of this understanding. The experience of informants, as recounted in focus group discussion or written biographical statements, confirms this reality.

The research has brought to light a body of knowledge about the work of a group of principals which has not previously been subject to critical scrutiny. While there is a considerable and growing body of knowledge about principalship as a leadership role in education, comparatively little is known about the way in which practitioners have experienced the role and attributed meaning and significance to it. Further, it may be that the experience of this selected group is representative of the experience of principals in a wider circle, but it is important also to acknowledge the specific characteristics of diocesan Catholic secondary schools in Victoria during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early part of the current century.

The research could provide the starting point for a more extensive study of lay principalship in Catholic schools, within Victoria and further afield. Certainly, in parts of the world where the Catholic Church has made a significant commitment to schools as part of its evangelising mission, there may be many parallels to the experience of Victorian lay principals in that of those who are called to leadership of such schools.

The research also has the potential to contribute to the ongoing planning and development of appropriate professional learning for principals and aspiring principals, in the provision of both academic courses and formation opportunities.

Finally, the research records the story of a group of principals whose story has intrinsic merit as well as an instructional and operational value.

### **6.5 Implications and recommendations for the profession**

The research findings confirm the importance, for leaders and aspiring leaders, of sound theological and spiritual education as summarised by Sullivan (2001) who identifies the need for Catholic educational leaders to be well educated in the distinctive features of the Catholic tradition including canon law, liturgy, ecclesiology, spirituality, doctrine, morality and sacramentality. Sullivan states that “an understanding of the nature and purpose of Catholic education is intimately connected with an understanding of the Church’s mission.” (Sullivan, 2001, p.59). Such education and formation would need to be through ongoing in-service as well as pre-service.

The findings also confirm the importance of a formal recognition of the role of principal as a ministry in the Church through appropriate public liturgical commissioning. At the time of writing, LPUC has been in the process of redrafting and it is noted that one significant addition to the new policy is a section addressing the commissioning and induction of a new principal. This addition is to be commended.

In chapter 3, I briefly touched on the idea of professional supervision as one valuable and useful support for principals in the discharge of their responsibilities. It seems to me that given the complexity and intensity of the role, as related by informants, regular opportunities for professional supervision would enhance the practice of principals both for their own benefit and for the benefit of those they lead. This would benefit their ongoing professional learning, provide them with personal affective support and become a means whereby their accountability in the role could be more reliably assured. I am advised by colleagues, at the time of writing, that some recently appointed principals are being required to seek regular professional supervision, paid for by their employer, as a condition of appointment. This is to be commended. For practical reasons it may not be possible for principals to have regular one-to-one supervision. Hawkins and Shohet (2005) suggest that group supervision, if properly conducted, offers an

equivalent opportunity for professional learning, support and accountability with the added benefit of shared experience. This would support the comments offered by informants in the present study who participated in the focus group, all of whom recognised that group experience as affirming, supporting and growth-enhancing.

Many of the informants in this study related their experience at the commencement of their term as either strongly negative or problematical. The causes for this are unique and specific to each setting but it is possible to say that in most cases, the problems confronted by informants as they took up their duties, were known to system authorities and within the school community. One of the most frequently mentioned issues was the resistance, resentment or anger experienced by senior members of the leadership team inherited by the incoming principal. There may be a need to identify clearly the transition issues confronting the incoming principal and continuing staff and provide appropriate support and counselling for all parties so as to maximise the effectiveness of the new principal at the commencement of their period of service. The process of appointing, inducting and commissioning lay principals might well benefit from a 'project management' approach as explored by Randall (2004) and one which recognises the human, personal and affective dimensions of change as well as the structural and system dimensions (Shaw, 2002).

Some regional diocesan schools have struggled to develop an ethos and charism unique to the local community and founded on the spirituality of the local faith communities. Others have either appropriated or re-appropriated the charism of a founder, as experienced through the historical involvement in the school, whether through members of a religious congregation being assigned to that school, or other circumstances. It is recommended that all regional diocesan secondary schools in Victoria actively work to develop a comprehensive identity and spirituality which is authentic and faithful to the tradition, however this applies in the local situation and which reflects the characteristics of the local faith community.

