

**CATHOLIC SCHOOLS SEEKING AUTHENTICITY  
IN A SECULAR AND PLURALIST SOCIETY**

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### *Statement of Sources*

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*All research procedures reported in this thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).*

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis reports on a case study of three Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, Australia. It also provides an exploration of the contemporary Catholic school as it seeks to participate in the educational mission of the Church. Catholic schools are no longer institutions for the converted. Today their purposes are challenged by a contemporary demographic which finds little formal relationship with the institutional Church. Yet these schools still hold a strong enough attraction for parents to select them as their school of choice for their children. At a time when enrolments have never been higher, identification with the institutional Church in its various forms has never been lower, a reality which is equally true of teachers in Catholic schools. This situation seems to pose a challenge to the authenticity of the Catholic school, in terms of the consonance or otherwise between purpose and action, between the school mission statement and the ways in which the Catholic school lives this out.

Through questionnaires and interviews the research sought to give voice to parents, students and teachers in three Catholic schools as they reflected on their experiences and choices as well as their understanding of the purposes of the Catholic school. The three schools chosen were from different parts of the archdiocese of Melbourne, a Primary school, a Preparatory to Year 12 School and a special school for children who have struggled with mainstream education. The experiences of these three Catholic schools are regarded against the background of the historical development of Catholic schools in Australia in general and Victoria in particular.

The review of literature examines the purposes of the Catholic school as these are described in the Church's official literature as well as through its educational agencies. It also analyses and comments on the writings of contemporary researchers in the field. In comparing

the official literature and examining the contemporary experiences of those in Catholic education, it became obvious that there was a gap between traditional statements of purposes and how schools perceive these purposes through their teachers, students and parents. These gaps became even more obvious in the data gathered for the research. Beyond these, moreover, the data also suggested other gaps and dissonances. These included the gap between the parents' expectations and the schools' expectations about what constitutes Catholic education, and the structural dissonances between schools and the local Churches. The separation or lack of conversation between Catholic school and local Church identified in the research goes to the heart of the authenticity of the educational mission of the Church itself.

The research identified that on their own Catholic schools can neither be substitute parishes nor manage the Church's educational mission. More than this, the question of the authenticity of the Catholic school is also an ecclesiological question. This means that the Catholic school's strategies and actions can only be seen as part of a larger strategy of the Church itself to educate Catholics. Like the Church, Catholic schools involve the participation of staff and families whose loyalties, values, life experiences and decision-making are directly affected by the secular and pluralist nature of the society to which they belong. Yet this has not meant that people are any less spiritual or seeking of a deeper meaning to their lives. People in general, and parents in particular, are not necessarily looking to fulfil this spiritual need in their local Church, and neither is this fulfilled by sending their children to Catholic schools.

The thesis explores this phenomenon and proposes that only in partnership between school and local Church can authentic Catholic schools develop and grow.

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## ACRONYMS

**A**

ACU Australian Catholic University

**C**

CCM Constant Comparative Method of Analysis  
 CECV Catholic Education Commission of Victoria  
 CEOM Catholic Education Office Melbourne  
 CFR Catalyst for Renewal  
 CS The Catholic School  
 CSTTM The Catholic School on the Threshold of the New Millennium  
 CSYMA Catholic Schools Youth Ministry Australia  
 CW Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord

**D**

DI Divini Illius

**G**

GE Gravissimum Educationis  
 GS Gaudium et Spes

**I**

ICT Information Communication Technologies

**L**

LCSWTF Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith  
 LG Lumen Gentium

**N**

NCLS National Church Life Survey

**P**

par paragraph

**Q**

QCEC Queensland Catholic Education Commission

**R**

RDECS The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School  
 RE Religious Education  
 REC Religious Education Coordinator  
 REPR Report of the Enrolment Policy Review  
 RM Redemptoris Missio

**S**  
SCCE Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education  
SIF School Improvement Framework  
SIP Spirituality in the Pub

**U**  
UK United Kingdom

## **CHAPTER ONE: THE BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT - RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### Introduction

The Victorian Catholic education system is the largest non-government education system in Australia consisting of four dioceses and 487 schools, and costing almost nine million dollars per day to run the entire system (Wilkes 2009, p. 2 & 3). Victorian Catholic schools save over seven hundred and twenty million dollars annually to the Australian community and tax payer (Wilkes 2009, p. 18). Unlike their counterparts who send their children to government schools, parents who choose to send their children to a Catholic school pay school fees, and this is because Catholic schools are not fully funded as are the government schools. In July 2008 it was estimated that there were 185,000 students in all Victorian Catholic schools (Baillieu & Ryan, 2008, p. 1). Government funding, both federal and state, has become the key to the survival of Catholic schools. With funding also comes accountability requirements, and as funding increases so do these accountability requirements. It is in this environment that Catholic schools are seeking to live out their Church appointed educational mission.

The researcher has worked for thirty years in four Catholic schools in the Melbourne archdiocese. As a specialist Religious Education (RE) teacher, he has experienced both the disinterest of students in the subject matter as well as the disinterest of parents who tended to be unconcerned about progress in the subject. However, it was also observed how well students responded to meditation activities, camp retreats, reflection days, well prepared liturgies and good ritual. At times, tacit disregard for RE was reflected in poor timetabling options, use of RE lessons for other school activities, and using it as a subject to complete the

teaching workloads of teachers rather than appointing specialist teachers. The quality of teaching in RE was variable at best.

Perhaps despite this it has become obvious that Catholic schools, rather than being on the wane, have remained popular, especially for families but also for teachers. New schools are now being built in major population corridors in Victoria, and this growth continues apace. Alongside this growth, however, we are now witnessing declining numbers attending Church, even among the staff in Catholic schools, let alone the parents who enrol their children in Catholic schools.

This thesis provides an examination of these two phenomena and also examines the relationship they have with each other. It provides an analysis of the extent to which secularism and pluralism contribute to this situation, and examines the challenges to the authenticity of the Catholic school that these specifically pose. The thesis, therefore, is an exploration of the experience of the contemporary Catholic school. It seeks to give voice to those who work in three schools, their students, their teachers and leadership teams as well as the parents who have chosen a Catholic education for their child.

To set the context for this contemporary research it is essential to present a brief historical perspective on the growth of Catholic schools in Victoria, Australia. However, before this it is important to elaborate on the significance of the word “authenticity” in the title of this thesis.

### *The meaning of Authenticity*

The researcher came upon the question of authenticity through reflection on his experience as a specialist RE teacher. Religious education was under-valued as a subject by teachers and

students, and even more so by the parents of these students; the absence of any requests for an interview at parent-teacher time was a stark reminder of this situation. While key leaders in the school had an understanding of the importance of the subject this was not shared by others. It was impossible to assume that students, their parents or even teachers were Christian believers or affiliated with the Church. There was therefore an inconsistency between the stated purposes of the Catholic school and those who were part of this community, students, parents and teachers. There was also another missing element, the local Church. It was 'present' in such RE curriculum units like 'The Parish' and the 'History of the Catholic Church in Australia', yet beyond this it played little or no part in the school, at least in the experience of this researcher.

Another way of engaging with the notion of authenticity as it is used in this thesis is to link it with the notion of "spiritual capital", 'resources of faith and values derived from commitment to a religious tradition', (Grace, 2002, p. 236). In the researcher's experience what was lacking was this spiritual capital, a certain driving force within the Catholic school. Catholic schools within Australia have benefited from the presence of significant spiritual capital provided by the religious orders which sustained Catholic schools and also from committed lay men and women. However, the findings presented in this thesis will also provide a picture of Catholic schools struggling to maintain this spiritual capital in the face of difficult circumstances. Grace describes this challenge as

nurturing spirituality in the young against external pressure for secularism, hedonism and materialism; renewing and revivifying Catholicity to meet the needs contemporary adolescents; mediating between the moral teachings of the institutional Church and the mores of youth culture; teaching the importance of personal and social justice and the dignity of the person. (Grace, 2002, p.237)

It is also an argument of this thesis that this dearth of spiritual capital is also experienced in the problems Catholic schools face in engaging families who enrol their children as well as the staff who teach and work there.

The question of authenticity, then, arose out of this perception of lack of connections between school and local Church as well as a lack of consistency between the stated purposes of the school and what actually was achieved. The focus on authenticity also arose out of a sense that the spiritual capital in the school was both challenged and possibly in decline. In other words, is the school what it says it is? However, the research undertaken for this thesis showed that the concept of authenticity is complex. It takes into account the vision the school has of its own nature and the ways in which it lives up to this. It also needs to account for consonance and consistency within the school, and then the separation of Catholic school from local Church because of other forces at play both within the school and in the broader Church itself. Other scholars have also noted these complexities (Mackay, 2001; McQuillan, 2004; McLaughlin 2005; Singleton, Mason & Webber, 2004, 2006). Sullivan (2000) states this point succinctly:

Catholic schools exhibit diversity and pluralism and display a wide range of original syntheses in their responses to the ideas and values that compete for their allegiance. The richness offered by this diversity and originality derives in part from resources at the heart of the Catholic faith and in part from the sheer multiplicity in the cultural contexts, socio-economic circumstances and alternative ideologies that surround schools. (Sullivan, 2000, p. ix)

This research sought to locate the notion of authenticity within the constructionist view of knowledge, a concept developed in Chapter three of the thesis as a basis for the research design. The choice of this epistemology for this thesis, therefore, sought to build a context specific view of authenticity, rather than narrow the research by providing a definition.

When the research data had been gathered and thematically analysed it became clear that the authenticity of the contemporary Catholic school was an elusive and context specific notion. It was context specific in the sense that it could be measured against the spiritual capital or lack thereof that could be identified in the school – this was measured to an extent through the group interviews held with participants. Rolheiser’s perspective on post-ecclesialism also bears on the Catholic school and the notion of authenticity. One of the premises of this thesis is that even though in recent times numbers attending Church have greatly decreased, there has not been a similar decrease in enrolment numbers for Catholic schools.

The huge drop-off has come mostly in one area, actual Church-going. People still believe in God and their Churches even when they don't often go to Church. They haven't left their Churches; they just aren't going to them. We aren't so much post-Christian as we are post-ecclesial. The problem is not so much atheism or even religious affiliation, but participation in the Church. (Rolheiser, 2008, p. 1)

Rolheiser’s reflection here seems to explain some of the reasons behind the large numbers of Catholic school enrolments even though there is a lack of participation in the Church. Hence, it is not possible to begin with a definition of authenticity in this thesis because the experience of ‘post-ecclesialism’ is a larger dynamic than can be adequately responded to by an individual Catholic school alone. Authenticity is context specific. Post-ecclesialism, as described by Rolheiser, could also be the significant factor that is contributing to the decline of spiritual capital in Catholic schools.

A comment needs to be made about the use of the term ‘post-ecclesial’. The way it is used in this thesis is not meant to suggest that one can be Catholic or even Christian without the Church. Rather, it is used in an attempt to describe the phenomenon of high enrolments in Catholic schools yet decreasing involvement in the Church. In other words, for many parents

and staff in Catholic schools their only ‘involvement’ with the Catholic Church is their participation in a Catholic school. This can hardly be described as a positive outcome when Catholic schools are by their very nature seeking to build this same involvement. Related to this issue as well is the notion of school as substitute parish or even that the school is the Church. The way this notion is used in this thesis is not to suggest that this is the way Catholic schools are meant to be. Rather, the experience of some Catholic schools as explored in this research suggests that this is something that has simply come about and has not been by design. That schools have not sought to become substitute parishes but may have become so, seems to be an undesirable consequence of the contexts in which contemporary Catholic schools find themselves both socially and demographically. It is this phenomenon that requires a considered response from both Church and education authorities.

The title of this thesis also includes the word “seeking”. In other words, authenticity is a quest, maybe even a journey. Thus whenever “authenticity” is used in the data analysis and discussions on themes which arose from the data in this thesis, it will be used with a sense of hesitation, but also a sense that the contemporary Catholic school is always a dynamic community, working hard to live out its mission statement in interesting times. Any conclusions about the meaning of the authenticity of the contemporary Catholic school can only be partial, and therefore, as yet another contribution to discussion and reflection in the fields of Catholic education in general and religious education in particular. Any understanding of the authenticity of the contemporary Catholic school cannot be separated from reflection and discussion on the Church’s educational mission in general. Nevertheless, the final chapter of this thesis in distilling the findings from the research will describe some features of authenticity around which Catholic schools may build their own identities.

One final point in relation to seeking an understanding of authenticity is the choice of the three schools for this research. The three schools chosen for this research were three separate examples of Catholic schooling. The first was a primary school typical of so many like it with the Church on the same property; the second was a new Preparatory to Year 12 school, one of several starting to appear around Melbourne; and the third was a Special School with a different structure than either of the other two. Missing from this selection are secondary regional schools and Religious Order owned schools. Choosing five schools for the research was not considered practical within the bounds of this research project. It may have also been possible to have researched three of the same kind of Catholic school, for example, three regional secondary colleges. However, the choice of such diverse schools as representative of the different ways Catholic schools express their mission lent itself to an exploration of the context specific nature of the authenticity of the contemporary Catholic school. In other words, the purpose of the research was to analyse authenticity in its complexity not merely develop a comparative analysis of regional or primary or Preparatory to Year 12 schools *per se* as a form of Catholic schooling. This could form the purpose of other research. Grace put this another way, as well as head teachers and leadership teams ‘spiritual capital is also constituted in school governing bodies, in classroom teachers, in priest and school chaplains, in parents and not least in the students themselves’, (Grace, 2002, p. 238). As the research findings also go on to point out, the other source is the local Church.

## A Brief history of Catholic schools to the present

### *Introduction*

A treatment of what constitutes the purposes of Catholic education in Australia, and Victoria, in particular, cannot avoid the historical context of its development. This must, in the context of this thesis, be very brief, and so it is restricted to what are considered key formative influences and events.

*Catholic Education: the Australian experience from 1872*

The response of Australia's Catholic Bishops to the Victorian Education Act of 1872 was quite clear: secularist education was seen as a system of "practical paganism, which leads to corruption of morals and loss of faith"; indeed, such schools "were seed-plots of future immorality, infidelity and lawlessness, being calculated to debase the standard of human excellence, and to corrupt the political, social and individual life of future citizens" (O'Farrell, 1968, p. 101).

The practical response was swift: by 1885 the Australian Catholic bishops had determined that the first building in a new parish would be its school, 'the single most distinguishing feature of Australian Catholicism' (Campion, 1987). How could this be sustained? The answer was to be found in 'importing' teaching religious orders. By 1900 there were 4000 religious occupied in teaching in Catholic schools. It was the combination of un-salaried religious and the sacrifices of the Catholic laity who met the expense of capital outlay for buildings and maintenance that provided the material substance of the Catholic school. Current research (O'Donoghue & Potts, 2004), documents the unique and significant contribution religious orders made to the building of the Australian Catholic school system. However, there was one other key and formative influence which wove Catholic education into a rich and powerful fabric. Campion suggested that 'the identification between Irish and

Catholic is .....central to the experience of being Catholic in Australia'. It was, as well, a deliberate policy by the Australian bishops to 'coalesce Catholicism with Irishness....a marriage of Irish national sentiment to Catholicism'. Further, 'it was a religion that put weight on continued and loyal belonging to a group of co-religionists' (Campion, 1982, p. 47 & 51). This was the stable social structure which was at the heart of Catholicism in Australia, quite obviously permeated its schools, and was proudly boasted about in such ditties as:

*I am a little Catholic,  
I love my holy faith;  
I will be true to Holy Church  
and steadfast until death.  
I shun the schools of those who seek  
to snare poor Catholic youth;  
No Church I own – no schools I know  
but those that teach the truth.*

By 1950, the number of sisters, brothers and priests teaching in Catholic schools had reached 15,000 or 95% of all staff. By 1965 this had slipped to 72% of all staff, and by 1972 it was down to 43% of all staff. In 1984 it was a mere 10%, and today the figure would be less than 1%. Overall figures of religious teaching in Catholic schools in the USA peaked in 1965 at 185,000 and have since fallen to fewer than 70,000. (Kessel Stewart, 2006) "Behind these figures lay the collapse of the central pastoral strategy inherited from the nineteenth century: a Catholic school, staffed by religious sisters and brothers, for every Catholic boy and girl" (Campion, 1987, pp. 234-235). But there were other changes which had an impact on the Catholic school and the Church in general. The first of these was the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965).

Before the Second Vatican Council and its aftermath, religious education was a simpler business in a simple world. The years following the Council saw conflict and polarization among adult Church members, and alienation and rejection on the part of many young Catholics. Their anger found its focus in the religion classroom, which became most unpleasant for a teacher to work in. Things got so bad that many schools

not only changed their curricula and text books but also modified their expectations. They cut back on content and class periods. (Di Giacomo, 1984, p. 405)

Added to this was the gradual dissipation of the 'Irishness' in the Catholic Church with the increasing presence, in parishes and associated primary and secondary schools, of migrant Catholics whose faith origins lay in other cultures and places.

The teaching sisters, brothers and priests in Catholic schools were replaced by an increasing number of lay teachers, a movement from a voluntary staff to a paid staff. These lay teachers had to be paid and new pressures came to bear on school finances. Consideration had to be given to salaries and working conditions, as well as finding teachers prepared to work in a Catholic school with a different ethos to that of government schools. However, there was another change that came about as a result of this movement from a religious staff to a lay staff. The ethos of the Catholic school had been predominantly formed by teaching religious, priests, brothers and sister, who also brought with them the special charism of their orders. As they left the Catholic schools so too was there a slow dissipation of this special ethos which they had brought with them. Such an ethos could not always be assumed with a now predominant lay staff.

In summary, the eventual disappearance of the pillar of the Catholic school system in teaching members of religious orders, brothers, sisters and priests, along with the combined effects of the Second Vatican Council with its emphasis on 'aggiornamento' or 'adjusting to the present', and the changing demographic of the Catholic Church had irrevocably changed the face of Catholic schools in Australia. The Church's response to these changes and their impact is to be found in the various official statements emanating from the Papacy itself, Vatican bodies, Bishops' committees and local Catholic Education Offices, and these documents form part of the review of literature to follow in Chapter two. However, there were

two more developments which changed how Catholic secondary schools were to grow, and this was the growth of regional secondary colleges and the development of the Catholic Education Office.

*Parishes and the growth of regional secondary colleges:*

*A brief historical perspective*

The growth of regional secondary colleges in the Melbourne (Victoria) archdiocese has been described as ‘one of the most exciting and dramatic changes in the post-World War II period in Catholic education’ (Rogan, 2006, p. 2). In his brief history of regional secondary colleges Rogan argued that their growth and development was primarily given its impetus by parishes. Parish priests, seeing the need to provide a Catholic education for their growing communities, ‘heroically undertook growing debts on behalf of their parishes to ensure that Catholic children had Catholic schools to attend if they wished’ (p. 5). This was particularly noteworthy in that in the 1960’s Commonwealth Government funding was limited to science rooms and libraries. In addition, there was a decreasing capacity of the religious congregations to continue to staff schools, with the consequence that more lay staff had to be employed, thus raising the recurrent costs of running a school. A further important aspect of the development of regional secondary schools was that they had their origins in the perceived needs of the local Church to provide Catholic education for its growing community, bolstered by the massive migration program sponsored after the Second World War by successive federal governments. The initial growth of Catholic regional secondary schools, therefore, was owed to what was then a massive commitment by the parishes.

However, in time this was to prove difficult as ‘it was soon clear that the priests had already committed their parishes to financial burdens which they were not able or prepared to extend’ (p. 6). In many instances this led to anomalies where the religious congregations were financing regional schools owned by the parish on whose land they were built. ‘The parishes served by the college were not able to assume financial responsibility for it’ (p. 6).

Structurally, at least in a financial sense, secondary schools had been tied to the parish. Today parishes contribute very little if any financial support to the regional school as the funding which sustains them is allocated by the Catholic Education Commission Victoria (CECV) which in turn receives its funds from state and federal governments.

Regional secondary colleges today have taken a new direction in the growth of Preparatory to Year Twelve schools. In other words, there is now a trend towards the inclusion of the primary years of schooling within a larger structure that also incorporates the secondary years. This part of the history of Catholic education is being written now as more of these large schools are progressively being built in the major growth corridors in and around Melbourne. One of the sites researched for this thesis was a Preparatory to Year 12 school.

### *The Rise of Catholic Education Offices*

O’Brien (1999) briefly traced the rise of the Catholic Education Office in Victoria. It is not possible to detail the whole story in this thesis, but it is important to highlight it as a background to this research. Though the first effort at creating a Catholic education authority, the Catholic Education Advisory Council, was a failure (O’Brien, 1999), it was later replaced by other bodies which have evolved to become the Catholic Education Office Melbourne. It is significant that the need for such a body came about as a result of the growth of Catholic

schools and also at a time when government funding was beginning to take effect in Catholic schools, and it also had some central staffing. With its increasing reliance on government funding, Catholic education was on the way to becoming a part of “public” education in Australia. Whilst this may have been regarded as not only necessary but also just, it also signalled a lessening reliance on the parish for support, perhaps the beginning of a critical fracture between parish and school, and the family. Today, parishes contribute little or nothing to Catholic schools by way of financial support.

#### *Conclusion to this section*

Catholic schools have grown through periods of massive social change and upheaval over more than one hundred and thirty years. The conditions which shaped the foundations of the early Catholic education system have now clearly changed. Catholic schools now operate in a new social and cultural context. The choices made by parents and school staff alike are quite different from those of their forebears. The question as to what constitutes an authentic Catholic school in a changed society is a rather complex question, not least because one has to find measures of how successful schools have been in educating in faith and promoting the Church’s educational mission. If one looks at Church attendance figures, there is a temptation to argue that perhaps Catholic schools have not been very successful. However, to say this would be glib as it fails to show an appreciation of the added pressures on schools to comply in so many ways with the demands of the funding authorities upon which they rely for their continued existence. A clear example of such a requirement is the recently developed School Improvement Framework (SIF). In addition, the staff, students and parents of Catholic

schools are also part of the larger social and cultural context, and are themselves subject to differing pressures on their time as well as on their beliefs and practices.

The story of Catholic education is quite unique. So too is its continuing growth and development. This rich heritage forms an important background to any contemporary research on Catholic schools. The research for this thesis must respect this history. The researcher must also bear this in mind when studying the three schools which were the focus of this research, and must recognise the complex processes, traditions and customs that have shaped, and continue to shape, each school's identity.

### The Research Questions

Chapter one thus far has provided a background to and an explanation of the research problem. However, it is also necessary to give shape to the research problem by developing clear research questions. The research reported in this thesis, including the methodology chosen, the findings, conclusions and recommendations, was shaped by the following research questions.

1. How do some Victorian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?
2. What impact, if any, have these changed circumstances had on the way these schools arrange their work structures?
3. What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general?
4. Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?

The first research question will be answered by gathering research data from three school sites. The second research question will seek to identify how the three schools have shaped their work structures. By work structures is meant the kinds of roles that have been identified by the school authorities that will enable them to administer their school effectively. Of specific interest to the research in this thesis is how each school has gone beyond the teaching of RE as a way of responding to the faith needs of their community. The third research question seeks to open up the area of the ways in which contemporary Catholic schools respond to the various pressures they face in their participation in the Church's educational mission. Finally, the fourth research question seeks to address the complex understanding of what might constitute an authentic Catholic school, and how achievable authenticity might be in the current situations schools face.

It is hoped that in seeking to answer each of these questions some knowledge can be gained in regard to what shape contemporary Catholic schools need to take both now and into the future. Catholic schools do not stand alone in what they each strive to achieve. Each must be guided by the Church's educational mission interpreted in specific contexts, and led by staff with a personal commitment in faith. But these schools stand alongside the local Church, whose parishes are decreasing in numbers. The schools draw their population largely from the same geographical boundaries as parishes, yet there seems to be a perception that Catholic schools interact much more with the people within their boundaries than does the local Church. Interpretation of this reality is the task at the centre of this thesis.