Finally, it seems worthwhile to commit serious resources to the further development of an authentic lay spirituality of leadership. This research indicates

that individual practitioners, religious congregations and Catholic education authorities have all identified the importance of this dimension of leadership in Catholic schools and have committed themselves to its further development. The rich resource of practitioners' experience could be further utilised in this task.

The other aspect of the development of an appropriate spirituality is the tension informants perceived between the busyness of their work and the need to be spiritually grounded and refreshed. Some informants indicated that they had begun to seek formal spiritual direction as an important personal support. It is recommended that principals seek spiritual direction, as a separate support from that provided by professional supervision as described above.

## **6.6 Recommendations for possible future research**

The present study has been limited to a selected number of lay principals in diocesan Catholic secondary schools in Victoria. As such, its findings relate primarily to lay principals in these schools. In the course of the research, many questions arose from the informants' accounts of their experience which were unable to be addressed within the scope of the present study. One such issue was the identification by informants of the difficulties experienced as they commenced their appointment as principal. As previously mentioned, this was for many of them a fraught experience. Having made a decision not to pursue this issue as a major element of this study, I would nevertheless recommend that the phenomenon be taken up as the subject of a separate study, perhaps using a case study approach.

A possible area for further research is to replicate this present study, using a wider selection of participants. This partly to offset the fact that the number of informants used in this study was restricted to a small group, primarily for reasons of practicality and the feasibility of dealing with a large volume of qualitative data. It might also be possible to conduct a similar study in a parallel setting, perhaps exploring the experience of lay principals in congregational schools. This is suggested in the light of some informants' accounts of the struggle to establish a specific and authentic identity, culture and spirituality for their school community. Another fruitful area of study might be to conduct

equivalent research on the perceptions and experience of lay principals in other countries where Catholic schools are a significant element of the Church's mission in those countries.

Informants for this study identified the formation and faith development of teaching staff as a significant challenge facing them. It may be timely for research to be undertaken which explores effective ways of contributing to staff faith development, especially in relation to the principal's role in faith development of staff and the encouragement of an appropriate spirituality in education.

Finally, a question which arose in the present study but which was not able to be addressed was the issue of dissent from major teachings of the Church. This issue was explored by Prest in relation to the personal faith and moral life of teachers in Catholic schools (Prest, 2000). In the present study, the question arose in relation to the public role of the principal in ensuring adherence to official Catholic teaching within the various aspects of the life of the school while struggling personally with some of those official positions. The question arises; how is it possible for a principal to remain faithful to the Gospel and to their ministerial role as principal while at the same time holding a position, in good conscience, which may be at odds with the Church's public teaching? Informants clearly struggled with this whole question of the primacy of conscience as against their public role. This issue would seem to warrant further study.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

I was conscious, when I began this study, that digging was an apt metaphor for understanding the purpose and methodology of the research. As a researcher, I have used the 'squat pen' to uncover the tacit realities of the experience of a select group of lay principals in diocesan secondary Catholic schools by digging into the presented material of their accounts and scattering the 'new potatoes' of insight and meaning gained through critical scrutiny of that material.

In 'going down' for the good turf there is a hint that reflection on practice is not a finite or limited endeavour but that the deeper one goes, the more richness and

meaning there is to be uncovered and shared. In rural Ireland, turf was traditionally the main fuel for cooking and heating and its association with the warmth of the hearth and home is a recurring image in literature and folklore throughout centuries. It is hoped that this 'good turf' as uncovered in the present study, will provide fuel for further digging by principals themselves, in developing a deepening capacity for self-awareness and reflection. May it also encourage the continuing study of principalship with the goal of further enriching the personal and professional lives of principals.