The chapters that make up this thesis are as follows: Chapter two provides a review of literature whose main purpose is to present a critical synthesis of the literature that underpins the research problem described in chapter one. Chapter three explains and justifies the

research design adopted in the exploration of how Catholic schools respond to the call of the Church's educational mission in contemporary society. In Chapters four and five the data collected in the three schools is analysed according the constant comparative method of analysis. Chapter four does a vertical analysis of the themes which emerged within each school and across particular groupings, and Chapter five then does a horizontal comparison of these themes across the three schools to see what main themes emerged. Finally, Chapter six analyses the significance of the responses to each of the research questions and makes recommendations and suggestions for education and Church authorities in respect to how the challenges to the authenticity of the contemporary Catholic school may be met.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a critical synthesis of the literature that underpins the research problem that is investigated in this thesis. In particular, an attempt is made to answer four critical questions which also derive from the four research questions. Firstly, what issues in Australian society, culture and the Church today challenge original notions of the Catholic school; secondly, what new understandings of the Catholic school can be found in contemporary literature; thirdly, how do Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in contemporary Australia? A consideration of these three questions leads naturally to a fourth question, which asks what the implications of this are for the future of Catholic schools? The relation of these critical questions to the research questions is described in table 2.1 below.

*Table 2.1 Relationship of the Critical Questions of the Literature to the Research Questions*

Research Questions	Critical Questions
1. How do some Victorian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?	What issues in Australian society, culture and the Church today challenge original notions of the Catholic school.  How do Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in contemporary Australia
2. What impact, if any, have these changed circumstances had on the way these schools arrange their work structures?	What new understandings of the Catholic school can be found in contemporary literature?
3. What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general?	What are the implications of this for the future of Catholic schools?
4. Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?	What new understandings of the Catholic school can be found in contemporary literature?

A guiding assumption in this review is that the contemporary Catholic school is a far more complex reality than its forebear of fifty years ago. Its relationship to the local Church, its demographics and the perceptions of its stakeholders as to its purposes, can no longer be assumed. Any critical exploration of what makes contemporary Catholic schools authentic must respect this complexity, and so the literature must be viewed broadly. The themes presented in Figure 2.1 below are, therefore, not linear, but represent this complexity by showing their inter-relatedness.

The literature generally describes a mixed situation in contemporary Catholic schools. The espoused purposes of the Catholic school are not always what they seem to be in the eyes of the stakeholders, teachers, parents and students. Teachers' understanding of themselves as Catholics seems to challenge the core of what it has meant in previous times to be Catholic (McLaughlin, 2000a; O'Brien, 2005; Rosengren, 2005). The values as espoused by parents are not always generally expressed in terms that equate to the core values of a Catholic school (McLaughlin, 2005; REPR, 2006); and students themselves seem to leave Catholic schooling unclear as to their commitment as Catholics or, indeed, as active participants in their local Church (Gilchrist, 2000; McQuillan, 2006).

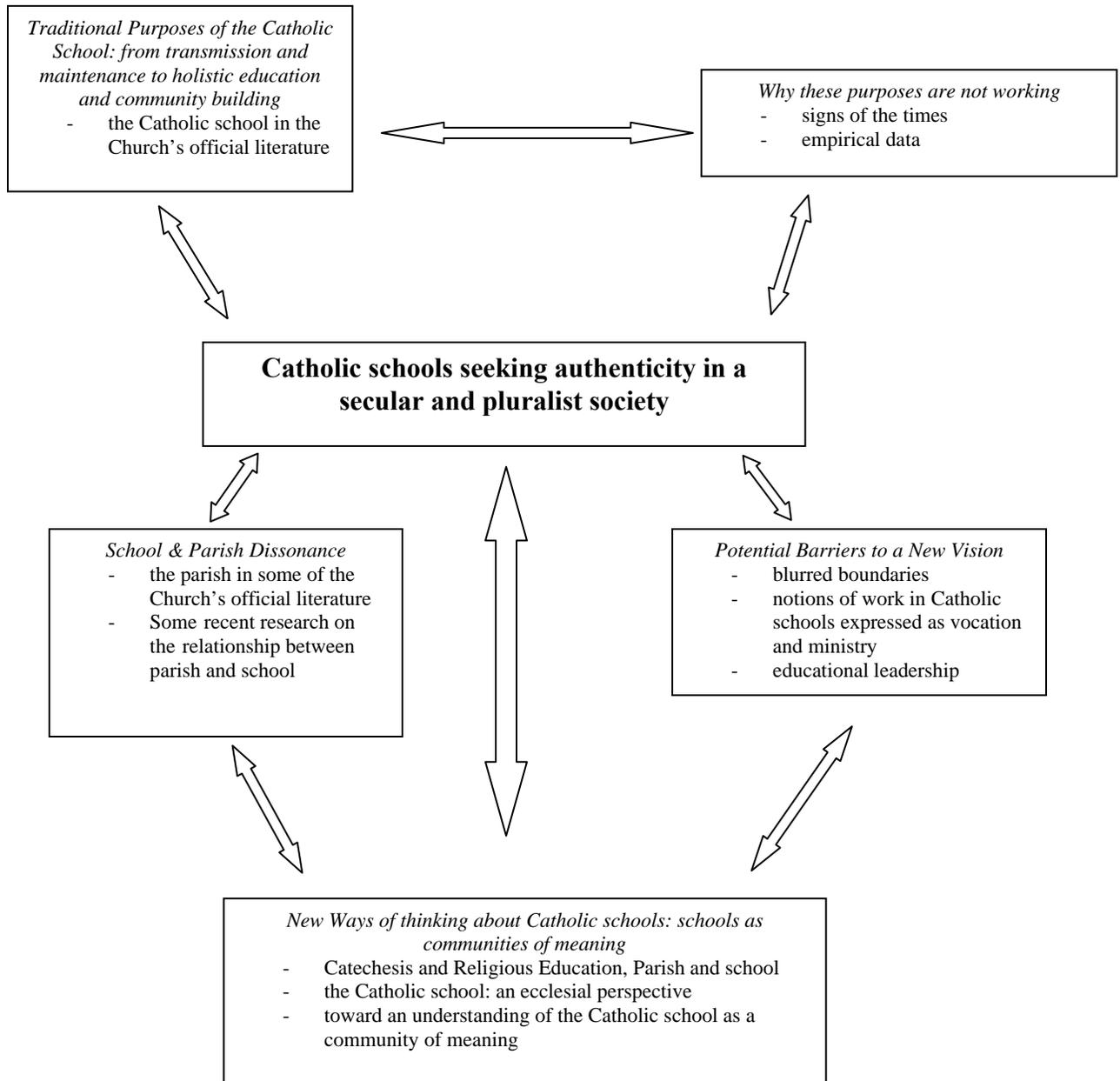
What then can be made of claims such as the Catholic school is part of the mission of the Church (Pascoe, 2005)? The reality of a pluralistic and secular society is now challenging the foundations, indeed, the authenticity, of the Catholic school (Mackay, 2001; Mellor, 2005; Ryan & McLaughlin, 2003). The purpose of this research, therefore, was to explore how contemporary Catholic schools respond authentically to this changed reality. The question as

to what constitutes an authentic Catholic school in contemporary society drives this literature review.

### The Conceptual Framework of the Review of Literature

The issues identified in the literature are complex, as is the task of describing what makes a Catholic school authentic. This is because the questions under investigation in this research could be addressed in a variety of ways in the empirical literature: through the work of Principals in Catholic schools (Cannon, 2004; Mellor, 2005); through the spirituality of young people (Maroney, 2006) and the spirituality of teachers in Catholic schools (Downey, 2006); through the relationship of local Church and school (Battams, 2002); or through the beliefs, values and practices of student teachers in Catholic schools (McLaughlin, 2000a). The Church's official literature on the purposes of the Catholic school dating as far back as 1929 also presents conceptual developments which require analysis.

A guide to the conceptual framework of the literature review is provided in Figure 2.1. The literature to be reviewed is presented in five areas: a) traditional purposes of the Catholic School: from transmission and maintenance to holistic education and community building; b) why these purposes are not working today; c) school and parish dissonance; d) new ways of thinking about Catholic schools: schools as communities of meaning; and e) potential barriers to a new vision.



*Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework for the Review of Literature*

The *traditional purposes* of Catholic schools have been expressed as the maintenance and transmission of the Catholic faith (McLaughlin, 2000c). However, newer expressions of these purposes have moved away from this concept to an acceptance that they are challenged

by contemporary realities (*Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE]*, 1998; McLaughlin, 1999).

The empirical literature, however, indicates that these are *not working*. This is sometimes expressed in terms of the involvement or non-involvement of ‘Church attenders’ (Dixon, 2002) in their local Church, but it is also expressed as the disillusionment of young people with the Church (Rosengren, 2005). In other words, the purpose of Catholic schools to build the faith of young people and/or consolidate the faith of its other stakeholders, parents and teachers, is simply not being achieved. A review of the literature here examines this complex reality. This brings about the need to re-examine the purposes of the contemporary Catholic school.

There also appears to be a *dissonance* between the Catholic school and its traditional sponsors, the parish or local Church (Harrington, 2006; McLaughlin, 2000b; Quillinan, 1997). If the official Church literature sees the Catholic school as integral to the Church’s mission, then how does one explain what appear to be poor or even non-existent relationships between local Church and school? Current research and literature suggests that the gap is widening. (Battams, 2002; Quillinan, 1997)

There is a suggestion in the literature, however, that there are *new ways of thinking about Catholic schools*, specifically the Catholic school as a community of meaning (Battams, 2002; Kaldor, 2002; Miller, 2005; Whelan, 2002). Further, it may be possible to explore the notions of work in Catholic schools as vocation and ministry (Fay, 2005; Graseck, 2005), especially as these concepts are reflected in the Church’s official literature (CCE, 1982 & 1998). The review of the literature here contends that the contemporary Catholic school *de facto* finds itself in a unique position to fulfil the Church’s call to mission. The authenticity of

the Catholic school is grounded in the nature and purpose of the Church itself. (Battams, 2006)

However, there are barriers which may stand in the way of the development of a *new vision* (Cannon, 2004; Harrington, 2006; Sinclair & Spry, 2005). Because the parish seems no longer to be the locus of faith expression, Catholic schools may have, unwittingly, become the substitute parish, an unintended consequence of striving to fulfil its mission. Consequently it may be necessary to reframe older understandings of vocation and ministry to better understand the notion of work in Catholic schools. This in turn will have an impact on the understanding of educational leadership as a guiding conception of work.

Together these themes provide an integrating dynamic for the development of the conceptual framework. The inter-relatedness of these themes is highlighted. Any attempt at a critical review of the vast literature which now exists, reflecting on the purposes and authenticity of the contemporary Catholic school must, therefore, respect the complexity of the current secular and pluralist context in which contemporary Catholic schools and the Church find themselves. Framing an understanding of the purposes of the contemporary Catholic school is a complex task, and in particular, the question of what is an authentic Catholic school as depicted in Figure 2.1 above. The literature suggests that the concept of ‘authenticity’, in the context of describing the contemporary Catholic school could be an elusive concept and complex notion, yet the success of Catholic schools in attracting increasing enrolments also suggests that there is much about them which many parents find attractive for their children.

Traditional Purposes of the Catholic School: from transmission and maintenance to holistic education and community building

*Introduction*

The brief history of the development of Catholic schools in Victoria offered in Chapter one is now complemented by an analysis of the official literature of the Church. The official literature includes various official statements emanating from the Papacy itself, Vatican bodies, Bishops' committees and local Catholic Education Offices (CEOs). A few documents have been chosen which highlight a number of shifts in understanding and emphasis which have occurred.

*The Catholic School in the Church's official literature*

What follows can only be a cursory treatment of the core notions regarding Catholic schools in the official literature. It can only provide a flavour of changes in perception and vision of the bodies which wrote them, to demonstrate the gradual change in focus and expression as it describes the purpose of the Catholic school.

The first papal encyclical on Catholic education was *Divini Illius Magistri* (DI) substantially authored by Pope Pius XI in 1929. In style and content, it is a world away from more contemporary documents. Kelty argued that the thinking of this encyclical was built on the theology of Thomas Aquinas, but it also presented a 'cautious view of the person; Augustinian pessimism is discernible with so much talk of sin, weakness, and a will flawed by desire' (Kelty, 2000, p. 27) The role of the Catholic school, as described in this document, was to provide an education consistent with 'man's last end' (par. 26):

since education consists in preparing man for what he must be and for what he must do here below, in order to attain the sublime goal for which he was created, it is clear that

there can be no true education which is not truly directed to man's last end...there can be no ideally perfect education which is not Christian education (par. 26, DI, 1929)

The purpose of Christian education was clearly defined as follows:

The proper and immediate aim of Christian education is to cooperate with divine grace informing the true and perfect Christian, that is to form Christ himself in those regenerated by Baptism (par. 300) ...the true Christian product of Christian education, is the supernatural man who thinks, judges, and acts consistently in accordance with right reason illumined by the supernatural light of the example and teaching of Christ (par. 301, DI, 1929)

This document was to also significantly influence the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Christian Education* [Gravissimum Educationis, GE] (McLaughlin, 2000c, p. 1), but the Council was to also prove a watershed in a movement away from the theological and philosophical influences of Thomas Aquinas, and here we note the first obvious shift in thinking away from transmission and maintenance as the purposes of the Catholic school. There is an orientation toward more holistic understandings of the human person in contrast with the dualism so prevalent in DI.

True education aims at the formation of the human person with respect to his ultimate goal, and simultaneously with respect to those societies of which, as a man, he is a member, and in whose responsibilities, as an adult, he will share. (GE in Abbott, 1966 p. 639 )

This same document also sounds the beginning of a theme which assumes prominence in subsequent documents, education in faith as a core purpose of the Catholic school:

that as the baptized person is gradually introduced into a knowledge of the mystery of salvation, he may daily grow more conscious of the gift of faith he has received. (Abbott, 1966, p. 641)

GE is a brief document which does not reflect the more powerful theology of the *Pastoral Constitution in the Modern World* (Gaudium et Spes, GS). Nonetheless, its preface explains that it is concerned with 'enunciating certain basic principles' which 'will have to be

developed at greater length by a special post-conciliar Commission and applied by episcopal conferences to varying local situations' (Abbott, 1966, p. 639). From this time on, there has been a steady progression of key documents on Catholic education.

*The Catholic School* [CS], developed by the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE), was written in 1977 as a direct response to the call of the Second Vatican Council which has been described above. It sets down the language and concepts which have typically come to characterize discussion of the purposes of the Catholic school. It continues the earlier and new emphasis on **holistic education**:

It must never be forgotten that the purpose of instruction at school is education, that is, the development of man from within, freeing him from that conditioning which would prevent him from becoming a, fully integrated human being. The school must begin from the principle that its educational programme is intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person. (CS, par. 29)

The word **community** appears twenty-five times in CS:

The school will allow young people to be formed by value judgments based on a specific view of the world and to be trained to take an active part in the construction of a community through which the building of society itself is promoted. (CS, par. 13)

It acknowledges the **cultural pluralism** of our world (par. 10-15) and notes that, amongst the demands that the contemporary Church must meet is 'a pressing need to ensure the presence of a Christian mentality in the society of the present day, marked, among other things, by cultural pluralism' (par. 11). This, 'therefore, leads the Church to reaffirm her mission of education to insure strong character formation' (par. 12). The **secular** nature of society also calls for the Church to be pro-active:

It also stimulates her to foster truly Christian living and apostolic communities, equipped to make their own positive contribution, in a spirit of cooperation, to the building up of the secular society. For this reason the Church is prompted to mobilise her educational resources in the face of the materialism, pragmatism and technocracy of contemporary society (par. 12)

According to CS, the Catholic school is also an ‘authentically formational school’, one in which ‘young people gradually learn to open themselves up to life as it is, and to create in themselves a definite attitude to life as it should be’ (par. 31) The distinctiveness and authenticity of the Catholic school ‘is the task of the whole educative community’, parents, teachers and hierarchical authority (par. 73) Finally, at the heart of a Catholic school is the building of community for the Kingdom of God:

It is a genuine community bent on imparting, over and above an academic education, all the help it can to its members to adopt a Christian way of life.....A policy of working for the common good is undertaken seriously as working for the building up of the Kingdom of God. (par. 60)

This notion of the Catholic school as community was strongly emphasised in another document which appeared in 1988, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (LCSWTF)

Everything that the Catholic educator does in a school takes place within the structure of an educational community.....(it) is one of the most enriching developments for the contemporary school.....Every human person is called to live in a community, as a social being, and as a member of the People of God (LCSWTF, par 22)

It was also emphasised by the writers of *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, (RDECS) also written in 1988 (CCE, 1988). The Declaration on Education of the Second Vatican Council changed the way schools were thought of: “the transition from the school as institution to the school as community” (RDECS, par 31).

Ten years later the document, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of The Third Millennium* (1998) (CSTTM) seemed to embed this notion of the communitarian purposes of the Catholic school in the Church literature on Catholic education by deploring the “extreme pluralism pervading contemporary society (which) at times are so opposed to one another as to undermine any idea of community identity” (CSTTM, par 1). Indeed, the word

‘community’ appears seventeen times in the document and the expression ‘educating community’ appears eight times. The educating community is the context for the educational project of the synthesis between culture and faith (par. 14). It is not ‘merely a sociological category; it has a theological foundation as well’ (par. 18).

The document concluded by saying that “the work of the school is irreplaceable” (CSTTM, par 21). It goes on to echo the Second Vatican Council when it quotes directly from GE:

Since the Catholic school can be of such service in developing the mission of the People of God and in promoting the dialogue between the Church and the community at large to the advantage of both, it is still of vital importance in our times. (CSTTM, par. 21).

The truth of this preceding statement is clearly expressed in the following figures which described Catholic education in Victoria in 2006: 180,000 students attended 92 Catholic secondary schools, 387 Catholic primary schools as well 7 special schools; 13,500 teachers employed and supported by the Catholic Education Offices of the four dioceses of Melbourne, Ballarat, Sandhurst and Sale. (Pascoe, 2006b, p. 22).

#### *Conclusion to this section*

The purpose of this section was to briefly describe the shift and movement in the description of the purposes of the Catholic school in recent times. There is a clear movement from the dualistic notions of the earlier document, DI (1929), to the more holistic concepts of the human person and community to be found in CSTTM (1998). These conceptual shifts seem to have become the necessary outcome of a contemporary Church in search of meaning, a meaning which had to find expression in its many schools. It was necessary to analyse these documents in order to set the context for an examination of these purposes as they are applied

in the contemporary Catholic school. This argument informs the first of the critical questions for this review of literature which centres on what issues in Australian society, culture and the Church today challenge original notions of the Catholic school. An understanding of the traditional purposes of the Catholic school as expressed in its history and in the Church's official literature provides the necessary background for an exploration of those issues in contemporary Australian culture and society which have an impact on Catholic school identity.

Why these purposes are not working in the contemporary Catholic school

### *Introduction*

It was observed earlier in this chapter that the Church has gradually changed the way it perceives the role of Catholic schools in its broader mission. There was also a recognition that schools themselves had to be more responsive in a changed and more complex social reality. In particular, the first few paragraphs of CSTTM (1998) summarise current social conditions which work against the Catholic school. There was a pervasive 'crisis of values' expressed in subjectivism, moral relativism and nihilism. Further, 'in countries of long-standing evangelization', rapid structural change and globalization of the economy have had an impact with the result that the Christian faith as a reference point struggles to be a 'convincing interpretation of existence' (par. 1). The aim of this section of the literature review is, therefore, twofold: a) to explore what issues in contemporary Australian society, culture and the Church challenge traditional and new notions of the purposes of the Catholic school; and b) to examine the empirical data which describe the consumers of Catholic Education: teachers, parents and students.

*Signs of the times: Australian society and culture*

To understand the contemporary Catholic school it is necessary to also have an understanding of the social context in which it exists. Psychologist, social researcher and writer, Hugh Mackay, provided a fascinating social analysis of Australia (Mackay, 2001). Australia is beset by change on a massive scale typified by a rising rate of youth suicide, rising use of antidepressants and the lowest birth and marriage rates in 100 years. There were also concerning figures with regard to marriage and divorce. Forty percent of marriages ended in divorce with the result that the concept of marriage had changed from being seen as an institution to being seen as a relationship. This meant that it was more subject to regular assessment and, at the same time, also more transient. Not surprisingly, this had resulted in the rising number of single person households. 'Underlying these statistics are a series of contradictions' (p. 2), the first of these being record levels of wealth for some yet a steady increase in the levels of poverty and homelessness e.g. 30 percent of households had income of less than \$20,000. The full-time workforce was working longer hours absorbing 500,000 extra full-time jobs yet almost two million were unemployed or under employed, while youth unemployment had crept back to 25 percent. Finally, there was optimism about the future yet also pessimism about the state of contemporary society. Confidence had surged but there was also a deep insecurity. However, there was this feeling of insecurity because Australia 'has been living through four socio-cultural revolutions at once' (pp. 2-3): a gender revolution, an information revolution, a cultural identity revolution and an economic revolution.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There were other significant indicators of change: Australia had 7.25 million households of which 70% contained no children under the age of 15; 25% of these had only one person living in them. The major change in household patterns was a couple with no children, an expected 42% by 2021 if the current trend continued. 69% of married couples cohabitated before they married. The divorce rate of first marriages was 34.2%. (Leonard, 2006)

Mackay discerned that in the late 1990's Australia was going through a 'trough of disappointment' typified by a widespread sense of job insecurity, growing sense of division between rich and poor, disappointment in leadership, and the values gap, that is the gap between the values we espouse and the way we lead our lives. This had eventually given way, in the early twenty-first century, to a sense of disengagement marked by lack of interest in a large national agenda including globalization, immigration, youth unemployment and the like.

The result was that Australia may have reached a turning point, and a good deal of re-thinking was occurring. Australians were looking to close the values gap and this would be led by women because of their increasing levels of authority and influence across business and the professions. However, coupled with this, there was also an increasing sense of a need to regulate our lives often displayed as religious, social and cultural fundamentalism – 'the more we regulate, the less we leave to the moral choices of individuals' (p. 5). However, Australians were also looking for a new framework for making sense of life in an uncertain world. Driven by young Australians this new framework was spiritual. Mackay concluded as follows:

No matter how much Australians might grumble and groan about aspects of contemporary life, they continue to believe that this is 'the best country in the world', that 'you wouldn't want to raise your kids anywhere else' and that in everything from crime and violence to environmental pollution, most other places are worse off than we are. (p. 6)

Significantly, the spectre of global terrorism was not mentioned in Mackay's work because it was written prior to the twin towers catastrophe in New York in September of 2001 as well as the consequent war on terror in Afghanistan and the Iraq conflict where Australians have had significant involvement. Now, one can add the Bali blasts of 2003 where a number of Australians were killed. All of these events may have also added to a general feeling of

uncertainty and even fear, and these have had an impact on the moods and feelings of school communities.<sup>2</sup>

*The empirical data: students, parents and teachers*

The Australian Catholic Church of the 1950's and 1960's has passed, (Campion, 1982, 1987), and this is represented in the ample research data now available (Dixon, 2002). What follows is an attempt to describe the contemporary stakeholders of the Catholic school, and their beliefs and values. A description of these will set the scene for a deeper analysis of the notion of authenticity as this relates to the purposes of the contemporary Catholic school.

The findings from recent research on Generation Y, those born between 1976 – 1990<sup>3</sup>, (Singleton, Mason, & Webber, 2004, 2006) are presented in Table 2.2 below.

*Table 2.2 The Spirit of Generation Y: beliefs (CathNews, 2006)*

<b><i>The Spirit of Generation Y</i></b> project (2003-2006)		
<b>Belief</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Believe in God	48	
Do not believe in God	20	Two-thirds of those in both these groups do believe in 'higher being or life force'.
Unsure	32	
<b>Spirituality</b>		
Christian	44	19% are actively involved in a Church to the extent of attending religious services once a month or more. Religion is seen as a private matter, and there is a strong tide of movement away from previous involvement or identification with a Church, and even from religious belief.
Eclectic	17	Believing in two or more New Age, esoteric or Eastern beliefs (including belief in reincarnation, psychics and fortune tellers, ghosts, astrology) and perhaps engaging in one or more alternative spiritual practices (yoga, Tarot, tai-chi). Some of these people attend religious services but most do not. Such beliefs and practices are more common

<sup>2</sup> I can recall an urgently convened senior leadership meeting at my current school the morning after the twin towers tragedy to discuss how we would respond to this event in the school community.