At the conclusion of the research, I am convinced that the 'good turf' is not only the insights gained through the research but the participants themselves and the quality of their service in principalship. It is my hope that the propositions offered as a result of this research will in some way affirm, enhance and support the quality of leadership provided by present and future principals of Catholic diocesan secondary schools in Victoria.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

*Note that definitions given here are not comprehensive but specific to the context of this research*

Term	Definition
Apostolate	“On all Christians therefore is laid the pre-eminent responsibility of working to make the divine message of salvation known and accepted by all (men) throughout the world.” Paul VI (1965). <a href="http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html">http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html</a>
Canon Law	The Code of Canon Law (1983) is the body of laws and regulations by which the Catholic Church is guided in all aspects of its institutional life.
Canonical Administrator	Parish priest of a member parish of the region – the cluster of Catholic parishes which together ‘own’ a regional college. The group of parish priests form an Association of Canonical Administrators which is the ‘responsible authority’ in Industrial Relations law and in capital development matters. The principal appoints staff under delegation from the ACA (Association of Canonical Administrators).
CEO	Catholic Education Office – the organisation within a particular diocese by which the bishop provides administration and supervision of the Catholic schools within his diocese.
CECV	Catholic Education Commission of Victoria. The peak policy-setting body representing the four Catholic dioceses of Victoria in their dealings with state and commonwealth education authorities. It receives grants from state and commonwealth governments for distribution to Catholic schools.
Charism	A power, generally of a spiritual nature, believed to be a freely given gift by the grace of God. Religious congregations are guided by the charism of their founder, a particular gift or set of gifts believed to be at the core of the congregation’s identity and work.
Conciliar	Having to do with a general council of the Catholic Church.
Congregation	A group of vowed men or women, living a communal life and guided by a ‘rule’ or set of constitutions which have been officially approved by ecclesiastical authorities.
‘cradle’ Catholic	A person who has been born into a Catholic family and likely to have been baptised in infancy. It is also likely that such a person would have attended a Catholic parish primary school and so have been socialised into a distinctively Catholic culture.
Diocesan	Having to do with a diocese – see next entry.
Diocese	An administrative territorial unit of the Catholic Church under the direct supervision of a bishop in full communion with the Church of Rome. It is also described in Canon Law as a ‘particular Church.’
Ecclesiology	That branch of theology which studies the nature of the Church, its doctrine, its role, its organisation and its leadership.
Employing authority	The Association of Canonical Administrators is recognised as a ‘public juridical person’ for the purposes of entering employment contracts with principals and staff in Catholic schools. In some dioceses, this role is performed by the Director of the diocesan Catholic Education Office.

Evangelisation	It is simply bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to all aspects of our shared humanity: helping people to encounter the Gospel. This activity of the Church is referred to as 'Evangelisation'. It is about being in Christ and in the world of today. <a href="http://www.melbourne.catholic.org.au/archbishop/pastoralletters/pastoralletter2004evangelisation.pdf">http://www.melbourne.catholic.org.au/archbishop/pastoralletters/pastoralletter2004evangelisation.pdf</a>
Founder	One who establishes a religious congregation and whose thoughts, writings and actions continue to guide and inspire the members of that congregation.
Liturgy of the Hours	The official prayer of the Latin rite of the Roman Catholic Church outside the Mass and is the liturgical embodiment of the Canonical hours of the Church. It is the form of prayer used by monastic and religious communities and is also the basis of the daily prayer of the clergy.
LPUC	Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Policy statement on Lay Principals Under Contract in Catholic Secondary Schools (1993).
Ministry	"Christian ministry is the public activity of a baptised follower of Jesus Christ flowing from the Spirit's charism and an individual personality on behalf of a Christian community to witness to, serve and realise the kingdom of God." (O'Meara, 1983).
Missiology	That branch of theology which has to do with the missionary activity of the Church. It embraces cultural studies, anthropology, methods of communication and other aspects of the work of propagating the Christian faith.
Mission	In the Church there is a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission. Christ conferred on the Apostles and their successors the duty of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in His name and power. But the laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world. Paul VI (1965). <a href="http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat_ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html">http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat_ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html</a>
Parish	An administrative sub-division of a diocese which is the basic local faith community in the care of a parish priest.
Parish priest	A Catholic priest appointed by the bishop to care for a parish community.
Province	A group of dioceses including a metropolitan diocese, headed by an archbishop and a number of other dioceses, known as suffragan dioceses.
Regional school	A school which is owned and operated by a parish or group of parishes rather than by a religious congregation.
Religious Institute	See 'congregation' above. Religious Institutes and congregations differ from Religious Orders in that their members take 'simple' vows rather than 'solemn' vows.
Religious Order	Groups of laypeople or clergy who live a common life under a 'rule' and are recognised by ecclesiastical authorities. See also 'congregation' and 'religious institute.'
Rome (Roman)	Used in this context to refer to the central authority of the Catholic Church. This may mean variously the teaching authority of the papal office or the authority of any of the structures collectively known as the Roman Curia – the central administrative and governance structure of

	the Catholic Church. In a more figurative sense “Rome” is used to distinguish the ‘centre’ of power in the institution as against the power exercised in a local Church by a bishop or by a national conference of bishops.
Sacrament	“Signs or symbols which effect what they signify” In the present context, the term has to do with faith practice as defined by being ‘eucharistic’ – in full communion through regular participation in celebration of Sunday Mass.
Sacramental	To do with sacraments. In the present context, to do with being in full Eucharistic communion in the Church through regular participation in the sacraments of the Church.
School Board (board)	The school board is the main reference group for the principal. It is a structure through which consultation about policy and priorities is conducted. Its membership includes elected representatives of parents of currently enrolled students as well as parish nominees and other members as co-opted on the basis of particular skills and knowledge. The Association of Canonical Administrators delegates to the Board a range of consultative and advisory functions. The principal of the regional college reports regularly to the board and the board has significant input into the process of selecting the principal.
Special minister of the Eucharist	Lay person commissioned for service to a particular community to assist with distribution of Communion at Mass.
Vatican II	The Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican was a general Ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church held between 1962 and 1965. It issued a number of major documents which have been implemented to varying degrees in the ensuing forty years. It is still regarded as a major event in the life of the Catholic Church but whose decrees are yet to be fully implemented.

## Appendix A

Statistics on numbers of religious and lay principals in Victorian Catholic secondary schools 1972-2003.

Note variations in total number of schools are a result of closures, new schools, mergers of schools etc.

Note also statistics unavailable/incomplete for some years. Regular published reporting of statistics in regular format did not commence until 1993.

Year	Religious	Lay	Total	% Lay
1972	92	0	92	0.0
1973	92	1	93	0.7
1974	86	6	92	4.6
1975	85	7	92	5.4
1976	82	14	96	10.6
1977	78	16	94	12.6
1978	78	18	96	14.3
1979	76	19	95	15.1
1980	*	26	*	*
1981	*	*	*	*
1982	*	27	*	*
1983	89	28	110	25.5
1984	90	28	110	25.0
1985	86	33	119	27.7
1986	79	40	119	33.6
1987	73	40	113	35.4
1988	70	43	113	38.0
1989	65	47	112	42.0
1990	65	49	114	42.9
1991	56	54	110	49.1
1992	57	49	106	46.2
1993	51	55	106	51.8
1994	50	57	107	53.2
1995	44	58	102	56.8
1996	40	60	100	60.0
1997	38	62	100	62.0
1998	36	63	99	63.6
1999	31	69	100	69.0
2000	27	71	98	72.7
2001	25	72	97	74.2
2002	24	73	97	75.2
2003	22	75	97	77.3

Source: CEOM Archives (incomplete data extracted from various statistical reports)

Regular reports available from 1993 onwards (CECV Statistical Bulletins published annually thereafter)

Statistics for 1972-1979 from a paper delivered by Vin Faulkner to NCEC Conference Canberra May 5-8 1980. "Sociological changes in the staffing of Catholic Schools" Paper filed at CECV 102/1980