<sup>3</sup> Baby Boomers are classified as those born 1946 – 1960, and Generation X as those born 1961 – 1975.

		among young women than young men
Humanist	31	Rejecting the idea of God, although a few believe in a 'higher being'. Of these secular-minded young people, almost half believe that there is very little truth in religion, and less than a quarter believe in life after death. They also largely reject alternative spiritualities
<b>Social Concern</b>		
		Not notably more self centred and lacking in altruism than older generations. For example, 27% are involved in some kind of volunteer work per month. Those who are actively involved in service to the community and have positive civic values are far more likely to come from the ranks of those who have spiritual and religious beliefs and actively practise them.
<b>Influences</b>		The significant social forces shaping contemporary religion and spirituality – secularisation, the relativism of post-modernity, consumer capitalism, individualism

Disenchantment with organised religion has not meant disinterest in matters spiritual, and this is reinforced by the work of others (McQuillan, 2006; Tacey, 2003) The extent of humanist belief is also significant: 'Some are angry at or disenchanted with organised religion, but most simply do not care or are not interested' (p. 1 Singleton, Mason, & Webber, 2006). This is not unique as their parents, the Baby Boomers, were 23% humanist and only 24% nominally Christian (p. 1 Singleton, Mason, & Webber, 2006).

There are implications of this research for Catholic schools. Those born between 1989 and 1990 have been in Years 11 & 12 in 2006 and 2007, whilst those who were born between 1980 and 1983 had completed tertiary education and may be finding their way back into the Catholic education system as teachers. In other words, this reality poses challenges to the nature of RE teaching at the senior levels, as well as the preparation of teachers to teach in

Catholic school settings. Here important questions need to be asked. What impact do these attitudes and beliefs have on the integrity of RE programs? How do Catholic schools address their response to the Church's call to mission when their teachers may not share the beliefs and values which shape the purposes of the school? However, there is more empirical research which needs to be examined to provide a more complete picture of the contemporary situation.

The research of Saker in 2005 (O'Brien, 2005; Rosengren, 2005) and McLaughlin (McLaughlin, 2000a) examined the beliefs and practices of student teachers in the Catholic education system. McLaughlin's earlier research data mirrored many of Saker's results, and is not detailed here. He differed from Saker, however, in his analysis of the significance of this data and his conclusions are considered later in this section. Saker surveyed 133 university students, all of them graduates of the Catholic school system and studying units to enable them to teach in Catholic schools in Western Australia. Some results of this survey are presented in Table 2.3 below.

*Table 2.3 Catholic Student Teachers in Western Australia: survey results*

<b><i>Catholic Student Teachers in Western Australia – research by Luker Saker, Edith Cowan University, WA</i></b>		
Category	%	Comments
Sunday Mass attendance	12.8	These figures are very much in line with those of the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) of 2001. Mass attendance among those in the 25-29 age group stood then at just 5.6%, for those in the 30-34 group it was 7.5% and for those aged 35-39 it was 12.1%.
did not agree that missing Mass on Sunday was sinful, nor did they agree with the Church's teaching on Sunday Mass	62.4	
Rarely participated in the Sacrament of Reconciliation	82	This was described by Saker as the 'forgotten sacrament'
<b><i>Attitudes to Church's moral teaching</i></b>		
Catholic Church's teaching on marriage and divorce was not "relevant to today's world."	47.2	The Bachelor of Education students had all completed at least their final two years of secondary education in a Catholic school.

Disagreement that the use of contraception was sinful and that every sexual act must be open to procreation.	77.4	Most had spent their entire education until university level in the Catholic system and were currently in their first or second year of teaching studies at Edith Cowan University when surveyed, with a view to teaching in Catholic schools when they graduated.
Agreement with the Church's teaching on when life begins and that the abortion of an unborn child is murder, but believed that a woman should be able to kill her child if the child is conceived by rape	69.9	
Did not accept that sexual intercourse outside marriage was sinful	59.4	
Did not accept that homosexual acts were sinful.	66.2	
The majority of students agreed that the Pope has the power to make statements on behalf of the Church, but disagreed that when the Pope makes ex-cathedra statements he speaks infallibly.	67.7	
<b><i>Relevance of Religious Education classes</i></b>		
Strongly agreed or agreed that their RE classes aroused interest among senior students	52	Saker also found that students do not feel hostile to their experience of religious education and many feel that it enabled them to grow. They also report their experience of Catholic education as generally positive.
Did not see their classes as a waste of time.	58.6	
Strongly agreed they would attend if their RE classes were voluntary	35	Saker estimated that 90% of students emerging from the Catholic schools system in Western Australia are not practising their faith.
Strongly agreed or agreed that they gained a lot from their classes	52.7	
Strongly agreed or agreed that the classes were taken seriously by senior students	12.1	

These figures directly challenge whether Catholic schools do continue to fulfil their traditional purposes. Saker said that:

The majority of student teachers have lost, or never had, a living sense of the faith. They no longer consider themselves members of the Church and they live a life far removed from Christ and the Gospel. The difficulty begs the question: can teachers go into a religious education classroom with knowledge of Catholic doctrine/dogma but not believe it themselves? (Cited from his thesis in Rosengren, 2005)

Saker's findings lead him to two interesting conclusions: firstly, 'that the days are gone when we can rely on the parents and the parish to provide Catholic education because they are just not going'; and secondly, that there is a need in schools 'to combine catechesis and religious knowledge into a solid religious education program.....knowing Catholic doctrine and dogma is not going to change their opinions, but at least they will know why and what they are rejecting', (pp. 3 & 7, O'Brien, 2005). This simple dismissal of 'parents and parish' seems to fly in the face of what were regarded as the very foundation of Catholic schools in the first place (see the section on the history of the Catholic school in Chapter one), and is facilely replaced with a 'solid religious education program'. Without wanting to dismiss the importance of RE in the Catholic school curriculum, a Catholic school has to be more than just the RE program it offers, something that Saker did not adequately address in his work. He came close when he said that 'students were answering *yes we have faith* but they didn't know how to express it.....95% regarded themselves as spiritual people' but this 'is to confuse faith with spirituality'. (O'Brien, 2005, p. 3). It is difficult to see how reliance on an RE program alone will assist young people find an expression for their faith/spirituality, incipient as it may be.

However, the data Saker presented was not unlike that of other researchers such as McQuillan (2006) and McLaughlin (2000a, 2000b, 2000c). In this research there is a

suggestion that one needs to go a lot further in dealing with this issue: how do we deal with the reality that while the level of experiential spirituality among young people is remarkably high, Church allegiance is remarkably low? The notion of young people having a faith seeking expression was explored in the research of Paul McQuillan (McQuillan, 2006). Research in Australia and the UK indicated that despite significant disaffection with the Church there was a high level of spirituality. Less than 25% of Australians now claimed to attend Church at all and only 13% would actually attend in any given week (p. 2). However, unlike Saker, McQuillan explored this phenomenon in more depth. 'There are a number of difficulties that must be overcome before young people...will find an expression for their spirituality in the traditional Christian Churches' (p. 4) He suggested that the reason why the institutional Church as an expression of spiritual search and experience was a problem for many was because there are three 'modern divorces' (McQuillan calls them 'conversations of conflict') which add to the confusion: a) the divorce of spirituality from the whole experience of Church (ecclesiology); b) a conflict between the approach of the religions towards sexual morality and young peoples' experience of sexuality and relationships; and c) the divorce between the experience of the spiritual and the language with which it is expressed (pp. 6 – 7). The first conflict that of ecclesiology, will not be resolved until the other two conflicts have developed towards consensus. He finds it incongruous that the spirituality so evident in young people in the research 'has no coherent language for expression'. (p. 18)

McQuillan's research in two Australian schools (one Catholic and one independent) can be summarised as follows: awareness of religious experience – 76% and 88%; influence of RE on their feelings of life – 27.1% and 23.1%; Church attendance – 13.1% and 5.3%. In conclusion, he found that:

The majority of the respondents believe in God, although there is hardly consensus on this point. The vast majority see that religion and faith are very personal and that you do not need to be actively involved, nor does it matter what you believe in order to lead a good life. This attitude is reflected in their approach to belonging to a particular Church. The majority believe that they can express their spirituality without belonging to a religious organisation. (p. 14)

However, McQuillan also cautioned that it was easy to outline a spirituality of the post-modern world and be critical of the institutional Church, but what was more important was to find a way forward. The Church as a human institution is imperfect: ‘we are challenged to engage in this imperfect community.....the question.... is whether the Church is actually able to theologise itself as an imperfect community’ (p. 15).

Saker recommended a revamp of religious education in Catholic schools and McQuillan went further, putting out the challenge that we need to rethink much of our formal theology ‘in a way that can once again direct and touch people’s lives and provide them with an expression for the reality of their spiritual experience’ (p. 18). McQuillan’s conclusions were later confirmed by McLaughlin’s research (McLaughlin, 2000a). Student teachers believed that ‘they were cultivating a spiritual dimension in their lives not dependant on the institutional Catholic Church’. Young Australian Catholics were becoming ‘communal Catholics’ in the sense that they were seeking ‘new religious forms which provided personalized experiences of community’; the fact that they had little contact with clergy suggested that ‘the parish has a negligible influence on the lives of young Catholics’ (McQuillan, pp. 24 and 25).

Marcellin Flynn’s research (Flynn, 1993) had established that parental expectations in the area of religious development had already declined. Subsequently the reality has become somewhat more complex (McLaughlin, 2005). Drawing on the results of the National Church

Life Survey (NCLS) of 1996 and 2001 and the research of others, McLaughlin concluded that ‘the vast majority of parents who are sending their children to Catholic schools either do not practise Catholicism or are not Catholics’ (p. 218) Other research also indicated that ‘quality of teaching, care of children and school discipline were the main reasons why they sent their children to Catholic schools. Catholicism as a religion was number 14 on their list’. He expressed the problem as follows:

The dilemma is, if fees are increased to provide more resources in Catholic schools, an increased proportion of Catholics leave the system. If fees are not increased, more wealthy children leave Catholic schools and their places are taken by middle class non-Catholics. The dilemma is more than a financial one, it is about authenticity. The failure to explore this may well foster the dialectic of maintaining Catholic schools and systems operating as ends in themselves, ‘for the good of the college’, rather than as a means to serve....Instead of being counter-cultural, alternative or creative, the Catholic school system replicates the status quo and clones the government school system and then says it is somehow more different.....those who are responsible for Catholic education have to consider if parents are the final arbiters of authenticity. (pp. 219-221)

The challenge facing Catholic schools is, therefore, more demanding than a mere reliance on changing the RE curriculum as Saker suggested. This is important, but must form part of a larger enterprise, as McQuillan suggested. The Catholic school is right at the interface of faith and spirituality seeking expression in a complex contemporary social and ecclesial context. The suggestion here is that the purposes of the Catholic school need to be restated in ways which both honour this reality and find authenticity in its mission. Treston suggested that the fundamental question about the Catholic identity of the school ‘emanates from different perceptions about how Christians understand the mission of Jesus’ (Treston 2009, p. 4). He suggested that there was a distinction between a ‘reign of God’ theology which underpins the Catholic identity of the school and that of ‘theology of mission’. With the former ‘the role of a Catholic school in its evangelizing mission places more emphasis on a positive school culture

impregnated with gospel values rather than specific education in Catholic religious knowledge and sacraments' (Treston 2009, p. 4) whereas the latter 'gives more focus to education in a Catholic tradition of sacraments, doctrine, spirituality and knowledge of Catholic teachings', (Treston 2009, p. 4).

Undoubtedly, religious knowledge amongst students is poor and while Treston's comments refer to the evangelising nature of the school, the school is more than this. It also has a duty to educate Catholic students in their own faith. In other words, the two tasks are not really in opposition to each other as Treston would suggest, there is no dichotomy, and neither is it necessary to polarise the two tasks when both are what is required in a Catholic school. Putting forward such dichotomies is not helpful when it comes to the question of the purposes of the Catholic school

#### *Conclusion to this section*

The contemporary Catholic school exists in the context of a changing Church and even more complex society where the purposes of the Catholic are challenged. This description also informs the first critical question in that an examination of contemporary Australia reveals a challenge to the Church's self-understanding and by implication, the purposes and authenticity of the contemporary Catholic school. This challenge has found expression in the varying beliefs and practices of generation Y and student teachers.

#### School and Parish dissonance

##### *Introduction*

Dixon's research (Dixon, 2002) has already indicated an extensive decline in Church attendance, and the research on belief and practices amongst high school students and student

teachers (McLaughlin, 2000a; O'Brien, 2005; McQuillan, 2006) has also indicated a decline in personal adherence. This reality raises the question of the relevance of the parish or the local Church in the faith life of those who form the Catholic school community. Historically, what had been the cornerstone of a unique system of Catholic education may, indeed, have fallen on hard times. Connection with the parish is not necessarily a pre-requisite for entry to a Catholic school. The purpose of this section of the literature review is to explore the nature of the relationship between the contemporary Catholic school and parish.

*The parish in some of the Church's official literature*

'Parish' or even the term 'local Church' does not appear in CSTTM (1998) at all. However, these terms rate more than a mention in RDECS (1988).

The physical proximity of the school to a Church can contribute a great deal toward achieving the educational aims. A Church should not be seen as something extraneous, but as a familiar and intimate place where those young people who are believers can find the presence of the Lord: "Behold, I am with you all days". Liturgy planning should be especially careful to bring the school community and the local Church together (par. 30)

Added to this, the following statements all speak of an expectation of a more intimate linkage between school and local Church: 'Catholic students are helped to become active members of the parish and diocesan communities' (par. 44); 'the aim of catechesis, or handing on the Gospel message, is maturity: spiritual, liturgical, sacramental and apostolic; this happens most especially in a local Church community' (par. 69); 'religious instruction in the school needs to be coordinated with the catechesis offered in parishes' (par. 70). The school 'is a part of the particular local Church ..... and shares in the life and work of the local Christian community' (par. 101). Further, amongst the 'conditions which threaten the health of the school climate' are that 'the school is isolated from the local Church' (par. 104). It is this last

statement that equates more nearly to the current reality. The separation which has occurred, however, is more complex and needs further examination.

These statements provide a contrast to the data already presented in previous sections. The problem is not that these purposes are not valid: it is just that they are simply not being fulfilled. McLaughlin's research indicated that that between 18 and 19 per cent of Catholics participated in the sacramental life of the Church as represented by the parish system (McLaughlin, 2000b, p. 86), and more recent research does not prove much different (Dixon, 2002). If this is the case, then there is little guarantee that catechesis can be occurring in the local Church community. Further, how can 'religious instruction in the school' be 'coordinated with the catechesis offered in parishes'? (see par. 69 & 70 above). Quite aside from the general question of the relevance of the parish, is the particular question of the nature of the Catholic school, and specifically, its religious education program. This is where questions as to what Catholic schools should be doing in relationship to faith development must and should be asked: pre-evangelization, evangelization, catechesis and religious education, are all terms used extensively in the official literature of the Church, and even in more recent local documents (CEOM, 2006, Report of the Enrolment Policy Review, pp. 2 & 3, [REPR]).

With increased mobility the choices families make about school, place of worship, employment and leisure are not as tightly interwoven with place of residence as they once were. The Catholic community, too, has experienced significant shifts in culture.....fewer people active in parish life, and fewer priests and religious. Fewer young people identify themselves as Catholics, while many of those who do, express this identity in less traditional and more varied ways. The task of education in faith may be a task of catechesis, or pre-catechesis or evangelization. Where places are available, Catholic schools welcome other families seeking what Catholic education offers their children, and recognize the rich contribution such families can make to the life of the school. (REPR, 2006, p. 3)

REPR recognised the complexities confronting many Catholic families and young people today in seeking to find an expression for their faith. Consideration was also given to ‘other families’ whose involvement could also enrich the Catholic school. The historical nexus of school and parish may, indeed, appear to be broken, but not for any other reason than the changed society and culture in which Catholics find themselves. REPR allowed for the possibility that enrolment in a Catholic school may still be desirable even though direct involvement in the Church may not be present: ‘...the degree of involvement of parents in the life of the Church, while important, should not be a sole criterion for decision-making in the enrolment of Catholic students in a Catholic school’ (REPR p. 4)

The possible natural connections which may have existed between parish and school in the foundational period of Catholic education in the late nineteenth century, and consolidated in the first half of the twentieth century, have since given way to a changed social structure and cultural shift, both within society and now the Church itself. This reality adds complexity to the issue of what constitutes an authentic Catholic school. This gives rise to the question as to whether the Catholic school is now finding itself in a new paradigm, a key question to be further explored in this literature review.

#### *Some recent research on the relationship of Parish and School*

Two empirical studies which examined the relationship of parish and school are examined in this section, those of Quillinan (1997) and Battams (2002). These two have been chosen because they both addressed this issue in an Australian context – Quillinan studied the situation of Cairns in Northern Queensland while Battams examined the situation in Adelaide, South Australia. No doubt, there may be other empirical studies, but what is significant about these is that both lie outside the experience of this author. He grew up and was educated

Catholic in Sydney but has taught in Catholic schools for thirty years in Melbourne. Even though this empirical study researched schools in the Melbourne archdiocese, an examination of this other research helps to ground this study in the broader Australian context.

Quillinan examined the relationship of school and parish in the context of Sunday worship, and his figures reflected those of the literature already examined thus far in this review of literature. It was the view of the primary and secondary school administrative teams that parents who chose to send their children to Catholic schools themselves did not practise regularly – 15% in the primary sector and 10% in the secondary. When it came to participation in school based liturgy, 24% of primary school parents participated whilst only 7% of secondary parents attended. Combined, of those who participated in school based liturgy, it was estimated that 16% also attended Sunday liturgy, and this corresponded with the other responses which indicated that 80% did not regularly practise. He went on to argue that these findings reflected the scholarly literature on this issue (pp. 45 – 47)

In terms of ‘experience of Church’, the primary schools survey responses indicated that the parish involvement seemed restricted to major occasions such as first Eucharist, Reconciliation and Confirmation. ‘The Church did not appear to provide meaningful experiences to children as was provided by primary schools’ (p. 53). The situation was not much better in the secondary schools:

For most students the school was their parish. A number of secondary schools were regionally based and subsequently were not associated with a single parish; however, the school provided a microcosm of a typical parish through the spiritual experiences that were presented in the school environment. (p. 53)

Quillinan’s research, therefore, led to the following conclusions. First, that Catholic schools in the Diocese of Cairns provided the only experience of Church for most of their students and for a high percentage of their families. Parish and school seemed to be operating

independently of each other, with limited attempts to link the faith communities of school and Church to the detriment of the building of one harmonious Church community. Second, less than 20% attended Church but families did attend the many services offered by the school. As a consequence, the lack of dialogue between the leaders of school and parish led to confusion about a shared understanding of the purposes of the Catholic school. This was compounded by the changing expectations of parents choosing to enrol their children in Catholic schools. Third, Catholic schools appeared to be the only experience of Church for many students. Finally, there was a need to re-examine current ecclesiology so as to ‘nurture lay ministry’ and the responsibility to ‘evolve new ministerial roles...based on the People of God theology of the Second Vatican Council’ (p. 60).

The significance of Quillinan’s research for the current study is that it has drawn a connection between the experience of Church as expressed in the school and as distinct from the parish experience, or at least, the lack of it. Quillinan concluded, that this lack of connection contributed to a distortion of the Church’s mission which must be corrected. His suggestion for managing this was by promoting the notion of ‘teachers as pastoral ministers’ (p. 61). This represented a significant shift in an understanding of the work of teachers, associating teaching with the concept of ministry. Importantly, he did not set up an either/or situation. It is not a case of either the school or the parish being better able to meet the pastoral and faith needs of the community, but rather a case of both/and: the two need to work more closely together. Quillinan’s research highlighted a separation between parish and school which seemed to have progressively developed, but which was unimaginable in the early days of the development of the Catholic school system in the late nineteenth century. However, he neither examined what shape these ministries might take and nor explored what would bring

harmony between parish and school. Neither did he explore how a Catholic school needed to define its purposes even though his research pointed to confusion in leadership teams as to what these might now be in changed conditions.

Battams' research (Battams, 2002, 2006), on the other hand, took these and other questions further by grounding the discussion of the Catholic school's authenticity in the nature and purpose of the Church itself:

To be authentic, Catholic schools must be situated within the Church. Their nature and purpose are thus grounded in the nature and purpose of the Church. Understanding the nature and purpose of Catholic schools, therefore, is fundamentally an ecclesiological task. (Battams, 2006 p. 10).

Using the experience of Religious Education Coordinators (RECs) in the Adelaide

Archdiocese as the basis of his empirical research Battams concluded that:

The theological confession of Church and school as community (is) largely unrealized in and uninformed by the historical reality of the local Church and its schools.....the Adelaide Catholic Church and its secondary schools exist as a community in rhetoric only. (Battams, 2002 p. xiii)

He argued that the basis for this un-relatedness lay in an inherent dualism in notions of Church evident in the Vatican documents, LG and GS. This dualism was reflected in and actually shaped postconciliar educational letters. The Church appeared as a dualistic arrangement made up of two opposing ecclesiologies, the Church as gathering and the Church as gathered. In the former the Church was a community of believers, the people of God called through the Holy Spirit. It was a Church which sought dialogue with the world, and its hierarchy was underpinned by a collegial relationship.

In the Church of the gathered, there was a differentiation between the hierarchical priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful, the former being legitimated through the concept of apostolic succession. This Church saw itself as quite different to the world, and

hence its mission was that of ‘snatching people from the slavery of error and making them disciples of Christ’, (LG, 17 in Battams, 2006, p. 11). The laity ministered to the world outside the Church. This duality, Battams argued, was confusing and stifled genuine dialogue by positioning participants in one camp or the other. The consequence was ‘an impoverished notion of the Church and Catholic education.....schools would be left to question whether they belong to two Churches, or one Church with split personalities’ (Battams, 2006, p. 15). This last point is crucial. Beyond ‘increasing secularisation, and the accompanying decline in religious attitudes and values, and involvement in parish sacramental life’ it was becoming essential for the Church to look at its own self-understandings ‘and the means by which it formulates and communicates these both to its own membership and to the wider world’ (p. 16). McLaughlin called this dualism ‘the parallel Church’: one is the institutional Church characterised by organization, curia and magisterium, Battams’ “Church of the gathered”, and the other is the Church of the people of God with a focus on service, justice and compassion, Battams’ “Church as gathering”.

Battams’ research conclusion described an added complexity to the large questions being examined in this thesis. According to Battams, the question of the authenticity of the Catholic school itself needed to be embedded in the much larger question of the Church’s self-understanding. To the extent that this was unclear then so too was the Catholic school’s self-understanding. Battams succinctly described the consequent confusion as follows:

Schools currently strive to offer students a meaningful and relevant experience of the Church. Because the Church is perceived to be a distant and irrelevant fringe-dweller, however, this is an experience that will rarely if ever be extended on or nurtured in the parishes. Consequently, schools are beginning to become self-contained Churches. In many ways they are involved, albeit reluctantly, in developing an alternative identity, not only to the demands of the world but also the Church, at least as it currently exists as a historical reality. In trying to help participants engage with the Church, in other words, they are sometimes required to do this in spite of the Church. While this is not

their desired intention and they are in reality striving to build bridges to the wider Church, these by and large remain virtually untrodden by the increasing majority of their participants. The reason for this is that these bridges lead to a place where the absentee landlord resides who in reality is little more than a fringe-dweller. A great many students, teachers and parents do not want to travel to this place. (Battams, 2002, p. 382)

Herein lies the parish and school dissonance. The school as an agent in the Church's mission ends up itself alienated from its traditional roots, and not through any fault of its own. The problems of pluralism and secularism as examined in the Mackay analysis (see above) which have an impact on the culture and ethos of the school and its core values have another partner, the Church's own issues about its identity, or what Battams described as a dualism between the notion of the Church as gathered and gathering. But Battams also called for a 'reconciliation' of these two ways of looking at the Church (p. 383). Battams research also reinforced Qillinan's research findings reflected on above.

The significance of Battams' work for this research is that it enlarges on both the perception and reality of the seeming dissonance between local Church and school. Battams suggested that there must be a sustained and serious dialogue embedded in a commitment to building community, and this is not the task of schools alone:

While Catholic education is an ecclesiological endeavour, it is not the schools' role alone to engage in the processes necessary to nurture a reconciliated ecclesiology that can authentically engage with the world. As one part of the fabric of the whole Church, schools can make a contribution, but even though in reality they are the Church for many participants, schools are not equipped theologically and organisationally to achieve what this requires. This is the responsibility of the whole of the local Church. (Battams, 2002, p. 384)

#### *Conclusion to this section*

The discussion of the literature reviewed in this section indicated that the dissonance between parish and school is real. Schools are finding that they are, *de facto*, becoming the substitute

parish for many in their communities. Quillinan's research established this point and Battams' research took this further by embedding this in the ecclesiological dynamics which interplay with the school's search for authenticity. However, his response stopped short. It is not enough to say that schools are not equipped to manage this dissonance and refer the responsibility on to the local Church. Local Church communities themselves are in difficulty due to shortage of clergy and lessening practice. The question remains as to how the local Church will provide a real response to the practical difficulties both school and Church face. The suggestion that it will be the responsibility of the 'whole of the local Church' seems to ignore this question, and neither can one totally ignore the immense work that is being done in schools to straddle the massive divide between personal and community faith adherence, and the impact of the secularism and pluralism on the school's own identity. That schools have, unwittingly, become the *de facto* parish is indeed, an ecclesiological problem. The school as an ecclesial agency does not stand alone but with and for the Church, so while Battams suggested that it is necessary for the local Church to look for a solution, it is equally important to look at the way schools work to determine important connections with the local Church, and this is the aim of the next section of this literature review. This argument informs the second critical question for this review, what new understandings of the Catholic school can be found in contemporary literature? It has done this by identifying the reality that the Catholic school is an ecclesial reality in its own right and not merely an addition or appendage to the local Church.

## New ways of thinking about Catholic Schools: schools as communities of meaning

### *Introduction*

The task confronting contemporary Catholic schools is complex as they seek to interpret the impact of massive social, cultural and religious change in their educational communities. This point was also made by the outgoing Director of Catholic Education Melbourne, Ms Susan Pascoe, when she stated at a press conference (September 1, 2006) that although Catholics make up 27% of Australia's population, only 14% have indicated that this is expressed in the form of Sunday worship (Pascoe, 2006a). This figure is less than that indicated by earlier research which was between 18% and 19%: 'there is a vast and complex question of just how schools and parishes relate when the school-going population is not in the main a Church-going population' (McLaughlin, 2000b, p. 86). These figures suggest that the school may have become, *de facto*, a 'substitute parish', and the literature also suggested that this has become a role reluctantly taken on by schools (Battams, 2002; Mellor, 2005). This section of the literature review examines the possibility of finding different ways of describing the purposes of contemporary Catholic schools.

### *Catechesis and Religious Education, Parish and school*

The relationship between catechesis and religious education, and parish and school are expressed as a given in RDECS:

The aim of catechesis, or handing on the Gospel message, is maturity: spiritual, liturgical, sacramental and apostolic; this happens most especially in a local Church community. The aim of the school however, is knowledge. While it uses the same elements of the Gospel message, it tries to convey a sense of the nature of Christianity, and of how Christians are trying to live their lives. It is evident, of course, that religious instruction cannot help but strengthen the faith of a believing student, just as catechesis cannot help but increase one's knowledge of the Christian message. (par. 69)

One wonders now whether this clear separation of purposes is valid when the students barely have a relationship with the local Church. If catechesis is not occurring ‘most especially in a local Church community’, then a question must be raised about the efficacy of the religious education program. The following statement from the same document also begs the same question: the school ‘is a part of the particular local Church . . . . . and shares in the life and work of the local Christian community.’ (par. 101) Further, amongst the ‘conditions which threaten the health of the school climate’ are that ‘the school is isolated from the local Church’ (par 104). This last statement implies that the two are crucially linked, yet the reality is that they have become quite separate. The statement in RDECS provided above points to a more ideal situation because the reality seems quite different as is already evident from the data examined elsewhere in this literature review. If the Catholic school seems to have become the local Church for many, then it is the local Church which is now seen to be isolated from the Catholic school.

This description of the current situation raises important questions. Do the purposes of the Catholic school become threatened or invalid when the separation of school and local Church occurs? Put another way, are Catholic schools any less valuable when there is little relationship to the local Church community because its members do not identify with it? If parishes as geographical entities are on the decline, does it necessarily mean that Catholic schools lose their relevance and purpose? There is a hint of an understanding of these question in the writing of Pope John Paul II.

Pope John Paul II wrote an encyclical in which he examined the meaning of the Church’s mission in the context of evangelization, *Redemptoris Missio* [RM] (1990). There

were three distinct missionary activities: the first addresses ‘peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known’, and this is what would generally pass for missionary activity; the second is that of maintenance, reinforcing and consolidating already established Christian communities. The third is what the Pope called an ‘intermediate situation’ where missionary activity was required:

Where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a "new evangelization" or a "re-evangelization." (par. 33)

Whilst this encyclical may not have been written to address the question of the purposes of Catholic schools, this third missionary activity seems to be an apt description of the task facing contemporary Catholic schools. The situation of families choosing to send their children to Catholic schools even though they are not Church attenders, as already described elsewhere in this literature review, could very well be described as needing “new evangelization” or “re-evangelization”. The question has to be asked, to whom does the task of new evangelization or re-evangelisation fall? The answer, seemingly, is that it falls on the school. However, there is also a crucial role for the local Church. Here the issue revolves around the larger question of ecclesiology which Battams (see above) has sought to clarify.

Inherent in these ideas is the further observation that perhaps Catholic schools may very well be in a new paradigm. Catholic schools seem to have moved beyond the continuity paradigm whereby a school’s success might be judged on the amount of successful professionals or the amount of regular Church goers it produces (Ryan & McLaughlin, 2003). What this new paradigm is, or can be, must continue to be explored, however, there are a number of indicators as to what it might be. What the new evangelization or re-evangelization will mean in a school context needs to be examined in more depth, and so too will the current

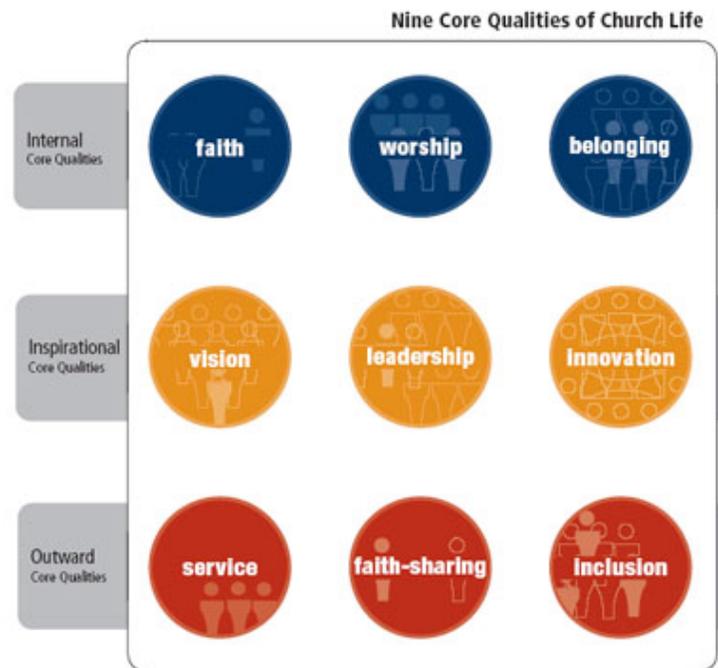
structure and purposes of the Catholic school. In the spirit of Pope John Paul II's encyclical, it needs to be understood that this work will be with and for the Church, not separate and independent. This presents a challenge to contemporary Catholic schools. An attempt to give meaning to this challenge is presented in the following section.

*The Catholic school community: an ecclesial perspective.*

The literature review to this point has established that the community of the contemporary Catholic school is constituted of a good proportion of parents, teachers and students seemingly detached from the Church, yet the fact that they are there and want to be part of this Catholic school community is in itself a call to honour their choice and elevate the meaning of this choice beyond a desire for good results, regular work and a final expectation of a university course. If the Catholic school cannot be a parish community then what kind of community can it be or become? An idea of what this community could be is suggested in the work of the National Church Life Survey, [NCLS] (Kaldor, 2006)

The survey team of the NCLS has for the past 15 years researched patterns of health and vitality in thousands of Australian Churches, Catholic, Anglican and Protestant. The survey has proposed nine core qualities which make up healthy Churches. In view of what has been said about the changing face of the contemporary Catholic school in this literature review, and the distinct possibility that it may have become a *de facto* parish, it is suggested here that these core qualities might also be seen as core qualities of healthy Catholic schools. The Catholic school, to use the terms of Pope John Paul II in RM could be seen as the location of the new evangelization or re-evangelization. It is suggested that this may, indeed, form the

new paradigm for a Catholic school. In figure 2.2 below, it is useful to replace the word Church with Catholic school.



*Figure 2.2 Catholic School (Nine Core Qualities of Church Life, Kaldor, 2006)*

In a Church setting the *faith, worship and belonging* core qualities are indicators of both the commitment of attenders and confidence in their Church, as well as important motivational resources when it comes to mission. In a school setting these could be regarded as being at the heart of the school enterprise of re-evangelization. Perhaps worship could also include ritual, and especially sacraments. Belonging is at the core of community building, the sense that what defines a Catholic school is also a strong sense of identity. This theme was picked up in Dixon's research on Catholics in the United States, Australia and New Zealand (Dixon, 2002) when he said that 'the Church's theological self-understanding.....is the ecclesiology of communion, which sees the Church as a communion for mission' (p. 4). In the

context of this review, it could be stated that the contemporary Catholic school is a community of meaning because like the parish, it too is a community for mission, and this mission seems largely that of re-evangelization.

The *leadership* and *vision* core qualities reveal the extent to which attenders are committed to the directions and visions of the Church. The *innovation* core quality reveals openness to change' (Kaldor, 2006, p. 1). In a school context, while leadership may be taking the school in one direction, are the members of this community actually involved? In the NCLS research an empowering style of leadership has been linked to the development of Church vitality and there is no reason why this would not be the case in the Catholic school. The aspect of educational leadership is examined in more depth in the next section of this literature review where it is suggested that distributed leadership rather than hierarchical leadership provides the optimum conditions for building a school community.

In a Church context, 'the *service, faithsharing* and *inclusion*' core qualities reveal how, in concrete ways, attenders at Church are involved in missional activity' (p. 1). In the Catholic school context this could mean a sharing with the whole Church's mission to bring Christ to the world. Battams called this activity 'the dialogical engagement between *core values, pastoral practice* and *the world*' (Battams, 2002, p. 110). The outward looking nature of schools needs to be expressive of an internalizing of the purpose of the Church's mission, something gained from the first three core qualities of faith, worship and belonging, and this is often expressed in schools as the development of community service programs, and what McLaughlin also called 'substantial outreach initiatives' (McLaughlin, 2005, p. 231)

The analysis thus far, using the conclusions of the NCLS research, suggests a closer connection, indeed, a true similarity with the purposes of both local Church and Catholic school. To highlight this point, it is worthwhile looking at a simple case study <sup>4</sup>.

A boy is enrolled who only has a single parent: mother is divorced. She has suffered cancer in the past but has been in remission. However, the cancer is now back and her health is declining rapidly. Apart from limited family support there is little or no parish connection. The boy went to the local parish school, but involvement in the life of the parish is limited, even though there is still some contact with other families made contact with during primary school days. The secondary school, through its pastoral and welfare strategies, maintains strong links with the mother through the services of the counselling unit. This has extended to offering assistance to help the boy get to school as the mother is no longer able to drive.

An examination of this situation raises a number of critical questions. Who is the natural community of support for this child and his mother? Should they be referred to the parish or is there more that the school could do? If the school is the natural community of this boy and his mother, then shouldn't the school seek out more ways of support? On its own this may be pushing the limits of what some schools are able to do but working with a local parish community there may be more which is possible. The extent of marital breakdown in society is mirrored in the Catholic school population, and Catholic schools are not resourced, financially or otherwise to always provide support. This situation is encountered in a school setting, but the regional school belongs to the regional parishes, and Centacare<sup>5</sup>, a core Church social agency, can provide support as well, but the office that supports this region is at the opposite end of the city to the school.

This case study gives rise to an examination of the interplay between the core qualities of Church/school life. In this situation the qualities of *service* and *inclusion* are highlighted.

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<sup>4</sup> This case study is based on a real situation encountered by the author.

<sup>5</sup> Centacare is an official welfare agency of the Catholic Church to be found in dioceses around Australia.

However, the sense of *belonging* in this situation is ambiguous: which community do mother and son belong to? There are no easy answers to this situation. It is brought up in the context of this literature review to highlight how clarity of the purposes of the Catholic school may have a practical impact on people, those who are in difficulty and the community to which they belong.

*Towards an understanding of the purposes of the  
Catholic school as a community of meaning.*

Underlying much of the analysis in this literature review is the search for what constitutes an authentic Catholic school. How can Catholic schools seek authenticity when changes in social and cultural paradigms have affected the faith and adherence of many Catholics? To understand the purposes of the Catholic school is to make a statement as to its authenticity, and as this analysis is beginning to show this notion of authenticity is context specific. A significant contribution to a discussion of the authenticity of the Catholic school has been made by McLaughlin (2005).

For McLaughlin the first key to the authenticity of a Catholic school is Jesus' mission which was the building of the Kingdom of God, a term which appears 123 times in the Gospels. 'Building the kingdom demands that the fundamental purpose of Catholic education be the undivided and focused pursuit of the enhancement of human dignity' (p. 229), a concept clearly espoused in CSTTM: 'The Catholic school sets out to be a school for the human person and of human persons' (par. 9). He then posited four theological premises which read like a syllogism: human persons somehow image God (Genesis 1:26) whose ultimate expression was found in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was also fully human and to be fully human is, therefore, to become more Christ-like, the object of spirituality. Finally, the

Kingdom of God can only be expressed in terms of community: ‘to be human presupposes ... communitarian dynamics, which demand the honouring of social justice imperatives’ (p. 230).

There is little difficulty in relating these to four of the NCLS core qualities of faith, belonging, service and worship. McLaughlin’s highlighting of these core theological premises sets out important fundamentals in a clear, uncomplicated and unambiguous language. They could be regarded as the foundation or bedrock for an ‘authentic contemporary Australian Catholic school education’ (p. 230). The theological premises underpin three goals for the Catholic school, and these are integral quality education, the nurturing of human community and liberation from forms of oppression.

Beyond the honouring of the imperatives of state and national curricula McLaughlin asserted that an integral quality education needs to be presented through the perspective of a Catholic world view, and a nurturing of spiritual intelligence backed with ‘the systematic, scholarly and critical exposure of students to the essentials of the Catholic tradition’ (p. 230). These are balanced with a provision of opportunities for private and meaningful communal prayer and worship along with the nurturing of student and staff spirituality through collaboratively planned reflective experiences. This moves beyond a mere reliance on RE programs as expressed by Saker (see above), but it may also provide an opening for local Church involvement through liturgy and prayer.

In describing what he means by ‘nurturing of the human community’ McLaughlin’s language included terms like: collaborative, team learning, welfare of all, pastoral care, sharing resources, horizontal and vertical communication, and developmental growth issues. The work of community building in ordinary and every day school activity, whether this be in the classroom or professional development or curriculum development, is a core focus of all

school activity, but he also took this one step further. Nurturing human community also involves schools in 'extensive and organized family educational outreach assisting positive parenting in the areas of communication, personal and vocational growth and drug education' (p. 230). This is significant because what he suggested implies that schools engage in other activities which are not traditionally associated with schools. One such example is the presence of psychologists in schools. In two schools in which the author has worked psychologists, and not just counsellors have been employed. As community needs are being identified and the school demographic changes, there is increasing pressure to also employ family therapists, as this is seen as a better option than having to rely on external agencies which sometimes have long waiting lists of clients. This development has implications for the nature of work in contemporary Catholic schools and is examined more closely in the final section of this literature review. Beyond the role of teachers and support staff there may be a need to see schools as communities in their own right which will need staff like psychologists and family therapists.

The third goal McLaughlin outlined focused on liberation from oppression (p. 231) which finds expression in cultures, practices, understandings and structures which limit and confine the community. Educational leadership must be practised as stewardship and service for community, and not pragmatic, competitive, consumerist and materialist. Curriculum structures need to honour the common good over individualistic agendas. Social justice teachings need to have systematic exposure in the school in two significant ways: in student programs which challenge students' values but also by privileging the Church's social teaching in school policies, practices and traditions as expressed in enrolment, termination, discipline, finance and resources. A good example of what McLaughlin referred to here is the

emphasis on restorative justice practices in school when it comes to dealing with matters of student discipline and welfare (Harney, 2005; Harrison, 2004; Vespa, 2005). Catholic schools must also be associated with ‘substantial outreach initiatives for the needy, poor and new poor and marginalized’ (p. 231). There is more than just an implication here that the activity of an authentic Catholic school must intersect with the work of other agencies which can be involved in this work. Whilst this could be seen as encroaching on the work of the parish and other external Church and social agencies, McLaughlin aligned this activity with the core activity of the Catholic school. It is a suggestion of this review of literature that this outward looking approach of the Catholic school necessarily entails some form of co-operation with other agencies and especially the local Church.

There is one other element in this third goal: ‘an understanding that employment in a Catholic school entails a sense of vocation for all and for some an acceptance of ministry’ (p. 231). Both the terms ‘vocation’ and ‘ministry’ are theologically loaded terms, and when used in conjunction with a description of the purposes of the contemporary Catholic school have implications for the meaning of work in the Catholic school. It could therefore be argued that work in Catholic schools expressed as vocation and ministry might also form an essential part of its authenticity. This is a vocation and ministry for all and not just the Principal or the REC. Sullivan (2000) expressed it this way:

‘if teachers themselves do not have a strong sense of vocation, if they lack the capacity and the confidence to articulate how their own “secular” work, in all its professional dimensions, can be interpreted as a mode of contributing to building the Kingdom, then it will be much more difficult for students to grow into this awareness. (Sullivan, 2000, p. 98)

*Conclusion to this section*

The purpose of this section of the literature review was to explore the notion of the Catholic school as a community of meaning. Reflection on the intersection of school and local Church, or the lack thereof, reveals a natural alignment of the school with the Church's overall mission: that Catholic schools may have become *de facto* parishes attests to this idea, and hence the Catholic school is seen not as some mere adjunct to the parish or even a substitute parish, but perhaps working with and for the local Church. However, the Catholic school also has its own peculiar expression of what this means precisely because it is an educational institution. An examination of the literature in this section has shown that the parish/school nexus is not expressed as either/or. Neither does it appear likely that schools can be an effective substitute for the parish – this is historically not the case and neither would it be practical. Neither is it simply an issue of both/and precisely for the same reason: even though avenues may be explored to see how both can cooperate, by definition and practice their goals are expressed differently. For the parish it is a focus on mission (see the examination of Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* above), and for the school it is a focus on mission expressed in and through an educational community. For these reasons, the contemporary Catholic school may find itself in a new paradigm. This poses a challenge not only to Church authorities which set the parameters of Catholic schools, but also to all those who constitute the Catholic school community, and this is to uncover and restate with clarity the purposes of an authentic Catholic school. This will, and must be, a work in progress because the forces of social and cultural change expressed as secularism and pluralism challenge the core of what it now means to be Catholic. The development of a new paradigm, however, faces a number of barriers, and an examination of what these are follows in the final

section of the literature review. This argument informs the third critical question for this review of literature, how do Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in contemporary Australia? It does this through an exploration of the Catholic school's relationship with the local Church and the conclusion that the new paradigm in which it now finds itself may be an opportunity to define authenticity.

### Potential barriers to a new vision

#### *Introduction*

The literature review up to this point has emphasised the massive changes which have affected the contemporary Catholic school. It is an argument of this review that this may have also changed the nature of work in these schools. The use of the terms 'ministry' and 'vocation' in relation to how people work in the school (LCSWTF, 1982, CSTTM, 1998) also calls for a practical expression of what this means. Added to this, if we are to understand how work in the contemporary Catholic school is organised there also appears to be a need to explore the nature of educational leadership. This is because it is the leadership of the school which shapes, develops and resources the work of all those engaged in the implementation of the purposes of that school. The respective Catholic Educational Commissions in Queensland and Victoria have seen the need to examine the significance of educational leadership in the changing contexts of their schools and have produced two documents which define what this means, *Leadership in Catholic Schools: Development Framework and Standards of Practice* (CECV, 2005) and *A Framework for Leadership in Queensland Catholic Schools: a Report* (Spry, Duignan and Skelly, 2004). The changing landscape of contemporary Catholic schools affects practices associated with these notions, yet older understandings of vocation, ministry

and educational leadership may very well stand in the way of a move into a new paradigm. This section of the literature review examines in more detail what these barriers to the new paradigm might be, and then suggests possible ways forward.

*Blurred boundaries*

The earlier discussions in this literature review regarding the relationship between school and local Church has suggested that the co-operation between the two is not as clear as it once was. Both share in the mission of the Church, each in its own distinct way. However, this understanding is lost on some commentators. Discussions about the proper place of the celebration of the sacraments of Eucharist, Confirmation and Baptism (Harrington, 2006) add up to what seems to be a demarcation dispute. Harrington expressed ‘some consternation’ at 22 young people receiving Confirmation from the bishop at a Catholic school during Lent, a young man becoming Catholic under the direction of a University Chaplain, and the initiation of 24 school student leaders at a weekday Mass on a school patron’s feast day.

The Catholic Church is manifested locally as the Sunday Eucharistic community of the local parish.....Initiating new members into the Church through schools or universities is not in keeping with this vision and understanding. A Catholic school is no doubt a Christian community which worships, witnesses and serves, but it is not a Sunday Eucharistic community.... The school or university can play a significant role and will constitute a supportive peer group for the catechumen’s journey of faith, but if the school usurps the role of the parish and becomes the only community of faith for young people, does that mean that they graduate from the Church when they leave school? (p. 1-2)

Parish, it would seem, in this context, is the one and only paradigm of faith experience, ‘the Catholic Church is manifested locally as the Sunday Eucharistic community’, (Harrington, 2006, p. 1). The rhetorical question Harrington asked at the end of the quotation is indicative of a lack of understanding of the current situation, ‘if the school usurps the role of parish and

becomes the only community of faith, for young people, does that mean that they graduate from the Church when they leave school? (Harrington, 2006, p.2). School has not, to use Harrington's word, usurped parish. Rather, parish has become insignificant as a locus of faith expression for a good number of the community who make up the school, students, parents and teachers. If the school has become the *de facto* parish, as already described in an earlier section of this review, then this would appear not to be necessarily of the school's making. The point is that many of the school's stakeholders have already 'graduated from the Church' (Harrington, 2006, p.2) when they have arrived at the school. What happens after they leave the school remains a challenge for the whole Church to manage. It is a concern that what seems to be promoted by Harrington appears to be a simplistic equation of expression of faith equals Sunday worshipping community or the parish. There also seems to be an assumption that somehow all Catholics still have their parish as the essential reference point for their faith when the reality of declining church attendance seems to indicate otherwise. It would be a pity that schools and universities are not seen as supportive and complementary to the work of the parish. That perhaps those receiving these sacraments were indeed receiving them in a meaningful community context seems of little significance to Harrington. To use Battams' (Battams, 2006) expression, this would appear to be an expression of the Church of the gathered whereas the communities sponsoring the celebration of the sacraments are more an expression of the Church of the gathering.