\* reliable and accurate numbers unavailable

## Appendix B

"Statistical Profile: diocesan clergy 1986 – 2003" selected unpublished figures provided by Catholic Research Office for Pastoral Planning – Archdiocese of Melbourne May 2003

	<b>1986</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>2002</b>
Parish priests	206	209	206	172
Administrators	4	5	5	8
Assistant priests	89	75	58	22
<b>Priests in parishes</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>202</b>

## Appendix C

### Focus Group questions November 2003

Task for focus group;

Text of LPUC tabled

Audio-recorder set

Respondents to read text 5-10 minutes

Each respondent to make an initial verbal response to text covering each dot point in turn on basis of understanding and experience of this text

Open discussion of initial responses assisted by following prompt questions;

What do you understand by term 'ministry'?

In what ways is your principalship motivated by a personal sense of vocation? Explain this

What does the term 'sacramental and general witness' mean to you?

Mission? Evangelisation?

When appointed what understanding did you have of these terms?

In what ways is your principalship a 'missionary' activity? Explain

How do you sustain yourself in role? Reference to particular religious congregation tradition?

Other sources? What is the well from which you drink to energise your leadership?

Particular experiences during your principalship – occasions, events etc which throw your spiritual leadership into sharp relief?

Insights gained

Relationships with others?

Family

Canonical Administrators

Colleagues

Hierarchy

Balancing of time/energy

Increasing secularisation of culture – loss of a sense of the "Catholic Project"

Disconnect between institutional church and school?

Limited supply of faith-active Catholic teachers? What impact on your leadership and the ethos of school etc?

Other issues regarding religious and spiritual dimensions of leadership as distinct from managerial, educational., etc

What kind of leadership appropriate in next phase of life of Catholic secondary schools especially in relation to regional/diocesan setting?

Other issues?

- pastoral care of colleagues

- symbolic and ritual involvement in public liturgies and other occasions

- the inner spiritual journey

- what sustains the principal in their work?

- the importance of relationships, both collegial and personal

- the usefulness of professional development/in service/conferences/academic study

- the question of dissent

## Appendix D

### Stimulus questions for five written statements from selected informants

Using the following questions, but not constrained by them, you are invited to make a biographical statement in the light of your experience as a Catholic secondary principal. Word max 5000 words, presented as a Word document.

Name

Type of school (co-ed, single gender? Approx size? Suburban/rural? Other relevant factors, eg single parish/multi parish etc)

Number of years in present appointment

Total number of years as a principal

How did you come to be appointed to your present position? circumstances, process, etc. from application to appointment? What was the interview like? What did you learn about your school and the position requirements at interview etc?

Was there any induction of you into the school? a commissioning ceremony, a formal introduction etc? Tell about how you took up the appt? getting keys, accessing office etc, your thoughts and impressions as you commenced. Was the handover from your predecessor helpful?

Was the situation you found yourself in better than or worse than you had expected to find? difficulties, surprises, positives and negatives?

What significant or defining experiences have you had as principal during your term eg trauma staff and /or student personnel issues - redundancy/termination/redeployment/staff appointments (eg changes in POL appointments which have been difficult) counselling by yourself offered to staff who have approached you about personal/professional issues other significant events or experiences Give some details/tell the story In recollecting that event/experience, what insights do you now have as to its meaning and/or significance

What indicators of your school as "Catholic?" eg social justice, liturgical and prayer life? Other? How do you see your work as principal as having religious and spiritual significance (eg LPUC defines role of principal as a ministry and uses terms like sacramental and general witness?) - see attachment at end for extract from LPUC 1993

Do you see yourself as exercising a ministry? In what ways?

How do you attend to your own 'inner journey' as principal - what nourishes you on the journey? What are the wells from which you drink?

Do you perceive any difference between your diocesan school and congregational schools in terms of their Catholicity?

Is the existence of a historical link (if any) at your school with a religious congregation a significant source of support for you in defining and maintaining a distinctive ethos at your school? Give details.

How do you assist non-Catholic members of staff to see their work as a service within the ministry of Catholic education? Is this a significant challenge for you as principal?