If Harrington has problems with core sacraments being celebrated in schools and universities then the existence of 'Spirituality in the Pub'<sup>6</sup> or SIP may also be a cause for concern. The idea of religious discussion in a setting more appropriate for loud talk and happy

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<sup>6</sup> This movement grew out of a small group of Catholics who met to discuss renewal in the Church in 1994. From this grew Catalyst for Renewal which 'has committed itself to promoting conversation as its contribution to renewal within the Catholic Church' (O'Loughlin, 2006).

consumption of food and drink just does not seem to fit Harrington's idea of 'a community of faith' (p. 2), yet its popularity has now been established for many years. Calling itself 'Catalyst for Renewal' (CFR), a group of people in Sydney set this up and it remains strong in Sydney and across Australia. Its website states:

We are believers who are attempting to establish a forum for conversation within the Catholic Church of Australia. Our aim is to prompt open exchanges among the community of believers, mindful of the diversity of expression of faith in contemporary Australia. This springs explicitly from the spirit of Pope John XXIII and Vatican II: "Let there be unity in what is necessary, freedom in what is unsettled, and charity in any case". (GS, par 92) (O'Loughlin, 2006, p. 1)

Catalyst for Renewal has become the impetus behind the phenomenon called SIP. In some ways this might also be considered a community of faith. One would normally expect the parish setting to be a natural location of this kind thoughtful reflection on faith.

CFR with its focus on conversation is a sign of the times. In recent generations, both within the Church and wider society, there has begun a massive, profound and rapid shift. This is reflected at all levels of our human experience - our institutions, customs, perceptions of right and wrong, good and evil, our expectations of governance, our appreciation of symbols and rituals etc. Among other things, amidst this flux, and the opportunities and dangers it offers, we need to remember the value of people and human relationships. We need each other in our struggles to connect with God at work in the world. Good conversation can contribute immeasurably to this. (O'Loughlin, 2006, p. 1)

This movement suggests a need for conversation on faith not provided in parishes. It is worth examining the mode and practice of this movement to see whether or not these might lead to understandings about good practices in Catholic schools. More particularly, how does the notion of 'forum for conversation' (O'Loughlin, 2006, p. 1) fit within the purposes of Catholic schooling and what structures within a school might support this approach? Perhaps this is a mode more suited to senior students in the years immediately before they leave school, the setting for formal religious education. It would appear that CFR or its more popular arm, SIP,

is indeed reframing the notions of Church community. SIP may have taken on one of the elements missing on parish life. At the very least, for many it has become a locus, a community which dialogues about belief.

In Victoria, regional Catholic secondary schools are based around the traditional geographical boundaries linking them to parishes and clusters of parishes called Deaneries and the case is the same with diocesan colleges. Even schools governed by religious orders retain a similar structure having feeder areas or major parishes as feeder zones, except that they are able to draw on a wider geographical base than just a local area. The parish has traditionally been the local geographical centre of the social and worshipping life of Catholics, but the evidence is that this has broken down to a large extent overseas as well as in Australia. In Australia, the NCLS reported that between 1996 and 2001, Catholic Mass attendance declined by 13% while figures coming from the United Kingdom also reflect the situation in Australia. Mass attendances in England and Wales fell by more than 130,000 in the three years to 2005. In tracing the pattern of regular attendance in statistics over 100 years, one author (Curti, 2006) concluded that if the trend continued there would virtually be no Christian institutional presence in Britain by the year 2050. This trend presents a special challenge not only to the local Church but also more especially to Catholic schools.

*Notions of work in Catholic schools expressed as Vocation and Ministry*

The empirical literature examined so far suggested that more may be demanded of Catholic schools in this contemporary era than was previously the case. What, then, does one make of the work of those in Catholic schools? Mellor's research (2005) made the point that the Principals in his study were wary of the 'assumption of formerly clerical roles' (p. 255). This

blurring which occurred between their educational and pastoral roles was seen, in his research, as the single biggest factor which Principals found daunting. It was also a source of stress and one which challenged their self-understanding. Caring teachers and support staff will always be an attraction for families who need important kinds of support to bring up their children. Whether schools are ready for this challenge is another question.

There is a suggestion in the literature that beyond the standard roles of workers in Catholic schools such as Principals, teachers, coordinators, Deputy Principals, education support workers and the like, notions of ‘vocation’ and ‘ministry’ may in fact inform not only the nature of their work but indeed the very structures of the schools themselves. Mellor examined the ‘ministry of the laity’ (p. 58 – 60) but applied this notion primarily to Principals. However, it may be applied more broadly.

If the Catholic school is one of the few Catholic institutions with which the majority of Catholics still choose to maintain contact, it seems sensible to utilise the established Catholic school system infrastructure to complement parish and/or other initiatives in the provision of lifelong faith/personal/developmental education programs .....the Catholic community will have to decide what it is going to do with this extraordinary ministerial resource....The key to the future lies in a reassessment of what the Church understands by ministry and how the ministry of the school fits into the overall work of the Church (McLaughlin, 2000b, p. 89)

The ‘Catholic school system infrastructure’ (McLaughlin, 2000b, p.89) is indeed quite a large one and well resourced, and one which for good periods of time, weekends and long holiday breaks remains idle. Yet it is more than a just a physical resource. The Catholic community is yet to decide what it will do with this ‘ministerial resource’ because it is yet to reassess what the Church understands by the ministry of the school and how this might fit into the overall work of the Church. This is also reflective of Battams’ assertion, provided in another section of this literature review, that the question of the identity of the Catholic school is also an

ecclesiological question. In a later discussion about the purposes of the Catholic school McLaughlin also made the point that ‘employment in a Catholic school entails a sense of vocation for all and for some an acceptance of ministry’ (McLaughlin, 2005, p. 231).

What shape this ministry might take in a Catholic school setting is not immediately apparent. What is the landscape of educational ministry? Mellor’s work did raise the point that the Principals in his study saw their work as ‘clerical’ or as the work of priests. A question which could be asked, and especially in light of the declining numbers of clergy in parishes let alone Catholic schools is as follows, should an understanding of ministry be limited to the work of priests or is it possible to extend this further to involve the work of others especially in the context of the Catholic school? The changed realities of contemporary Catholic schools suggest a need to redefine ministry in a Catholic school context.

Interestingly, the call for development in this area comes from no less an authority than the Vatican document of CSTTM:

The complexity of the modern world makes it all the more necessary to increase awareness of the ecclesial identity of the Catholic school. It is from its Catholic identity that the school derives its original characteristics and its "structure" as a genuine instrument of the Church, a place of real and specific pastoral ministry. The Catholic school participates in the evangelizing mission of the Church and is the privileged environment in which Christian education is carried out. In this way "Catholic schools are at once places of evangelization..." The ecclesial nature of the Catholic school, therefore, is written in the very heart of its identity as a teaching institution. It is a true and proper ecclesial entity by reason of its educational activity. Thus it must be strongly emphasized that this ecclesial dimension is not a mere adjunct, but is a proper and specific attribute, a distinctive characteristic which penetrates and informs every moment of its educational activity, a fundamental part of its very identity and the focus of its mission (par. 11).

The term “ecclesial” appears four times in this paragraph: the ecclesial nature of the school is at the very heart and fundamental part of its identity. It is also a place of evangelization. If we were to take away the word school and replace it with the word parish few would have

difficulty with this as a definition of the local Church, 'the aim of catechesis, or handing on the Gospel message, is maturity: spiritual, liturgical, sacramental and apostolic; this happens most especially in a local Church community', (RDECS, par 69). Fostering the ecclesial dimension of the school which is not a mere adjunct is the task of all those who make up the educating community. If the ecclesial dimension of the school 'penetrates and informs every moment of its educational activity' (CSTTM, par 11), then 'educational activity' in the Catholic school is a special kind of work, or at least significantly different from the work of teachers in schools which do not call themselves Catholic. Importantly, the word ministry appears only once in CSTTM and it appears in paragraph 11 provided above: the school 'a place of real and specific pastoral ministry'. The significance of this is that it points to an understanding of what work might mean in the school context, but the dimensions of this ministry are not quite spelled out. McLaughlin argued that there are two things which drive this idea of ministry, first the communal nature of the Catholic school and second the sense that schools should be focussed on 'building the Kingdom' (McLaughlin, 2000b, pp. 103-104).

The word ministry appears once in CSTTM and the word vocation appears more often in other official literature of the Church:

The personal relations between the teacher and the students, therefore, assume an enormous importance and are not limited simply to giving and taking. Moreover, we must remember that teachers and educators fulfil a specific Christian vocation and share an equally specific participation in the mission of the Church, to the extent that "it depends chiefly on them whether the Catholic school achieves its purpose". (LCSWTF, par. 9)

The work of Catholic teachers is regarded as vocation, a calling to a specific task in life which is that of sharing in the mission of the Church. This is significant because the identity of the school and the achievement of its purpose rely on teachers. Once again a search of the

LCSWTF revealed no reference to the word ministry, but the word vocation appeared quite often in expressions such as the following: the vocation of the laity (par. 2); the decline in religious vocations has had a profound effect on the work of the Catholic school (par. 3); the vocation of lay Catholics who work in schools (par. 5); the school vocation of the lay Catholic in schools (par. 11); the vocation of the educator (par. 15). Perhaps the most significant statement comes in paragraph 24:

The lay Catholic educator is a person who exercises a specific mission within the Church by living, in faith, a secular vocation in the communitarian structure of the school: with the best possible professional qualifications, with an apostolic intention inspired by faith, for the integral formation of the human person, in a communication of culture, in an exercise of that pedagogy which will give emphasis to direct and personal contact with students, giving spiritual inspiration to the educational community of which he or she is a member, as well as to all the different persons related to the educational community. To this lay person, as a member of this community, the family and the Church entrust the school's educational endeavour. Lay teachers must be profoundly convinced that they share in the sanctifying, and therefore educational mission of the Church; they cannot regard themselves as cut off from the ecclesial complex. (par. 24)

In what seems an attempt to make a distinction between the clergy and the laity, the work of the lay Catholic educator is regarded as a 'secular vocation' but 'they cannot regard themselves as cut off from the ecclesial complex'. Much is made of the vocation of the Catholic educator, but in this earlier document, written in 1982, the word "ministry" is conspicuously absent and the distinction between lay and clerical is made clear. On the other hand, CSTTM written in 1998, did not seem to have the same need. Nonetheless, paragraph 24 of LCSWTF provided above almost all but describes the work of the educator in a Catholic school as ministry. The educator is professionally qualified, has an apostolic intention inspired by a personal faith, is committed to education of the whole person, is marked by strong interpersonal skills and is a source of spiritual inspiration, but witnesses to a commitment to a living community of faith. Later in the same document it is asserted that lay Catholic

educators should regard their work as a ‘vocation rather than a profession’ (par. 36). Finally, the document mentions that ‘when priests, men and women Religious, and lay people are all present together in a school they will present students with a living image of this richness, which can lead to a better understanding of the reality of the Church’ (par. 43). Twenty-seven years after this document was written there was hardly any of the former but many of the latter who teach and run these schools. Many have developed in their profession over a period of time and then found that it has been enlivened and deepened through a sense of vocation. This is not always nurtured in Catholic teaching training departments (McLaughlin, 2000a; Rosengren, 2005). When it comes to working in Catholic schools, perhaps it is necessary to re-conceptualise lay vocation as lay ministry.

Beyond the question as to what shape this ministry in schools might take lies the prior question of what ministries, non-clerical in nature, already exist which are an accepted way of working in the Church. The Catholic Church the US in recent times has witnessed the growth of Lay Ecclesial Ministry: ‘In the United States, the number of lay parish ministers went from tiny in the 1960s to 22,000 in 1990. There are now almost 31,000. For the last few years, lay parish ministers have narrowly outnumbered diocesan priests (Hodges, 2006). In 2005 the United States Conference of Bishops produced a document titled *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (CW] Fay, 2005). Its purpose was to ‘guide the development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry’ (p. 5). Significantly, Lay Ecclesial Ministry in this document primarily referred to the work of many in parishes. The number of paid lay parish ministers has increased by 53% since 1990, and salaried lay ecclesial ministers had increased from 54% to 66%. The percentage of lay women in these roles is 64%, laymen 20%, and religious women 16% (p. 13). However the document included those who work in hospitals and health care settings,

university campuses, and in prisons, seaports and airports as well as pastoral musicians and lay Principals in elementary and secondary schools. Lay Ecclesial Ministers are ‘men and women of every race and culture who serve in parishes, schools, diocesan agencies, and Church institutions’ (p. 5) Ministry in schools is mentioned only three times, and in one of these references is included the Principal, however, it is significant that the term ministry was used to describe work in schools. What this work in schools is which constitutes ministry is not elaborated on because the aim of the document as a whole was as ‘a resource for diocesan bishops for guiding the development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry’ (p. 5).

The term Lay Ecclesial Ministry is generic as it is meant to encompass and describe several possible roles and is not a position title. In other words, it may be applicable across a variety of work done in the name of the Church. Its elements are as follows:

The ministry is *lay* because it is service done by lay persons. The ministry is *ecclesial* because it has a place within the community of the Church.... it is *ministry* because it is participation in the threefold ministry of Christ, who is priest, prophet and king..... the Church’s members continue the mission and ministry of Christ.....The application of ‘ministry’ to the laity is not something to be confused with ordained ministry. The lay ecclesial minister is called to service in the Church and not necessarily to a lifelong commitment which happens in Ordination. (p. 12)

The definition of the terms lay, ecclesial and ministry is redolent of the language of both CSTTM and LCSWTF. The work of the Lay Ecclesial Minister is typified by a life committed to service in community as part of the mission of the Church, and it is grounded in the ministry of Christ himself. The suggestion being made in this literature review is that the term “Lay Ecclesial Ministry” may be applied to the work of lay Catholic educators in contemporary Catholic schools, and that this could very well extend beyond the specific role of principal to also include roles like REC, Faith Development Coordinator, Community Liaison, RE teacher, College Counsellor and the like. This notion of Lay Ecclesial Ministry

describing the work of those employed in the Catholic school could, in these terms, be classified as vocation and ministry.

Lay Ecclesial Ministry is also an emerging concept which has many applications. One example of the development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry is the existence of the Catholic Schools Youth Ministry Australia (CSYMA). This is a network of schools which currently links seventeen schools across Australia. 'Its primary focus is to provide support and empowerment of staff and students for ministry and evangelization.' It has the endorsement of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and, as expressed in its website<sup>7</sup>, has the following aims:

- To help staff develop and sustain a personal living relationship with Jesus and a strong Catholic identity through on-going formation, discipleship and participation in the life of the Church.
- To develop a vision for a ministry of evangelisation as teachers, and to be committed to sharing the Gospel of Christ in a school setting.
- To support the development of School based faith formation programmes, including the four phase youth ministry model, family retreats, Christian service programmes and staff faith formation.
- To build bonds of communication and foster solidarity amongst Catholic Schools, through inter-school staff and student formation programmes at a local and regional level.
- To promote with senior students leaving Year 12 post-school Youth Ministry Formation courses.

CSYMA is an example of what can be possible, at least on a national scale. Through the formation of teachers and students it may become a vehicle for enhancing the work of Catholic schools. It also has a focus on formation for ministry for the post-school years. An initiative such as this needs to be encouraged and supported by both schools and local Church communities.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.csyma.com](http://www.csyma.com), About Us

### *Educational Leadership*

In the context of Lay Ecclesial Ministry it is useful to examine the notion of educational leadership, not in its narrowest understanding of the leadership of the Principal but rather the broader understanding of leadership involving the roles of others in the educational enterprise. There has been recent research on the pressures on Principals working in contemporary Catholic schools (Cannon, 2004; Mellor, 2005; Sinclair & Spry, 2005). Each of these has described the difficulties confronted by Principals in Catholic schools when facing the impact of the changed demographics of their schools, parish and school dissonances and the impact of recent social change. But beyond a specific examination of one particular role in the Catholic school it is also important to examine the leadership exercised by the many others who comprise the school community. To this end the archdioceses of Melbourne and Brisbane have developed their own leadership frameworks for schools *Leadership in Catholic Schools: Development Framework and Standards of Practice* (CECV, 2005) and *A Framework for leadership in Queensland Catholic Schools: a Report* (Spry, Duignan and Skelly, 2004). Each in their own way sought to describe the more complex and sophisticated nature of leadership now required of the contemporary Catholic school. The Melbourne document is referred to as CECV and the Brisbane document as QCEC, reflective of the respective Catholic Education Commissions which developed these frameworks.

CECV had a strong focus on educational leadership ‘as distinct from leadership for management, or administrative leadership’, and it also argued that ‘leadership is best understood as a feature of organizations rather than a characteristic of individuals’ (p. 1).

Further:

The concept of leadership is not viewed as being either conferred or bound by role, but as being accessible to any individual within a school ..... the framework is not role specific and is not tied to positions of responsibility. It is not a role description. (p.2).

In other words, leadership activity can be a feature of the work of all teachers and not reserved to those who are appointed to specific roles. Indeed, ‘effective schools are characterised by the capacity and willingness of teachers to initiate leadership activity’ (p. 1). Of course, this is not an argument to do away with leadership roles as such. Rather, it is a call to recognise and support leadership in its diversity as it is practised in the school. So it is the task of all to promote the value of justice in the school not just the Community Services Coordinator; it is the task of all to promote the values and beliefs of the Catholic Church not just the REC.

These notions of distributed leadership and the need to build leadership capacity in all were reflected also in QCEC. It highlighted the importance of recognising that leadership is complex and multi-dimensional, and that it is essential to develop a culture of shared leadership with decision-making responsibility distributed throughout the school. Leadership is also working with and for community as evidenced in patterns of co-operation within a Christian community (p. 13). Using these notions as a basis the frameworks seek to identify the core elements of leadership in schools. QCEC called them *dimensions of leadership*: these are determined by the extent of the development of essential capabilities (p. 13 & 26). CECV called them *leadership actions* which have very specific features (p. 10). Table 2.4 summarises the two descriptions of educational leadership.

*Table 2.4 Leadership Frameworks in Victoria & Queensland*

<b>Dimensions of Leadership (QCEC)</b>	<b>Leadership Actions (CECV)</b>
Inner Leadership	Faith Community
Interpersonal Leadership	A Vision for the Whole School
Organisational Leadership	Teaching and Learning
Educative Leadership	People and Resources

Community Leadership	Community
Faith Leadership	
<b>Capabilities of Leadership</b>	<b>Guiding Conceptions of Leadership</b>
Personal	Having a clear purpose
Relational	Relationship building
Professional	Understanding and managing change
Mission	Creating and sharing knowledge
	Ensuring coherence and alignment of structures

I would like to bring together the notions of Lay Ecclesial Ministry and leadership as described above and suggest that educational leadership in its distributed nature could be seen as a form of Lay Ecclesial Ministry in the contemporary Catholic school. Another way of putting this is to say that educational leadership in the school can effectively be “value added” by also being able to describe it as Lay Ecclesial Ministry. One of the potential barriers to the development of a new vision for Catholic schools then is identifying leadership narrowly as one or other particular role, typically that of Principal. In like manner the notion of Lay Ecclesial Ministry as defined by the US Bishops and illustrated above in CW above is not a narrow description of one role but a generic description that encompasses several possible roles. The suggestion in the context of this thesis is that Lay Ecclesial Ministry may be an apt way of describing work in the contemporary Catholic school.

In a recent talk to secondary school Principals Bishop Tim Costelloe (2009) argued that teachers and Principals in particular, share Christ’s teaching role in a ‘sacramental sense. ‘Within the Christian community of the school we represent Christ; we make him present’, (p. 7). Further on in his address to Principals he described their work as a ‘vocation’ (p. 11), and he concluded his address by urging Principals ‘to see in Jesus the model for your own ministry’, (p. 12). However, whilst he associated the terms ‘sacramental’, ‘vocation’ and

‘ministry’ with the work of Principals, there is also a question as to whether these notions could also be associated with the work of many others in the Catholic school. In other words, it is suggested in this review of literature that this task may be too much for one person to embody and lead. Beyond the ‘ministry’ and ‘vocation’ of the Principal there could also be the ministries and vocations of many others in the Catholic school. This should extend beyond the traditional roles of RE teachers and the REC, but also new roles yet to be defined. There may be a need, therefore, to re-imagine the work of Catholic schools in the context of Lay Ecclesial Ministry which is inclusive of many others and not just Principals.

Costelloe went on to describe a Catholic school as having the following qualities, ‘an innovative, engaging and comprehensive Religious Education programme, a well-developed sacramental programme where appropriate, a regular experience of liturgy and prayer, and a good relationship with the local parishes and clergy.’ A school without these qualities, ‘is quite simply not a good Catholic school’, (Costelloe, 2009, pp. 3-4). Presumably, if a school has these qualities then it is more than merely an outpost of the Church. However, sacramental programmes and regular liturgy require regular priestly involvement. What was meant by a ‘good relationship with the local parishes and clergy’ was not specifically described, but what was clearly stated was that the Catholic school must have an important relationship with the local parishes. This relationship between school and local parishes cannot simply be assumed. It has to also be clarified and clearly defined. Bishop Costelloe’s comment was possibly stating the ideal rather than the reality. He stopped short of describing this relationship as a partnership. It is an argument of this thesis that it is precisely a partnership of school and local Church which may bridge the gap that exists between families and their faith experiences, as

well as the gap between wanting a Catholic education but not the Church involvement which flows from this.

Costelloe continued to describe the ‘foundational principle on which our Catholic school is built’.

Only a relationship with God can enable a person to make sense of life and live it fully; only a relationship with Christ can lead us into the richness of a relationship with God; and only life within the Church can enable us to establish and deepen our relationship with Christ. If this three-fold principle doesn’t hold, then the rationale of our Catholic school system quickly begins to unravel. (Costelloe, 2009, p. 5)

If ‘life within the Church can enable us to establish and deepen our relationship with Christ’ then both Catholic school and local Church face the significant challenge of working with the large number of families represented in the Catholic system for whom ‘life within the Church’ is not a reality. The point here is that these families, by and large, are choosing the Catholic school and not the parish. If Costelloe’s point is to be taken seriously, then the need for a partnership will become all the more essential if the Catholic school and local Church can together develop a thriving faith community in partnership.

#### *Conclusion to this section*

This section of the literature review sought to examine the potential barriers to an understanding of contemporary Catholic schools as communities of meaning. These were firstly expressed as the perceived blurred boundaries between school and parish and local. Another barrier was the identification of vocation and ministry being allied too narrowly to the work of Principals in schools rather than to the work of others as well, and here was introduced the practice of Lay Ecclesial Ministry as defined by the US Bishops in CW. Finally, and perhaps as an extension of this idea, an understanding of leadership in schools

which goes beyond a mere definition of specific roles was proposed. The argument of this section was that in understanding these barriers it may very well be possible to frame an understanding of what work in contemporary Catholic schools might mean, and thereby be able to identify what might also constitute an authentic Catholic school. This argument informs the fourth critical question for this review of literature which was what are the implications for the future of Catholic schools? An exploration of what constitutes an authentic Catholic school may very well lead to a need to reframe the ways in which Catholic schools work and seek to find an expression for their alignment with the mission of the Church to build the Kingdom of God.

#### Conclusion to the Review of Literature

This chapter has reviewed the current literature which might provide an understanding of what constitutes a contemporary, authentic Catholic school. It set out to answer four questions. a) What issues in Australian society, culture and the Church challenge traditional notions of the Catholic school? b) What new understandings of the Catholic school can be found in contemporary literature? c) How do Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in contemporary Australia? And finally, d) what are the implications of this for the future of Catholic schools? An examination of the stated purposes of Catholic schools in the Church's official literature in the first section revealed an important conceptual shift from simple transmission and maintenance notions of the Catholic school, to more holistic concepts of the human person and community, serving as the focus of core goals. Paralleling this shift in the Church's articulation of the purposes of the Catholic school was the immense upheaval of social and cultural change throughout the twentieth century. Mackay's analysis provided in

the second section (Mackay, 2001) set up an important backdrop to understanding the pressures confronting individuals and the Church itself. At the local level of Catholic schools this came to be expressed by an increasing number of its stakeholders as disaffection with the practices and beliefs of the Church.

Nowhere was this disaffection more clearly expressed than in what can only be described as the dissonance between the local Church and the Catholic school. This was examined in section three of this literature review. Put simply, though the school's stakeholders were by and large not Church attenders they still chose the Catholic school as a place in which to work as well as a place to send their children. In addition, an increasing number of non-Catholics also send their children to Catholic schools. In many ways, Catholic schools have become substitute parishes, not by design but as an unintentional consequence of wanting to do their task well. Battams' research (Battams, 2002, 2006) indicated that there was an intrinsic link with ecclesiology: the nature and purpose of Catholic schools are grounded in the nature and purpose of the Church. If this is the case, then it is logical to think of Catholic schools as not being mere adjuncts to the parish or even as parish substitutes, but as communities of meaning, that is, as entities which are not in competition with the local Church but as true ecclesial communities totally aligned with the Church's mission for the world in the name of Jesus Christ. The school's mission is distinctive in that it is a mission expressed in and through an educational community, and this was the point of section four of the review. For these reasons the Catholic school may very well find itself in a new paradigm.

The final section of this review examined potential barriers to framing of a new paradigm. These were expressed as the blurred boundaries between school, parish and local Church and too narrow definitions of vocation and ministry when it came to describing the

work of some in Catholic schools. These tended to be limited to Principals. It was suggested that the notion of Lay Ecclesial Ministry as expressed by the US Bishops might provide a more holistic understanding of the vocation and ministry of lay people in Catholic schools. Finally, changes in contemporary understandings of educational leadership emphasise distributed leadership and a leadership not tied to specific roles. This could be linked with Lay Ecclesial Ministry as a way of describing the work of those in Catholic schools, thereby suggesting a new way of describing the authenticity of the contemporary Catholic school.

The conclusions from the foregoing research illuminate the research problem in the following way. The literature has described the reality that at a time when enrolments have never been higher identification with the institutional Church in its various forms has never been lower. This posed a challenge to the authenticity of the Catholic school because of confusions which arose between its stated purposes and the reality of beliefs and practices of the stakeholders. An exploration of how Catholic schools might respond to this challenge suggested that one way forward may be a kind of re-valuing of the work of those in Catholic schools in terms of Lay Ecclesial Ministry. However, for this to have substance it must start from a grounding of the authenticity of the Catholic school in the nature and purpose of the Church, and this is what would make Catholic schools communities of meaning in their own right but working alongside the local Church and not merely as an add on. The distinctiveness of the Catholic school, and therefore, its authenticity may be expressed in and through the living of the Church's mission as an educational community. Table 2.5 summarises the key arguments of the literature review and relates these to the research questions for this thesis.

Table 2.5 Summary of Key Arguments of this Literature Review and their Relationship to the Research Questions

Section	It was argued that:	Relationship to the Research Questions
Traditional purposes of the Catholic school	There has been a conceptual shift in the Church's understanding of the purposes of the Catholic school, a movement from maintenance and transmission to more holistic concepts of the human person. This shift is the necessary outcome of a contemporary Church in search of meaning.	How do some Victorian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?
Why these purposes are not working in the contemporary Catholic school	Australian society has experienced the upheaval of massive social and cultural change, and this has been reflected in the challenge to Catholic identity in a secular and pluralist environment. This is most obvious in the changed beliefs and practices of the stakeholders in Catholic schools, parents, staff and students.	What impact, if any, have these changed circumstances had on the way these schools arrange their work structures?
School and Parish Dissonance	The contemporary Catholic school may have become, <i>de facto</i> , a substitute parish: many parents not involved in their local Church are still sending their children in large numbers to Catholic schools. This is an ecclesiological problem as these schools do not stand alone but with and for the Church.	What are the implications of this experience for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general?
New ways of thinking about Catholic schools	The Catholic school is a community of meaning, and its identity and commitment to the Church's mission is expressed in its being an educational community. It is not a mere	What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general?

	adjunct to the parish but works with and for the local Church. A secular and pluralist society and the consequent impact this has on Catholic identity poses a challenge to Catholic schools and the Church to define what is an authentic contemporary Catholic school	
Potential barriers to a new vision	The blurred boundaries between parish and school, the too narrow identification of vocation and ministry with the role of Principal and an understanding of leadership as confined to only specific roles rather than the broader notion of distributed leadership, together stand in the way of the development of a vision for the authentic Catholic school. A concept which may contribute to this new vision is that of Lay Ecclesial Ministry.	Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?

The following chapter, extrapolates and justifies the choice of epistemology, research methodology, and the selection of participants as well as the choice of research methods.

## CHAPTER THREE: DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

### Introduction to the Design of the Research

Table 3.1 summarises the entire process of data gathering and the research design:

*Table 3.1 Summary of Research Design*

<b>PURPOSE: To explore how contemporary Catholic schools respond to the challenge of a secular and pluralist society: seeking authenticity.</b>				
<b>Research questions</b>	<b>Stages of Research</b>	<b>Data gathering strategy</b>	<b>Sources of Data &amp; Analysis</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
1. How do some Victorian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?	Exploratory	Document Analysis including archival records and questionnaires	School documentation including mission statements.  Thematic Analysis with aid of a software package	February 2008
2. What impact, if any, have these changed circumstances had on the way these schools arrange their work structures?	Exploratory	Obtaining data from focus group discussions with the various groups and interviews at each site	Semi-structured Interviews, data triangulation and constant comparative method of data analysis  Thematic Analysis with aid of a software package	February to June 2008
3. What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general?	Inspection	Obtaining data from further discussions and interviews	In-depth one to one semi-structured interviews if needed, data triangulation and constant comparative method of data analysis.	July 2008
4. Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what				

constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?				
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The literature review which was provided in the previous chapter of this thesis described the current time when enrolments in Catholic schools have never been higher while identification with the institutional Church has never been lower. The literature review also argued that the increasingly secular and pluralist nature of society has largely contributed to this phenomenon. This reality seems to pose a challenge to the authenticity of the Catholic school because of confusions which arise between its stated purposes and the reality of beliefs and practices of its stakeholders. The purpose of this chapter is to explain and justify the research design adopted in the exploration of how Catholic schools might respond to this challenge.

The research questions that focused the research design were:

1. How do some Victorian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?
2. What impact, if any, have these changed circumstances had on the way these schools arrange their work structures?
3. What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general?
4. Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?

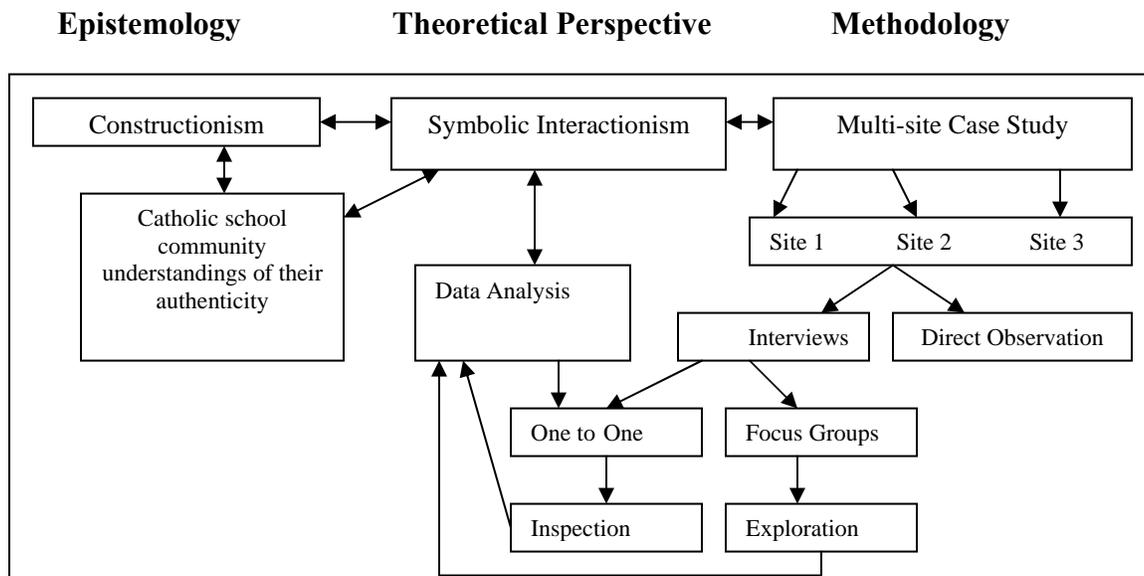
The researcher adopted an interpretive design to explore how Catholic schools respond authentically to the situation of a lack of consonance between their stated purposes and the

reality in which they find themselves. The epistemological framework of social constructionism (Barkway, 2001, p. 317) was used to elicit the individual, personal and group constructions of what constituted an authentic Catholic school. Symbolic interactionism formed the theoretical perspective through which data analysis was conducted, because the meaning of an authentic Catholic school could be constructed through the social interaction of the stakeholders, parents, students, teachers and others. Multiple-site case study was used as the methodology as it was able to complement both the epistemology and the theoretical perspective. It also enabled a deeper understanding of what some Catholic school communities might regard as the authenticity of what they do as a Catholic school (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Consequently, it was possible to investigate the contemporary reality in which Catholic schools found themselves because the researcher was able to pose questions of those who say they seek to live out the mission of the Church in an educational setting, and from their responses it might have been possible to frame an understanding of what an authentic Catholic school might be like. In exploring the experiences of some Catholic schools, the study aimed to extend understandings of the current experience of contemporary Catholic schools in general. The insights gained might also provide ground for the further exploration of different forms the Catholic school might take into the future. Table 3.2 describes the six elements of interpretive research used in this case study.

*Table 3.2 Five Elements of Interpretive Research*

<b>Research Paradigm</b>	Interpretivism
<b>Epistemology</b>	Social Constructionism
<b>Theoretical Perspective</b>	Symbolic Interactionism
<b>Research Methodology</b>	Multi-site Case Study
<b>Methods</b>	Textual analysis, Focus groups, semi structured interviews
<b>Data Analysis</b>	Thematic or content analysis

Figure 3.1 below offers a diagrammatic representation of the three core elements of the research design.



*Figure 3.1 Overview of the Research Design for the Study*

## Theoretical Framework

### *Introduction*

The interpretivist approach has been adopted for this study because it emphasizes social interaction as the basis of knowledge. ‘The researcher uses his or her skills as a social being to try to understand how others understand their world. Knowledge, in this view, is constructed by mutual negotiation and is specific to the situation being investigated’ (O’Donoghue, 2001, p. 9). In other words, knowledge is built through social construction of the world (Weber, 2004). As such it is also concerned with the exploration of the values, attitudes and beliefs which influence people to act in a particular manner. This approach lends itself to this study because of the varied and context specific understandings inherent in the notion of authenticity

individuals may have, but also because of the variety of Catholic schools which exist in Australia. Social constructionism and symbolic interactionism are the research components of interpretivism which guided this study.

### *Epistemology*

This study adopted the epistemological underpinning of social constructionism as a means of attempting to describe the authentic Catholic school. However, an examination of the literature on epistemologies suggested that this needs to be distinguished from an epistemology similar in name and nature, that of social constructivism (Barkway, 2001). The understanding of this distinction has led to the adoption of social constructionism.

Constructivism ‘emphasises that ..... human understanding is a construction and an interpretation. It is not the grasping of objective meaning..... the focus is clearly on individuals’. Constructionism on the other hand ‘comes into being in, and out of, human interaction, and importantly, becomes a legacy and tradition’ (p. 193). This latter point is significant as it proposes that culture is a core determinant on the ‘way in which we see things and gives quite a definite view of the world’. But culture, in this understanding, is also to be seen as ‘both limiting and liberating’ and not simply binding one to a set understanding. As such social constructionism readily calls culture into question whereas constructivism with its emphasis on individualism tends to ‘resist the critical spirit’ (Barkway, 2001, p. 193). Crotty also made the same distinction when he said that ‘It would appear useful, then, to reserve *constructivism* for epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on the “meaning making activity of the individual mind” and to use *constructionism* where the focus included

the “collective generation and transmission of meaning” [italics in original] (Crotty, 1998, p. 58)

This distinction is important in shaping the epistemology for this study. Firstly, the notion of authenticity itself is an elusive yet context specific concept. It could also be used as a kind of ‘proof-texting’ of the practices of contemporary Catholic schooling against the traditional understandings as described in the official literature of the Church. Social constructionism enables an evaluation of both traditional and contemporary understandings. For example, it may seek to throw open the assumptions people have about why they work within and are committed to the task of Catholic education. This is important for this study because reflection on literature in this area suggested that Catholic schools may need to re-frame and perhaps re-imagine how they work and survive the increased challenge of secularism and pluralism of contemporary society.

Secondly, Catholic schools themselves have developed their own cultures and traditions. The researcher’s own experience of working in four Catholic secondary schools and knowing of many others over thirty years is testament to this reality. Questions were explored regarding how far these cultures were resistant to, or embracing of, the changed realities of Church allegiance on the one hand, and a changed social context on the other. This went to the heart of the question of how they understood their role in living the Church’s educational mission. Social constructionism hopefully ‘invites us to free ourselves from the constraints of culturally derived understandings and to view things anew’ (Barkway, 2001, p. 193).

The literature review in the preceding chapter indicated how traditional understandings of the Catholic school have been eroded in the face of a changed social and cultural paradigm

which has affected perceptions of what it means to be Catholic, indeed, what it means to work in a Catholic school. The epistemology of social constructionism allows us to open up newer understandings of what it means to be an authentic Catholic school whilst also laying open the assumptions about what constrains culturally (and traditionally) derived understandings of the practices of contemporary Catholic schools.

### *Theoretical Perspective*

A theoretical perspective is a way of describing the ‘assumptions brought to the research task and reflected in the methodology’ chosen for this study (Crotty, 1998). It is ‘a way of looking at the world and constructing an understanding of the world’ (Osborne, 2006). Symbolic interactionism was chosen as the theoretical perspective for this study because it focuses on how people understand their reality and choose to act and respond to it in their own setting. The purposes of the contemporary Catholic school are derived both from what the Church itself sees as its core task, and also from the lived experience, culture and traditions of that school. The people working in this context are constantly making and remaking their own meaning and purpose for being there. To understand this dynamic is important for this study as it goes to the heart of an understanding of what constitutes an authentic Catholic school. Authenticity is more than a set of officially stated purposes – it is the lived expression of these purposes for a particular community, or at least how these people seek to live them in their context.

Symbolic interactionism as a paradigm for understanding the world is derived from the work of George Herbert Mead (1863 – 1931) who maintained that people’s selves are social products but that these selves are also purposive and creative. A student of Mead’s, Herbert

Blumer (1969), coined this term, and it could be summarized as the way people view objects depends on the meaning these things have for them; this meaning comes about as a result of a process of interaction; and the meaning of an object can change over time. Blumer's own definition is as follows:

The term "symbolic interaction" refers, of course, to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings interpret or "define" each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions. Their "response" is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions. This mediation is equivalent to inserting a process of interpretation between stimulus and response in the case of human behaviour. As quoted in (Gingrich, 2000, p. 1)

The characteristics of this approach are (i) human interaction: humans create meaning in their interactions with each other, (ii) they interpret or define rather than merely react to situations, (iii) their responses are based on the meaning they ascribe to their actions, (iv) humans use of symbols which assist understanding of their environment: 'The history, culture, and forms of communication of humans can be traced through symbols and it is through symbols that meaning is associated with interpretation, action, and interaction' (Gingrich, 2000), and (v) between the stimulus and response of interaction there is interpretation, an ascertainment of meaning.

This is important in the context of this study because it is an approach that helps develop an understanding, for example, of why people choose Catholic schooling for their children and yet may not have any consistent, formal connection with their local Church. Similarly, it assists in understanding why teachers choose to work in a Catholic school yet also may not have other formal connections with the Church. Again, these questions are concerned with the meaning of authenticity. This relates to the first and fourth research

questions of this study: How do some Australian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society and based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?

Denzin elaborated an understanding of symbolic interactionism. “Methodologically, symbolic interactionism directs the investigator to take, to the best of his [sic] ability, the standpoint of those studied”, (Denzin, 1978). This perspective is important to this researcher as a way of keeping a check to ensure that his own assumptions based over long experience do not intrude on others’ understanding of their reasons for working in the Catholic school system. In other words, it is important that the research moves ‘beyond the prejudice and bias of the observer’ (Gingrich, 2000). So, for this study to have significance it is important to this researcher that it moves beyond his personal understanding of the situation of contemporary Catholic schools, to focus on the meanings others involved in this enterprise have constructed from their social interactions (Osborne, 2006, p. 6). This is particularly relevant insofar as one aim of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of how those involved in a Catholic school understand their work as being authentic.

This study is significant in that, through an exploration of the experiences of many in the Catholic school context, it illuminates both their motivations and perceptions of future possibilities. This relates, in particular, to the second and third research questions for this study, what impact, if any, have these changed circumstances had on the way these schools have arranged their work structures and what are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general?

## Research Methodology

The research adopted a case study approach to gain a deeper understanding of how those involved in a Catholic school understood their work as being authentic. This approach was appropriate in a number of ways; however, before this is described in more detail, it is important for this study to acknowledge the ongoing debate as to what constitutes case study research. There are issues regarding transferability, generalization and ethics as well as a contrast between case study as qualitative research and quantitative research in general, and whether a case study is intrinsic or instrumental (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000; Stake, 2005). This debate will not be traced in this chapter. However, there follows a description of the qualitative case study approach adopted in the research that addressed some of these issues as they affected the study. ‘This design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing....case study is a design particularly suited to situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon’s variables from their context’ (Merriam, 1998, pp. 28-29), a notion important in understanding the context specificity of authenticity.

The research undertaken for this thesis used a case study methodology to investigate the contemporary phenomenon of the dissonance between the officially stated purposes of the Catholic school and the reality that its stakeholders do not necessarily embrace these in practice. This phenomenon has already been described in Chapter two of this thesis. By engaging with the stakeholders of three Catholic schools it was possible to investigate this phenomenon to understand in more depth what this meant in particular circumstances. This methodology of case study has three features important to this study. First, it is particularistic, ‘the case is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might

represent'. It 'concentrates attention on the way particular groups of people confront specific problems' (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). By looking at the settings of some Catholic schools it may be possible to determine the extent to which the issues of dissonance between stated purposes and reality was felt by the people who worked there and those who sent their children to the schools. As such, it is consistent with the epistemology of constructionism and the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. Second, it is descriptive in that the end product is 'a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study..... the complete, literal description' of the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam, 1998, p. 30). This thick description may highlight the specific issues which inform the decisions of people who work in Catholic schools and that affect their understanding of authenticity. Third, it is heuristic 'in that case studies illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study'. It can either 'bring about discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known' (Merriam, 1998, p. 30). This is important in that this phenomenon is not just something observed by the researcher, but something recognized by other researchers (McLaughlin, 1999; McQuillan, 2004) and of interest to those involved in Catholic education (Battams, 2006; Mellor, 2005; Quillinan, 1997).

However, there is also something quite paradoxical about case study methodology. "By studying the uniqueness of the particular, we come to understand the universal", (Simons, 1996, p. 231). Case study research, in this sense, has three critical points. First, knowledge is both personally and socially constructed and therefore our representations are inevitably incomplete. Second, 'research has the power to stimulate thinking as much as express conclusions'. Third, 'and crucially.....that research.....if portrayed in problematical ways can provoke us to think differently' (Simons, 1996, p. 232). This was important for this study

because this research was not undertaken with any pre-conceived ideas of solutions for the situation or even a pre-conceived notion of an authentic Catholic school. The nature of contemporary society and the changed reality of Catholic schools seem to preclude any ready made solutions. Saker's research (O'Brien, 2005), for example, suggested that the strengthening of religious education programs in Catholic schools was important in turning around the problems of belief and practice, however, this suggested solution needed to be seen as only part of the solution. Even the suggestion that Lay Ecclesial Ministry (see Chapter two) might be a lens through which to look at work in schools is just that - a suggestion. In other words, it was the hope of this researcher that the case study methodology employed would lead to an exploration of new insights as well as the possibility of new forms. 'The search for certainty, comparison and conclusiveness tends to drive out alternative ways of seeing. Yet it is the latter.....which offer us new insight and potentially that quantum leap in understanding which may change our worlds' (Simons, 1996, p. 237). Simons described this process well when she described educational research as 'striving to understand and communicate truths about complex educational endeavours'. It is an argument of this study that the changed nature of society has made fulfilling the purposes of the contemporary Catholic school a complex educational endeavour. Consequently, case study methodology can be useful in that one needs to 'challenge existing forms of knowing through using different ways of seeing' and by doing so one must 'embrace the paradoxes inherent in the people, events and sites we study and explore rather than try to resolve the tensions embedded in them' (Simons, 1996, p. 237).

There are other elements to case study methodology which are important to this study. A case study is a 'bounded system..... a unit around which there are boundaries' (Merriam, 1998). The case for this research is the Catholic school community as expressed in the

experience of three schools. However, there is another dimension to the boundedness of a case study, the temporal boundaries of a case. ‘Unless case study researchers take account of the temporal organization of the cases they are investigating, there is a danger of erroneous inferences from what they observe (or from information received) about what goes on routinely in those cases’ (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000, p. 110). This caution is important because what is observed over a limited time span cannot be generalized to be the situation over a longer period of time. In other words, data collected over a period of a few weeks or months cannot be treated as holding true over a longer period of time. This is especially true of Catholic school communities whose personnel and policy management change a great deal over time. This is also an interpretive or analytical case study. ‘A case study researcher gathers as much information about the problem as possible with the intent of analysing, interpreting, or theorizing about the phenomenon’ (Merriam, 1998, p. 38). This was also the research paradigm adopted for this study.

Finally, this research was a multi-site case study in that the phenomenon under investigation was examined in three different school settings. This approach to educational research emerged in the 70’s and 80’s as ‘an attempt to marry the study of the particular with the need in policy contexts for comprehensive coverage of sites and a broader basis for formal generalization’ (Simons, 1996, p. 230). Stake described it thus: ‘a number of cases may be studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon ..... because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, and perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases’ (Stake, 2005, pp. 445 - 446). Merriam took it even further when she stated that ‘the more cases included in a study, and the greater the variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be.....The inclusion of multiple cases

is, in fact, a common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalisability of your findings' (Merriam, 1998, p. 40). Sturman made the point that unlike an ethnographic case study 'researchers engaged in multi-site case study usually spend much less time in each site. They trade in-depth inquiry for comparisons across a number of sites' (Sturman, 1997, p. 64). Catholic schools all seek to live out the purposes of the Catholic school specific to their various contexts and the authenticity of this enterprise was explored in the research.

## Participants

### *Introduction*

This study focused on three Catholic schools in the Catholic archdiocese of Melbourne. The schools selected for the research were chosen in an attempt to acquire a range of understandings of their experiences from different school populations. Site one was a small school situated on the outskirts of Melbourne's central business district but it enrolled students from across Melbourne. Site two was a Catholic primary school situated in Melbourne's north-east and was located on the same site as the parish church. Site three was a recently established archdiocesan Preparatory to Year 12 school. It was located in a rapidly growing area of Melbourne's north east. All three schools described themselves as committed to implementing the Church's educational mission even though they were not alike in structure.

Site one was of interest because it was a small school (it takes between 18 and 20 students from Years 6 to 9 per semester) dedicated to catering for the needs of students at risk. Students who would otherwise fail in a mainstream school are assisted to deal with their issues and make an attempt to get back into the mainstream if only to undertake a pathway to work. After six months the student returns to their home school, and for twelve months thereafter a mentor

maintains contact with the student and works with the home school. Site two fitted the pattern of a regular Catholic primary school situated on the same grounds as the parish Church. At the time of the research it was experiencing growth due to a new housing development on the fringe of its feeder area. Site three was a recently established (2006) Preparatory to Year 12 archdiocesan school. Whilst it was regional in the sense that it was meeting the Catholic education needs of a geographic area, it was both regulated and governed by the archdiocesan authority and not the canonical administrators of a group of feeder parishes in the same way a regional secondary school is managed.

### *Selection of Participants*

The target groups for the project in each setting were a cross-section of teachers, parents and students, as these were the stakeholders of the Catholic school. There was also to be a fourth grouping involved and this was called “governors” as it referred to those in the community who held responsibilities related to the overall management of the school and not just its daily management. Criteria for the selection of desired participants was influenced by the criteria of the boundaries to be established for the case as indicated in Table 3.3.