How do you assess the quality of the networks within which you work? eg your relationship with Canonical Administrators, Board and CEO? Positive and lifegiving? Other? Comment as relevant.

Does the collegial support of PAVCSS (Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools) make a contribution to your role? How?

What formal study have you undertaken in relevant fields (Theology, Ed Leadership, RE) that has assisted you in your role as principal?

What formational experiences have you found helpful? eg retreat, colloquium, enrichment activity, etc? Give some details about how such things have assisted?

How do you balance the tensions between work, family and personal dimensions of your life?

Any other insights you think would be helpful in making more explicit the religious and spiritual dimensions of principalship in Catholic secondary school in Victoria?

What pre-service preparation and in-service support would you recommend in light of your own experience?

## **Appendix E INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS**

TITLE OF PROJECT: LAY PRINCIPALS UNDER CONTRACT

NAMES OF SUPERVISORS: DR H NEIDHART/DR ANNETTE SCHNEIDER

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER : LIAM DAVISON

NAME OF PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED: ED D

This study seeks to explore the understanding and experience of some secondary lay principals of diocesan schools as to the religious and spiritual responsibilities of their role as set out in 'Lay Principals Under Contract' CECV Policy 1993. The perceptions and insights of respondents will be collected through participation in one of two ways; (1) a focus group comprising the enquirer and three volunteer colleagues and (2) a biographical statement based on indicated headings provided by up to five colleagues. This statement would be of approximately 5000 words in length.

It is unlikely that either of these activities will involve risk or discomfort.

Participation in this research will involve a significant time commitment with the focus group requiring approx three hours and the biographical statement considerably longer.

The potential benefits to you of participating include an opportunity articulate and critically reflect on your own professional practice in these significant areas of your responsibility. The benefits to Catholic education include the possible identification of forms of support, formation and education that secondary lay principals may need to enable them to perform their duties effectively. One of the outcomes may be the formulation of some recommendations for the consideration of Directors of Catholic Education offices as to the preservice and inservice needs of principals of diocesan secondary schools. Research results will be made available to participants and will be presented as a thesis for Ed D. Results may also be written up in summary form and published in relevant journals but not in a way which will identify respondents.

You are free to refuse consent altogether without having to justify that decision, or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the study at any time without giving a reason. Confidentiality will be ensured during the conduct of the research by the secure storage of audio and/or written data and in the event of any report or publication arising from it. It is not anticipated that there will be any limits to confidentiality in this particular project.

Any questions you may have about the proposed research should be directed to Dr Helga Neidhart, my principal supervisor. If there are more volunteers than the research requires, Ms Patricia Ryan, Executive Officer of the PAVCSS has indicated a willingness to assist in the selection of a representative group of principals.

Dr Helga Neidhart rsc  
on telephone number 9953 3000  
in the School of Educational Leadership  
Australian Catholic University  
St Patrick's Campus  
115 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy 3065

It is hoped that all participants will be provided with a report of the results of the research.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Investigator or Supervisor and Student Researcher has (have) not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of;

Chair, HREC

C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Melbourne Campus  
Locked Bag 4115  
FITZROY VIC 3065  
Tel: 03 9953 3157  
Fax: 03 9953 3315

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Student Researcher

Yours sincerely  
Liam G Davison  
(Student Researcher)

## Appendix F

### Digging

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound  
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:  
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds  
Bends low, comes up twenty years away  
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills  
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft  
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.  
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep  
To scatter new potatoes that we picked  
Loving their cool hardness in our hands

By God, the old man could handle a spade.  
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day  
Than any other man on Toner's bog.  
Once I carried him milk in a bottle  
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up  
To drink it, then fell to right away

Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods  
Over his shoulder, going down and down  
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap  
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge  
Through living roots awaken in my head.  
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests.  
I'll dig with it.