*Table 3.3 Boundaries for participant selection*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Criteria</b>
Teachers and leadership teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A selection of beginning and experienced RE teachers.</li> <li>• The Principal</li> <li>• A selection of members of the senior leadership e.g. Curriculum Head, Deputy Principal, Religious Education Co-ordinator</li> </ul>
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A selection of members of the School Board</li> <li>• A selection of the Parents and Friends group where such exists.</li> <li>• Where possible, parents outside these groupings</li> </ul>
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A selection of students mainly in Years 6 to 9.</li> <li>• A selection of students from the student council where such exists</li> </ul>
Governors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The parish priest in site one</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select canonical administrators in site two</li> <li>• Those responsible for the ongoing viability of site three</li> </ul>
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Experienced and beginning teachers were selected to provide a spectrum of information relating to questions such as ‘Why did you choose to teach in the Catholic system and why do you choose to remain?’ It was also important for this study to examine how the senior leadership in the school saw and understood the purposes of the school. In respect to the selection of the parents, it was hoped to gain a cross-section between those who had official responsibilities e.g. board member within the school community and those who didn’t. This was so that it would have been possible to provide a variety of responses to questions such as ‘How does your Church affiliation affect your choice of school for your children?’ A selection of years six to nine students and those who had leadership roles in the school was thought useful because they may have been in the school for some time and understood its culture. It would also have been useful to observe students in the environments of religious education classes and other faith related activities, where possible e.g. reflection days, school or class Masses and the like. Finally, other participants to be selected were members of the governance teams of each site, as this group of people made major contributions to, and influence upon, the shape of the vision, practice and philosophy of the school. Ultimately, however, this was not possible due to the practical limitations experienced in each site described in Chapter four.

This selection of participants reflected the research design because it was their experiences, values and vision of the educational mission of the Church in their school which gave meaning to the concept and reality of the authenticity of their enterprise. Consideration also needed to be given to another participant, the researcher. The purpose of the research and the research questions for this project were fundamental in the experience of this researcher, yet there may be questions as to the

partiality of the researcher especially if the researcher's own perceptions, personal history and preferences have shaped the project (Sproston, 2005, p. 80). However, this researcher saw this as an advantage rather than a disadvantage for this research because the researcher's own reality as an educator has been constructed through the many ways he has interacted with the social world of his experience in four Catholic schools.

If we take our partiality as researchers, the fact that we always influence the direction of our work, indeed, that our work is in many ways an expression of who we are and who we are becoming, we can interact with our connection to the research not as a liability to be guarded against, but as an opportunity to make the research more meaningful by more fully appreciating our part, as researchers, in it. When our partiality, that is, what makes our relation to our research unique, is understood as an integral aspect of our methodology and data, the research and the researcher begin to share a mutually supportive relationship. (Haskell, Linds, & Ippolito, 2002 pars 2 & 3)

In other words, for this project the researcher's own experience was seen as a positive and not a negative factor in the outcome of the research. This experience cannot be ignored but neither can it be conceived that it might make the outcome of the research any the less significant.

#### *Demographic details*

All participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire prior to focus groups and interviews. Where there was observation, this information was gathered from other sources e.g. the teacher of a class, the organiser of a liturgy and so on. This is illustrated in Table 3.4 below.

*Table 3.4 Participant Demographics*

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Focus Group</b>	<b>One to One</b>	<b>Observation</b>
Gender	Male Female			
<b>Teachers and other staff</b>				
Years of Experience	1 – 5 years 6 – 10 years			

	> 10 years			
Positions of Leadership held				
Educated in a Catholic school	Yes No			
Number of Catholic Schools worked in				
<b>Parents</b>				
Educated in a Catholic school	Yes No			
Number of Years involved in the school				
Special responsibilities				
Former pupil?	Yes No			
<b>Students</b>				
Year Level				
No of years at school				
Responsibilities				
Attended other Catholic schools	Yes No			
<b>Governors</b>				
Role				
Years of involvement				
Involvement in other Catholic schools				

### Data Gathering Strategies

The procedures for data gathering were guided by the research design, in particular, the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. This study focused on the acting individual within a social system, in this case the Catholic school, rather than the social system itself. Hence, 'the direction of analysis is from the individual up through social groups, organisations, and institutions rather than from the system down through the parts to the individual role' (Bowers, 1989, p. 36). The strategies employed in this study affirmed the

notions that ‘the self is a never finished entity, but is continually evolving’. However, what is the role of an individual in a social system? ‘The (symbolic) interactionist views role as the consequence of a dynamic, interactive process between the self and the social context’ (Bowers, 1989, p. 38). This study sought to honour this understanding of the individual working within the social system which is Catholic education as expressed in a Catholic school.

The researcher adopted a two stage process for the research (Blumer, 1969). The first stage was that of exploration undertaken as focus group interviews. This stage set the parameters of the collected data which gave rise to further questions to be examined in stage two, inspection. There were fewer participants in the second stage than the first stage, to enable a deeper analysis of the issues which arose from a broader exploration of issues in stage one. This twofold process is illustrated in Table 3.5.

*Table 3.5 Data Gathering and Analysis Stages*

Data Collection Stage	Activity	Data Collection Methods	Data Analysis Methods
Stage 1 Exploration	Obtaining data from focus group discussions with the various groups & interviews at each site as well as examination of other data sources	Semi-structured interviews. Data triangulation	Thematic analysis
Stage 2 Inspection	Obtaining data from further discussions and interviews	In-depth, one to one semi-structured interviews Data triangulation	Thematic analysis

In keeping with the research design, multiple sources of data were accessed. Yin outlined six: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant

observation and physical artefacts (Yin, 2003, p. 86). It was anticipated that of these only the last two would not be possible for this research. There were constraints on participant observation because of the researcher's own full-time work commitments, and physical artefacts were not necessary in this research because the nature of the research problem required a focus on individuals and groups. These multiple sources of data or evidence are important for other reasons.

The use of multiple sources of evidence in case studies allows an investigator to address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioural issues. However, the most important advantage.....is the development of *converging lines of inquiry* (italics of the author), a process of triangulation. Thus, any finding or conclusion in a case study is likely to be much more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information, following a corroboratory mode. (Yin, 2003, p. 98)

Figure 3.2 which summarises the sources of data, is based on an adaptation of Yin's work.

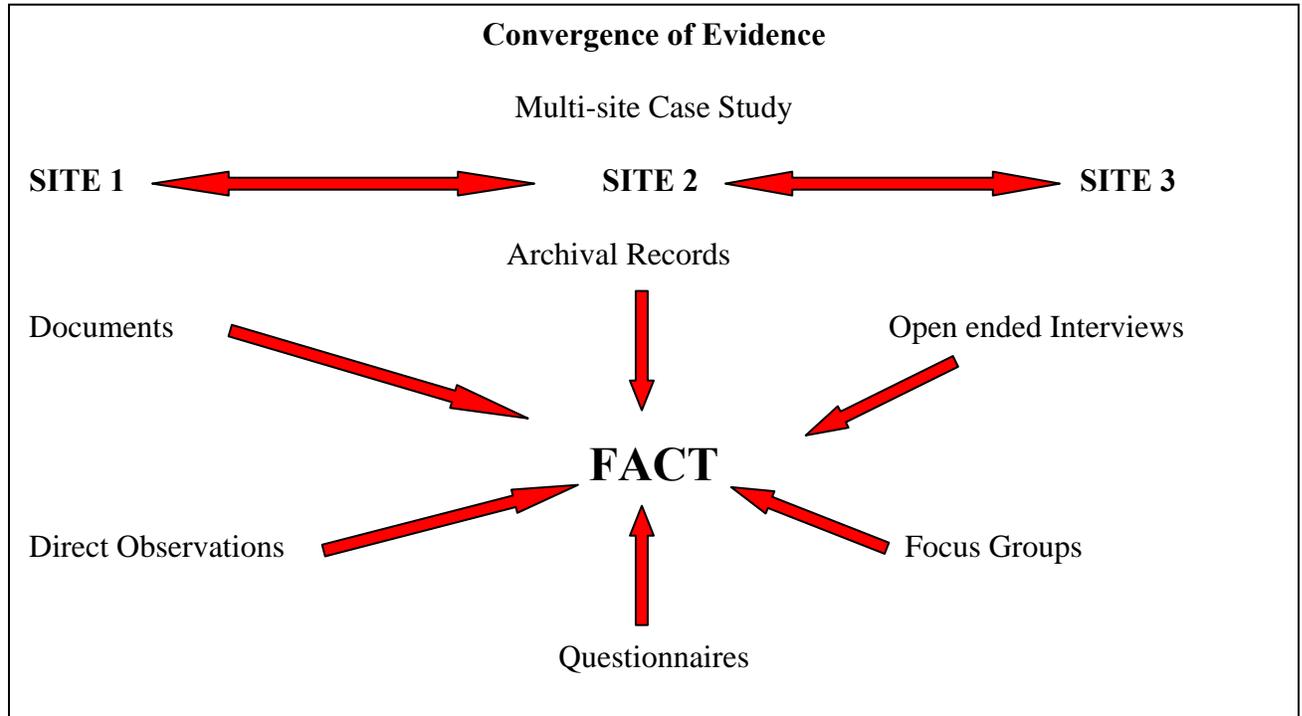


Figure 3.2 Convergence of Multiple Sources of Evidence (Yin, 2003, p. 100)

The type of triangulation chosen for this study was data triangulation which encouraged collection of information from multiple sources but aimed at corroborating the same phenomenon, 'the multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon' (Yin, 2003, p. 99).

As well as investigating three sites, the researcher also cross-checked data both within a particular site and across the sites. It was hoped that this would enable a more thorough exploration and analysis of the notion of authenticity of the contemporary Catholic school as understood and practised at the three settings selected. Triangulation is an established approach in quantitative methods (Cox & Hassard, 2005) and also qualitative methods as it reduces 'threats to internal and external validity' (Denzin, 1978). It also 'reduces the risk of systematic distortions inherent in the use of only one method' (Kelle, 2001, p. 1).

Interviews were chosen as the main vehicle for this research because participant observation was not possible for this researcher. The latter would have been ideal as it would have allowed the researcher to 'observe, participate in, and ask questions about those observations' (Bowers, 1989, p. 46). Direct observation would have served as another source of evidence and could have involved both formal (observations of meetings and classrooms) and casual or less formal observations (condition of buildings and classrooms, availability of resources). Site one defined itself as a Catholic school yet in many significant ways it was structured differently from sites two and three which would be characterised as more typical Catholic schools. It was its perception of alignment with the general purposes of Catholic education yet differentiated approach to embodying these purposes which were of interest to the researcher.

Questioning in the interview process was important for this research because the object of this research was a clarification of the authenticity of the contemporary Catholic school, a notion which may prove to be elusive. The researcher was not working from a presupposed definition of authenticity, and it was important that those being interviewed both knew this and were allowed to reflect on their own experience of what this might mean in their context. Bowers' advice was salient for this research:

It is crucial for the researcher not to provide the subjects with a definition ..... In a sincere attempt to be as helpful as possible, many research subjects request a definition and try to construct their responses around the researcher's expectations.....early interview questions are also constructed in a way that gives subjects permission to define the object [the authenticity of the contemporary Catholic school] in the way they perceive it [these questions] must communicate the researcher's acceptance of the subject as an expert on describing the object being investigated.' (Bowers, 1989, p. 46) (brackets inserted by the researcher).

In a similar vein, Yin referred to the open-ended nature of interview questions. He insisted that a "why" question may create defensiveness in an informant whilst a "how" question tends to be more friendly and non-threatening' (Yin, 2003, p. 90). Thus, those interviewed were treated as informants: they were asked about how they saw the facts of a matter and their opinions about events. They were not mere respondents to a pre-selected theory or proposition favoured by the researcher. A more focused interview approach over a set time, between 20 and 40 minutes, was also adopted where a certain set of questions was developed and used.

#### Analysis of Data

The analysis of the data collected was guided by the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism and the epistemology of social constructionism. The focus of the analysis was on how people understood their reality and chose to act and respond to it in their own setting.

For this data analysis to have significance it needed to be an iterative process as it was to involve more than a simple thematic analysis, but a framing and re-framing of the understandings of the authenticity of the Catholic education enterprise as described by the people interviewed and questioned for this study. The rich data gathered was examined and re-examined many times over and even verified with interviewees to ensure that accuracy of understanding was achieved. This illuminated important themes and categories which went toward answering the research questions for this study.

The type of analysis chosen for this study was that of the Constant Comparative Method of Analysis (CCM). Whilst CCM is generally associated with grounded theory (Haig, 1995) it aligns easily with qualitative analysis (Boeije, 2002) which is the basis of this multi-site case study. CCM lent itself to this multi-site case study because data comparisons were able to be made both within one site and across the three sites chosen for the case study. This provided a level of verifiability not always possible by limiting one's research to one site alone.

CCM was also chosen because it provided a systematic way of managing the large amounts of data which was generated across the three sites. Haig stated that:

The constant comparative method is an amalgam of systematic coding, data analysis and theoretical sampling procedures which enables the researcher to make interpretive sense of much of the diverse patterning in the data by developing theoretical ideas at a higher level of abstraction than the initial data descriptions. (Haig, 1995)

As such, it provided another description of the iterative process which this data analysis demanded. Dye elaborated these key concepts of CCM further:

As social phenomena are recorded and classified, they are also compared across categories. Thus, hypothesis generation (relationship discovery) begins with the analysis of initial observations. This process undergoes continuous refinement

throughout the data collection and analysis process, continuously feeding back into the process of category coding. (Dye, 2000)

The process of data comparison generated categories, but these were also related to other more general categories as they arose in the review of literature in Chapter two. The process of analysis and data collection of necessity went hand in hand. “The data in hand are then analysed again and compared with the new data.....the cycle of comparison and reflection on ‘old’ and ‘new’ data can be repeated several times”, (Boeije, 2002, p. 393).

However, this process cannot go on endlessly, because all the data needs to be manage and arranged in themes and categories which related to the research purpose and its related questions. How many categories are settled on finally needs to be determined. ‘It is only when new cases do not bring any new information to light that categories can be described as saturated’. This saturation point is important in being able to delimit the boundaries of investigation and theory development. Some themes or categories which appear dominant at first, may become less significant as more data is collected and analysed. ‘This means that cases can be easily assigned to one of the already existent categories in the growing theory’ (Boeije, 2002, p. 393). This iterative process as expressed in CCM is a form of filtering data so that the data is able to speak for itself.

The discussion provided above describes what CCM is but it does not describe how the analysis was carried out (Boeije, 2002, p. 392). Boeije developed a five step approach, however he made the point that the number of steps is not important because that depends on the kind of material that is involved (Boeije, 2002, p. 395). What follows is an adaptation of the work of Boeije to develop a step by step approach for constant comparison. A four step approach is proposed in table 3.6.

Table 3.6 Different steps of the constant comparative analysis

Step	Description	Aim	Important Questions	Results
<p><u>Step 1:</u> Comparisons <b>within</b> each category of participants in one site</p>	<p>Coding of transcripts. If reference is made more than once to a theme then relevant fragments are compared to see if this is new information or more of the same. Further comparisons are made to see what they have in common or how they differ and what is the context</p>	<p>To develop themes and to label them with the most appropriate codes.</p>	<p>-What codes are used to label the themes in the focus groups and one on one interviews? What do fragments with the same code have in common? -What is the main message of each interviewee and focus group? -Are there any 'silences'? Contradictions?</p>	<p>1. A summary of each interview and focus group. 2. A list of provisional codes, incipient conceptualization. 3. Memos which describe the analysis process</p>
<p><u>Step 2:</u> Comparisons <b>between</b> each category of participants in one site</p>	<p>In this step the interviews across categories of participants are compared to see if there is a variety of themes emerging.</p>	<p>The aim is to further develop the conceptualisation of the subject.</p>	<p>-Are the various participants talking about similar themes? -What are the similarities and differences between each category of participant? -What are the criteria underlying this comparison? -Are there any particular combinations of themes? What are the</p>	<p>The sorting process is being established. 'The relevant parts of the interviews are those that say something about the research questions' (Boeije, 2002, p. 398).</p>

			interpretations for these combinations?	
<u>Step 3:</u> Comparisons <b>between</b> categories of participants across the three sites	Similar to above except that now data triangulation becomes important. This time it is the unique experience of each school which is being compared: what does it mean to be an authentic school in the current time?	The aim here is to develop a larger picture of the work of Catholic schools and enrich the information being obtained. Another aim is to see if themes already identified are confirmed or disconfirmed.	-What does each group have to say about the different themes? -Which themes appear in one group and not another and vice versa? -Why do different groups view issues similarly or differently? -What silences does the data reveal?	This step is aimed at deepening insights on the themes already obtained.
<u>Step 4:</u> Comparisons between select individuals across the three sites, e.g. Principal, parents, students, teachers	By comparing particular individuals across sites data triangulation is taken to another level	The aim to understand more deeply the experiences and motivations e.g. of the decision makers. This can then be used for confirming and disconfirming purposes.	The questions are similar to the ones above. However, more prominence is given to the individuating factors which define each site.	It may be possible at this stage to test the silences previously detected and obtain more information about the themes already identified.

There are three points to be made about this approach. Firstly, it is not necessary to compare everything with everything else, however it is important to have a plan for what is to be compared. This is because there will be so much data generated that there must be some clear process to sift and identify what is important in answering the research questions.

Secondly, the steps described above are not a linear process. This reinforces the iterative nature of the approach taken to data analysis. Finally, the four step process described above

focuses on comparisons between interviews conducted to answer the research questions. External data such as mission statements, curriculum programs, films and the like have not been compared. 'Excluding these sources from the step by step procedure does not mean that the information and knowledge they provide should be ignored' (Boeije, 2002, p. 408). This material was used alongside the themes and categories already identified in the comparative process and as such was part of the more general interpretive process adopted for this study.

### Verification

Verification is related to the question of the rigour of the research undertaken for the study, and rigour raises questions such as, how close the data is to the truth and does the data say what it purports, in other words is it good data? Discussions about rigour in case study methodology employing a social constructionist epistemology also cannot avoid comparisons with quantitative or conventional research (Hoepfl, 1997; Morse, 2006, 2002). 'In quantitative research we are taught that *reliability and validity* are serious concerns.....in qualitative inquiry, we are concerned not with measurement but with description and meaning' (Morse, 2006, p. 5). Lincoln and Guba provided another perspective, 'validity cannot be dismissed simply because it points to a question that has to be answered one way or another: are these findings sufficiently authentic ....that I may trust myself in acting on their implications?' (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 178).

Whilst this study represented an example of qualitative research it is useful to look at a comparison for judging its quality with that of quantitative research so that important distinctions in terminology can be made. In table 3.7 below is taken from Hoepfl (1997), the terms quantitative and qualitative could be substituted for conventional and naturalistic.

*Table 3.7 Comparison of criteria for judging the quality of quantitative versus qualitative research (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 2)*

<b>Conventional (Quantitative) Terms</b>	<b>Naturalistic (Qualitative) Terms</b>
internal validity	credibility
external validity	transferability
reliability	dependability
objectivity	confirmability

Internal validity refers to the extent to which the findings or data accurately describe reality. The qualitative researcher, on the other hand, assumes the presence of multiple realities and attempts to represent these adequately. Credibility is the extent to which this has been done with attention to the data. It can be enhanced through the triangulation of data (already discussed earlier in this chapter). Hoepfl refers to four types: methods triangulation, data triangulation, triangulation through multiple analysts and theory triangulation. Member checking is another approach. Here a transcript may be sent back to an interviewee so that they can add or withdraw what they do not want to be there. This enables the interviewee to have themselves represented accurately. This study was a multi-site case study and as such provided ample opportunity for both triangulation and member checking.

External validity refers to the question as to whether or not the cause and effect relationship found in data can be generalised across other similar situations. For qualitative researchers, however, the term transferability is preferred because generalisations are seen more as working hypotheses rather than conclusions and hence ‘the researcher cannot specify the transferability of findings; he or she can only provide sufficient information that can then be used by the reader to determine whether the findings are applicable to the new situation’ (Hoepfl, 1997). This helps to underline the point that part of the purpose of this study was an exploration of how contemporary Catholic schools saw their work as authentic.

Reliability refers to the question as to whether the research is accurate; can the study be replicated and the same results achieved? Social constructionists, on the other hand, emphasise that the construction of understanding requires change and that these understandings might mean different things to different people, and hence replication is not possible (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

The idea of dependability, on the other hand, emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs. The research is responsible for describing the changes that occur in the setting and how these changes affected the way the research approached the study. (Trochim, 2006, p. 3)

Lincoln and Guba have referred to this process as an inquiry audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 317). This was important for this study because the phenomenon it tracked was spread across three sites all calling themselves Catholic schools but living out this meaning in changing contexts.

Objectivity refers to the question as to whether or not the inquiry is free of bias, values and prejudice. Qualitative research, on the other hand, 'relies on interpretations and is admittedly value bound, is considered to be subjective' (Hoepfl, 1997). Patton found that this division between objectivity and subjectivity unhelpful because paradigm debates are futile. Rather, he preferred 'empathic neutrality' (Patton, 1990, p. 55). Empathy 'is a stance toward the people one encounters, while neutrality is a stance toward the findings'. Lincoln and Guba suggested something more, a 'confirmability audit' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher needs to provide an audit trail made up of raw data, analysis notes, reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, personal notes and preliminary developmental information. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 320 - 321). This is not too dissimilar to some of the requirements of the constant comparative method described above. Trochim brought a different perspective: 'Qualitative research tends to assume that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the

study. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others' (Trochim, 2006). He suggested using the approach of getting another researcher to play the 'devil's advocate' role with respect to the results of the investigation. Another approach is to find negative instances that contradict prior observations. This final concept of confirmability lent itself to this study, again because the case study was a multi-site case study. Results of data collection and analysis in one site will either be corroborated or denied by the results obtained from other sites.

Analysis of core terms and concepts around the whole notion of verification shed light on what might give integrity and trustworthiness to the conclusions of the research. This description has not sought to enter the whole quantitative versus qualitative debate per se. Rather, it has been more helpful for this researcher to see this debate more as question of understanding one's own research paradigm. Ultimately, 'the (qualitative) researcher bears the burden of discovering and interpreting the importance of what is observed, and of establishing a plausible connection between what is observed and the conclusions drawn in the research report' (Hoepfl, 1997).

### Ethical Issues

This multi-site case study, by its very nature, was an ethical study. The epistemology of social constructionism proposes that reality is constructed and 'for those who accept metaphors of constructing, moral responsibility is central because one must be morally responsible for what one constructs or makes' (Smith & Deemer, 2000, p. 886). One implication of this was that the research undertaken must adhere to accepted standards of ethical research and 'researchers

must ensure the rights, privacy, and welfare of the people and communities that form the focus of their studies' (Berg, 2004, p. 43; Glesne, 2006).

During the course of this study, the primary concern was to safeguard the human rights of all its participants, the members of the three educational communities interviewed. Prior to the selection of participants ethics approval was sought from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Australian Catholic University. Important ethical considerations included informed consent, disclosure and the role of the researcher as well as data storage, privacy and confidentiality.

The following protocols were employed in the course of this study to protect the rights of all participants:

1. Appropriate permissions from diocesan and school authorities were obtained before entering any site.
2. All participants were provided with a full written description of the nature and purpose of the study, its processes and what was expected of their involvement.
3. Participants were informed that they have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time during the study's process, without penalty of any kind.
4. All participants were able to sign a form to indicate that they had received sufficient information regarding the study prior to interviews and observations.
5. Participants were able to have access to transcripts of all interviews and be provided opportunities to add and alter sections after reflection on them.
6. Coding protocols (e.g. pseudonyms) were adopted to protect the privacy and settings of all individuals, and protection of all confidentiality was outlined to all participants.
7. Participants will be consulted prior to publication of any data, results and conclusions.

8. Storage and security of all data was as per the procedures described by Australian Catholic University. Data access was restricted to those authorised by the researcher.

The researcher was known to a few participants in one of the sites and this may have posed a potential threat to confidentiality and anonymity. This was overcome by following interviewing guidelines and demonstrating respect for all participant contributions by providing them with transcripts, giving them opportunities to add and alter as well as by making them aware of emerging themes when checking their responses during the differing stages of the interviews.