S Heaney *from* "Death of a Naturalist" 1966

## **Appendix G**

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria  
Policy statement on Lay Principals Under Contract  
in Catholic Secondary Schools  
September 1993

(Parts of sections 2 and 6 of the full document)

### **2 THE MINISTRY OF LAY LEADERSHIP**

- 2.1 All Christians, by their rebirth in Christ through Baptism have a genuine equality of dignity and action. Because of this equality, all contribute each according to his or her own "condition" to the building up of the body of Christ (Lumen Gentium 13,40)
- 2.2 Catholic secondary schools exist in the context of the Church's official mission to to proclaim the gospel message and to promote the formation of its members. The leadership of these schools involves the principal more directly and officially in the church's mission. Hence the role of the lay principal is an integral part of the Church's official educational ministry and involves the obligation to give witness both sacramental and general to that ministry.
- 2.3 All concerned with Catholic secondary education are challenged to develop authentic models which best encourage the lay principal's specific contribution to the work of spreading the gospel through the mission of Catholic education. This will be different from the model of principalship as defined by years of expression by members of Religious congregations.
- 2.4 Ministry is commissioned service to others which takes place within the Church and is motivated by a commitment to Christ. The ministry of the principal has a number of dimensions, including:
  - 2.4.1 Religious: the ministry of the principal must be seen as modelled on Jesus Christ and grounded in the Catholic faith
  - 2.4.2 Educational: as educational leader of the school community the principal has the major responsibility for the development of educational goals and for ensuring their implementation through the curriculum
  - 2.4.3 Pastoral: the principal's relationship with others in the school community must be sustaining, healing, growth-oriented and embody respect, concern and compassion for the individual.
  - 2.4.4 Managerial: the principal needs well developed managerial skills to organise and inspire others and to ensure that the school operates effectively.
  - 2.4.5 Collaborative: the principal is called upon to collaborate with colleagues and relevant authorities within Catholic and public sectors of education.

### **6 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL**

- 6.1 Principals are charged with educational leadership. They will, therefore, take a significant role in the formulation and articulation of the vision of the school and the translation of this vision into reality. Their responsibilities include:

establishing and nurturing s community where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is genuinely cherished and lived;

creating a climate where effective teaching and learning can take place;

providing a curriculum responsive to the needs and expectations of students, parents and societal change;

working in conjunction with Boards and Canonical Administrators

6.2 Principals are responsible under the authority of the Bishop of the diocese for the provision of catechetical instruction by means of a religious education program and for the maintenance of acceptable standards of religious education in accordance with the policies established by diocesan authorities and the Diocesan guidelines for religious education.

6.3 The other duties of the principal include:

- (a) direction and supervision of staff and students
- (b) provision of appropriate [pastoral care for all sections of the school community
- (c) engaging staff and terminating appointments on behalf of the Employing Authority
- (d) facilitation of faith development, curriculum development and professional development of staff
- (e) contributing to clear, regular and accountable communication channels with the School Board and Employing Authority
- (f) acting as executive officer of the School board if appropriate
- (g) establishing regular communication with parents
- (h) supervision of the proper care and maintenance of school property
- (i) administration of school finances within the agreed budget
- (j) liaison with official organisations associated with the school and with Catholic education

## Appendix H Copy of Human Research Ethics Committee Approval

Australian Catholic University  
Branches: Sydney, Canberra, Ballarat, Melbourne



Human Research Ethics Committee

### HREC Expedited Review Panel Approval Form

<b>Principal Investigator/Supervisor:</b> Dr Helga Neidhart Melbourne Campus <b>Co-Investigators:</b> <b>Student Researcher:</b> Liam Davison Melbourne Campus
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<b>Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:</b> Lay Principals Under Contract - an exploration of the perceptions of selected secondary lay principals in relation to the religious and spiritual dimensions of their role <b>for the period:</b> 17.09.03 - 17.11.03 <b>Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number:</b> V2003.04-19
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The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (1999)* apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as
  - security of records
  - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
  - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as
  - proposed changes to the protocol
  - unforeseen circumstances or events
  - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than minimum risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimum risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
(Research Services Officer, Melbourne Campus)

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