#### Conclusion to this chapter

This study adopted the interpretive paradigm of research incorporating social constructionism and symbolic interactionism which informed data collection and analysis. Multi-site case study was chosen as the methodology and complements the research design in that rich data was able to be collected from defined participants across three sites. This contributed to an understanding of what contemporary Catholic schools regarded as the authenticity of their enterprise in a secular and pluralist society. Throughout the research process four questions focussed the study:

1. How do some Victorian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?
2. What impact, if any, have these changed circumstances had on the way these schools have arranged their work structures?
3. What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general?

4. Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?

The two following chapters provide vertical and horizontal analyses of the leading to the identification of key themes.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS & ANALYSIS – PART I

### Introduction

Chapter four is the first of two chapters which analyses the data. The analysis is first of all vertical in that it compares themes within each site and then horizontal (Chapter five) by comparing similar participants across the three sites. Table 4.1 summarises this thematic analysis and the relationship of the themes to the research questions. In each table the research questions are linked with the themes which have been identified. Chapter six will finally answer each research question whilst the analysis offered in chapters four and five seeks to begin this process by describing each group of participants' response and commenting on this in detail.

*Table 4.1 Comparison of Themes across the three sites and their relationship to the Research Questions*

<b>Site 1: Primary School</b>	<b>Site 2: Preparatory to Year 12 School</b>	<b>Site 3: Special School</b>	<b>Relationship to the Research Questions</b>
<i>Leadership Team</i>	<i>Leadership Team</i>	<i>Principal</i>	How do some Victorian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	
School as Church	Catholic identity of the school	RE curriculum implicit in the values and attitudes which inform practices daily	
Role of the REC	Ambiguity: parish-school relationship	Catholic schools are distinctive in the degree of pastoral care they offer, willingness to spend time with the children	
	Need for spirituality	This school is a sign of hope, healing and never turns anyone	

		away	What impact, if any, have these changed circumstances had on the way these schools arrange their work structures?
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>		
Role of priest	Parents lacking in Church literacy		
Role of teachers			
Parents need for the school			
<b>Religious Education Teachers</b>	<b>Religious Education Teachers</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Relationship to the Research Questions</b>
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general?  Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?
Role of parents	Variance between school RE and parent response	Students need to be emotionally available for learning	
- lack of support of the school	Significance of having a priest on staff	This school supports mainstream schools but should be separate	
- lack of time		Regular and positive connections with the home	
- lack of understanding		Sense of community a foundation for progress	
- lack of interest in Religious Education	<b>Sub-themes</b>		
<b>Sub-Themes</b>	Essential to have a background in RE to teach it effectively		
Schools as places of evangelization	Sense of community makes a difference		
<b>Parents</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Parents</b>	What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	
Need for spiritual values	The school supports Catholic values and practice	n/a	

Need for a faith system for children as part of a Catholic community	Catholic school promotes basic values better than state system		contemporary Catholic schools in general?
<i>Students</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Students</i>	How do some Victorian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?
	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	
n/a	Sense of community	Size of the school was a positive	
	Necessary to be taught good morals	This school has made a difference	
	Growing up Catholic is not the same as going to Church	Sense of community	
	<b>Sub Theme</b>		
	School patron is a great role model		

Data collection involved questionnaires for parents, teachers and students as well as individual and group interviews with teachers and some students. The data collected was spread over three sites. Site one was a Catholic primary school, site two was a Preparatory to Year 12 archdiocesan school, and site three was a small school which took between 18 and 20 students from Years 6 to 9 per semester. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the number of interviews that were conducted and the number of questionnaires that were returned.

*Table 4.2 Data Collection*

SITE Activity	SITE 1		SITE 2		SITE 3	
	Group	Status	Group	Status	Group	Status
<b>Interviews</b>	Leadership Team	√	Leadership Team	√	Principal	√
	RE Teachers	√	RE Teachers	√	Staff	x
	Students	x	Students	√	Students	x
	Parents	x	Parents	x	Parents	
		<b>2</b>		<b>3</b>		<b>2</b>
		<b>Interviews</b>		<b>Interviews</b>		<b>Interviews</b>

<b>Questionnaires</b>	Leadership Team	5	Leadership Team	6	Principal	x
	RE Teachers	5	RE Teachers	8	Staff	10
	Students	Not applicable	Students	Not applicable	Students	x
	Parents	2	Parents	3	Parents	
		<b>Total = 12</b>		<b>Total = 17</b>		<b>Total = 13</b>

Some comments need to be made about the amount of data collected. Interviews and questionnaires from the leadership teams and RE teachers in sites one and two were obtained without difficulty. In site three it was only possible to obtain an interview with the Principal and a separate interview with five staff, including two youth workers and three teachers. Because of the size of the school, 18 students and six staff, including the Principal there was no leadership team as such, and therefore no interview was possible. In site two it was only possible to obtain one group interview of students. It was difficult to organize student interviews in sites one and three largely because parents either did not respond to the invitations or the response was too small, for example two in site one. It was not possible to conduct any interviews with parents largely due to the difficulty of finding time suitable to parents, and this despite supervision being offered after school and offers being made to conduct the interviews in the morning when the students were driven to school. One can only surmise that parents were either working or simply unable to make the time because of prior commitments. One parent in a school wrote to the Principal expressing concern that she did not want to make comment as she feared that this might affect the enrolment of her second child. It is a concern of the researcher that the parent voice was not as obvious and direct as it could have been, and indeed is largely absent. This limited the possibility of a good balance in data presentation and analysis and had the impact that any findings and recommendations are

also limited in their range as these will not adequately represent a core element in Catholic education, the parent as partner in the educative process.

The rate of return of the questionnaires was generally quite good. In lieu of an interview with students in site three, it was possible to obtain ten questionnaire responses, and a specific questionnaire was designed for this purpose. No parents from site three returned any questionnaires, in all probability because of the fact that students only stay at the school for a period of six months and then move on or return to their school of origin. The invitation was made with the full support of the Principal and even so no responses were forthcoming. Five parent questionnaire responses in total were received from sites one and two and none from site three.

Overall, three points can be made about this data collection process. Firstly, in the initial design of the research it was proposed that there would be a fourth category of participant in the research and this was to be the governors of the schools (Chapter three). This did not prove practical and each Principal indicated this when each school was approached, so this category was omitted. Secondly, it was difficult to obtain interviews with students in two of the three sites, and the students who did respond to the questionnaire in site two, and took part in an interview were in Years 8 and 9 (approximately 13-14 years old). The selection of sites meant that none of the students was older than 14 years, so students in the senior years were not represented in the group that took part in the interviews. Ten students in site three provided questionnaire responses only. Thirdly, the majority of the data collected came from school leadership teams and teachers, those teaching RE in sites one and two and non-RE teachers in site three. Thus, whilst the initial intent had been to involve a larger variety of

participants, practicalities dictated that data was generated mainly from three groups and not the four originally proposed.

The following sections of this chapter provide a vertical analysis of the data according to the Constant Comparative Method of analysis as described in the previous chapter of this thesis. Step one consisted of comparisons **within** each category of participants in one site and step two consisted of comparisons **between** each category of participants in one site. The purpose of this vertical analysis was first to examine the general themes that arose within one school site, and second to discover which of these themes were consistent across participants in the same site. Chapter five then examines thematic comparisons between categories of participants across the three sites examining more closely comparisons between individuals and groups across the three sites, e.g. Principals, leadership teams, RE teachers, students and parents. This is a horizontal analysis which broadens the thematic comparisons looking for points of similarity and difference between the three sites.

#### Coding used in the Research

Specific coding for the interviews was adopted to easily identify participants in the different sites but also to safeguard their anonymity. No such coding was used in the questionnaire data.

The coding is summarised in table 4.3.

*Table 4.3 Coding for the Participants in the Research*

Coding adopted for this research related specifically to interviews reported in the data analysis.

Coding for describing sites and participants was as follows:

A. Number of the Site: **1, 2 and 3**

B. Type of participant:

- i) Leadership Team: **L**.
- ii) **RE** for Religious Education Teacher
- iii) **ST** for Student
- iv) **P** for Parent

C. Specific number for participant: **1 – 10**.

Within the leadership team the numbering signified the following –

**1 = Principal, 2 = Religious Education Coordinator, 3 = Curriculum Coordinator and 4 = Deputy Principal**

SITE 1	SITE 2	SITE 3
Leadership Team <b>1L1 = Principal</b> <b>1L2 = Religious Education Coordinator</b> <b>1L3 = Curriculum Coordinator</b> <b>1L4 = Deputy Principal</b>  Religious Education Teachers <b>1RE1, 1RE2, 1RE3, 1RE4, 1RE5</b>	Leadership Team <b>2L1 = Principal</b> <b>2L2 = Religious Education Coordinator</b> <b>2L3 = Curriculum Coordinator</b> <b>2L4 = Deputy Principal</b> <b>2L5 = Other 4</b> <b>2L6 = Other</b>  Religious Education Teachers <b>2RE1, 2RE2, 2RE3, 2RE4, 2RE5, 2RE6</b>  Students <b>2ST1, 2ST2, 2ST3 (Year 9 Students)</b> <b>2ST4, 2ST5 (Year 8 students)</b>	School Principal <b>3L1 = Principal</b>  Staff Members <b>3SM1, 3SM2, 3SM 3, 3SM4, 3SM5</b>

Vertical Thematic Analysis within each School Site

*Framework*

For sites one to three a table is provided explaining the demographics of the participants in each site as well as a summary of the themes which emerged in each category of participant in

both interviews and questionnaires. There is also reference to the research questions to which the themes apply. (see also Table 4.1 above)

Site One: Catholic Primary school

*Leadership Team*

Table 4.4 provides some information about the leadership team at this school.

*Table 4.4 Site One Leadership Team Demographics*

Gender		Position of Leadership		Years of Experience
Female	Male	Current	Previous	
4	1	Deputy**	Deputy, REC, Student Wellbeing	16
		Curriculum Coordinator	REC*, Level Coordinator	25
		Literacy** Coordinator	No mention	28
		Principal	REC, Senior School Coordinator	26
		REC	No mention	18

\* REC = Religious Education Coordinator

\*\* The Deputy Principal and Literacy Coordinator were unavailable for the interview but provided questionnaires.

*Site One Leadership Team Interview Data*

One way to determine the possible themes which emerged in the interview was to examine the number of times a word appeared in the transcript. Themes and word frequency are listed in the table which follows.

*Table 4.5 Themes and Word Frequency and relationship to the Research Questions*

Themes	Relationship to Research Questions	Word	Frequency
School as Church	How do some Victorian Catholic schools understand	Church	11
Role of the		Un-Churched	2

REC	and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?		
<b>Sub-themes</b>		Priest	10
Role of priest		Parents	14
Role of teachers		Community	5
Parents need for the school		Relationship	8
		Role of the REC	17
	Catholic	26	
	Teacher	11	

Two themes and three sub-themes emerged during the leadership team interview, these being the idea of school as Church and the role of the REC, with the sub-themes being the role of teachers, the role of the priest and the parents' need for a Catholic education for their children.

The idea of the school as Church emerged a number of times in the interview. In discussing the preparation for Easter and then Confirmation the Principal said that the 'school is being the Church to our families'. Later, in discussing the death of a pupil:

Going back to the school being Church, when x died, the Rosary and the Mass, it was us who did that, it wasn't the parish at all. They (the family) wouldn't even go to the parish, they would come to us. (1L1)

The REC said that the 'Catholic Church is alive in a school community.....you've got people involved but they're not necessarily going to Church...if we start having a relationship with them they might come.' (1L2)

Section 2.5 of the review of literature in Chapter two discussed school and parish dissonance and the lack of alignment between the goals of the Catholic school and the local Church. At this school there appeared to be an 'us and them' approach to a situation involving the death of the student and how the funeral liturgy was managed. In some ways this reflected the separation of parish and school that was discussed in Chapter two of this thesis. The Principal and REC stated in their interview that the family came to the school for support

rather than the parish. This was significant, firstly because it would appear that the family did not seem to go to the parish, and secondly it also appeared that the school seemed naturally to step in to support the family. There was further significance in this experience, namely that even though the school seemed to have replaced the Church in this instance, the family at least seemed to know that it could rely on the school in this difficult situation. Of course, the funeral was held in the local parish Church. Whilst the Church's own literature (RDECS, 1988) urges activities 'that bring the school community and the local Church together' (par. 30), this does not always appear to be the case. The ties which have traditionally brought school and parish together, especially financial need, seem no longer relevant in the contemporary situation.

The role of the REC was also seen as crucial in a Catholic school. It was mentioned seventeen times in total during the interview. The Principal saw the REC as a significant person in the school and giving leadership in many areas including the sacramental program and liturgy.

I was thinking how blessed we are to have Y as our REC because I feel there is an enormous pressure placed on (her) this is an enormous task. You need someone who has lived the faith, she lifts the place. (1L1)

The Curriculum Coordinator emphasized this importance in talking about the younger teachers getting the leadership they needed, 'Everyone just goes to the REC. We need someone like the REC who has the experience', (1L3). The REC herself was also able to say, 'I don't think you can ask too much of a classroom teacher. I think (they) are burnt. They're getting out after a few years, and they say you are the REC, you do it' (1L2).

The role of the REC in any school cannot be underestimated and in this school the importance of this role was much emphasised by the leadership team and later by the RE

teachers. The review of literature provided in Chapter two discussed the importance of the need to re-shape the idea of work in Catholic schools to be expressed as vocation and ministry. The role of REC is more than another position of leadership with attendant monetary and time allowance. In this school it seemed to go to the core of the school itself, and this was expressed in terms of how difficult it would be without this particular person. In other words, there were other qualities this person brought to the role, her openness, availability and support of RE teachers, which were more highly appreciated than any particular administrative abilities this person may have had. It was notable that in site one as well as in site two, the role of the REC was seen as significant in more ways than a simple administrative and RE curriculum role. In this school the role involved more than setting up the class-based curriculum. The recent insistence by the Catholic Education Office Melbourne for REC's to be recognised at the level of Deputy Principal, as welcome as this might be to some, may not necessarily be the approach needed. This is not to say that these people should not be recognised in terms of better remuneration. Rather, it is a suggestion of this research that more attention needs to be given to the qualitative aspect of this role in the school setting.

The review of literature focused on the role of Principal and made specific mention of the added pressures Principals are finding in their work today (Mellor 2005). However, this discussion did not extend to the role of the REC. Both in site one and later in site two it became obvious that the REC was generally at the forefront of the school's pastoral response to students and families. The discussion in the review of literature examined the notions of vocation and ministry and how these might be applied in the school setting. It would appear that this situation is suggestive of a need to view the role of the REC as perhaps expressive of a specific ministry in Catholic schools, and this is a potential conclusion of this thesis.

In this parish primary school the priest was seen as pivotal: ‘We’ve got a fantastic priest across the road’, said the Principal. In a Catholic school, says the REC,

You try to run the line that says here’s the best of what it’s like to be a Catholic. It says you are welcome, you are accepted, and you are loved: that’s our parish priest. You are loved, wanted, accepted, come as you are (1L2).

Equally, some anecdotes were provided where the priest in other parishes was not seen as a positive presence. These comments were significant in the context of this parish primary school, since in the example given above, a family in the school came to the school for support rather than the parish when their child died. Beyond this there is the situation of parishes having only one priest or parishes which have been merged so that priests can be shared. With the diminishing number of priests, what then can be made of the pivotal role of priest in the school? In the secondary school setting, unless families are involved with their parishes, there is the question of how they and their children have access to the sacraments. Access to the sacraments becomes an important aspect of a Catholic school when such access does not occur when families are not part of a parish community, a point made by the Principal in site two (2L1).

Well we have formal connections, but we struggle here even as part of the parish of (name of parish) because of that. Possibly what’s enabled us to go a bit further is because we have a full time (name of religious order) chaplain. If we did not have access to a chaplain here we would not have access to liturgy as much as we have, I don’t think, so I think that’s been a real plus for us.

The role of the priest in the contemporary Catholic school was also raised in site two, especially as a priest was actually an employee of the school. The school had access to the sacraments because the priest was a member of staff rather than a chaplain appointed by the Archbishop, and who generally came from the ranks of the canonical administrators in a given

regional secondary school. The researcher is aware of only one other school which has a priest on staff.

According to the REC the teacher's relationship with a child was also seen as important in communicating the Christian message.

If you're teaching from the heart with a relationship in mind.....whatever you say they will listen because they've got a relationship which has happened. And so therefore with RE and with the faith that we want the kids to hopefully develop so that they can continue with the Church, its going to come from relationships, a teacher, a grandparent who takes them to Mass, a ritual, or in daily prayer (1L2).

The REC asserts the primacy of the relationship between teacher and student or significant other and child in respect to the transmission of faith. In a Catholic school this has implications in the selection of RE teachers. Many graduate teachers from Australian Catholic University in Melbourne have RE as an additional method to their other teaching methods. However, should there be a requirement that RE teachers also have more, for example, a specialisation in the area? Equally the question could be asked as to whether the four walls of the classroom should be the main locus of RE teaching. Contemporary courses in school RE insist on a core of knowledge delivered in a systematic program across the school. Equally there may also be a need for an insistence that those who teach RE be adequately specialised to teach the subject. The REC's statement above might also be hinting that these same teachers must also have something more that they bring to the teaching of RE, a relationship framed in a faith context. In other words, the work of teaching RE is a more complex task than teaching other subjects. This relates to the broader question of how Catholic schools value the work of the RE teacher. It is a suggestion of this research that in the context of contemporary Catholic schools the work of an RE teacher has assumed greater importance because teaching RE as platform for faith is a more complex process than it has been in the past.

It was significant that parents as a group were mentioned 14 times by the leadership team during the interview. First, in relation to their need for the school to provide children with the basics of the faith, the REC said, ‘what we want is to get the parents involved – “if my kid’s got a job I’ll move heaven and earth to be there when my child is involved”’ (1L2). This was a reference to the sacramental program and how parents were drawn to Church through their children’s involvement. There was however, another side to this, ‘you’ve got people in the parish setting who scorn the involvement of the non-Churched taking over our faith’ (1L2). There was an implication that these people were not accepted in the parish community. Such an attitude could be destructive of the efforts of schools and parishes working together to build inclusive community.

Parents also made choices about a school for their child. ‘(the school) being Catholic does not really rate highly’, said 1L3, and ‘we have moved on from the era when we said, “I’m a Catholic and my kids are going to a Catholic school”’, said 1L1. But parents also ‘put the Catholic school on the same row as the state school’, said 1L1. One other member instanced parents inspecting the school and making notes so as to compare it with the local state school, “‘You’ve got a lovely environment, look at all those computers, look at the nice uniform, you’ve got good discipline and her friend’s coming here.” But I say we’ve got the Catholic ethos first which is my position’ (1L2). Whilst the Catholic ethos of the school was paramount for the school leadership team it was their perception that this was not always the case for the parents. This perception was supported by some of the empirical data examined in the review of literature. ‘The vast majority of parents who are sending their children to Catholic schools either do not practise Catholicism or are not Catholics’ (McLaughlin 2005, p. 218).

*Site One Leadership Team Questionnaire Data*

The questionnaire data is now examined for consistency with that of the interviews and whether or not new themes emerged. The questionnaire asked for specific information about each leadership team member (this is described in the demographic data in Table 4.1 above). Then it sought four specific responses, a) their reason for working in a Catholic school, b) what they appreciated about working in a Catholic school, c) the challenges they faced, and finally d) a comment on a given statement. The data came from five questionnaires and these are summarized in Table 4.6.

*Table 4.6 Questionnaire Responses for the site one Leadership Team*

<i>My Reason for working in a Catholic school</i>
Belonging to a faith community (4) The faith dimension (5)
<i>The things I most appreciate about working in a Catholic school</i>
Time to pray The sacraments Pastoral Care and sense of community Involvement in the RE program The people
<i>The things I find challenging about working in a Catholic school</i>
Mixed marriages and educating children in the faith Teaching RE to children who are not Churched Accountability Resources needed to lead the community on a faith journey Not sharing the same values
My reflections on the following statement: <i>Catholic schools are no longer institutions for the converted. It would appear that their purposes are challenged by a contemporary demographic which finds little formal relationship with the institutional Church. Yet these schools still hold a strong enough attraction for parents to select them as their school of choice for their children: at a time when enrolments have never been higher identification with the institutional Church in its various forms has never been lower. This situation poses a challenge to the authenticity of the Catholic school.</i>
1. Authenticity is not challenged but we are challenged to assist the Church in educating parents. 2. Parents have passed over faith education to the school because they are no longer

Churched: bigger onus on the school.

3. Parents are concerned about convenience not the Church

4. School is full with a large waiting list: authenticity requires that beliefs and practices are genuine

5. Catholic school and Church have little in common: not much difference in reasons for choosing a Catholic school and a state school. Then there's the issue of secondary schools that are linked.

The first two elements of the questionnaire, that is the reason for and what is most appreciated about working in a Catholic school related to their choice to work in a Catholic school and their experience, as well as whether or not the experience supported this choice. In almost all cases there was strong support for the notion that a Catholic school was a place where personal faith could be expressed and this was a vital part of building community. This element was important in terms of the faith education purpose of a Catholic school. That its teachers sought to express their faith in this community can only be positive for the students who would be looking up to their teachers for the example they needed to see that a committed Christian life was possible.

The next two elements, the challenges they faced and their response to a possible description of the contemporary situation in Catholic schools, pointed first to an apparent lack of faith understanding among the children, but more importantly to the reality that parents themselves had reasons for choosing the Catholic school other than those which gave meaning to them as school leaders. There was a significant amount of comment and questioning about parent choice: 'there has been a shift for schools to "do it"' (1L4), 'it' meaning educating in faith because the parents did not feel able to do this themselves, and neither were they co-operating with the school in this role. The same team member went on to say, 'our challenge is to assist the Church in educating our parents' (1L4). These same ideas were expressed in a different way by one other team member, 'parents are concerned about convenience not the

Church' (1L3). The researcher did not find that members of the leadership team were derogatory of parents. Rather their observations simply pointed out that transparency and consistency between school and parents can no longer be assumed as it may have once been. In other words, the comment that 'our challenge is to assist the Church in educating our parents' is significant because the seeming parent disengagement with faith education in the school was also a symptom of their disengagement with their local Church. The notion that parents are the first educators in faith of their children may not always be the case, and therefore there seemed to be more pressure on schools to make up what was lacking in this core area.

The apparent disengagement of parents with the faith education of their children and their reliance on the Catholic school to manage this instead would appear to pose a challenge to the Catholic school and its role. The review of literature provided earlier in this thesis pointed to some possible reasons for this disengagement. The Church statement, (CSSTM 1998, par 1), pointed to a 'crisis of values', Further, 'in countries of long-standing evangelization', rapid structural change and globalization of the economy had an impact with the result that the Christian faith as a reference point struggles to be a 'convincing interpretation of existence'. Some of this was backed by the social analysis offered by Mackay (2001) where he states that Australia 'has been living through four socio-cultural revolutions at once' (pp. 2-3): a gender revolution, an information revolution, a cultural identity revolution; and an economic revolution'. Education in faith in this context is therefore, a complex activity challenging not only parents but the contemporary Catholic school.

*Site One Religious Education Teachers*

It was significant that almost all teachers were either accredited to teach religious education or had a qualification in RE or Theology. This was similarly the case for teachers in site two.

Clearly recruitment and professional learning of RE teachers was important for these schools.

There were young teachers as well as more experienced teachers. Table 4.7 describes some of the characteristics of the RE teachers in this school.

*Table 4.7 Site One Religious Education Teacher Demographics*

Gender		Religious Education Qualification	Year Levels Taught	Years of Experience
Female	Male			
5	0			
		B.Theol, RE Accreditation	Prep, 1, 2 & 6	5
		RE Minor B.Arts, RE Accreditation	P – 3	10
		Not mentioned	P – 2	15
		B.Ed. 4 units RE/Theology	Prep	1 year 3 months
		Dip T (Primary) Catholic Teachers College	1 – 4	25

*Site One Religious Education Teachers Interview Data*

Once again a word search was used to gain some insight into possible themes and the frequently recurring words are shown in Table 4.8.

*Table 4.8 Themes and Word Frequency from Religious Education Teachers interviews*

Themes	Research Questions	Word	Frequency
<b>Role of parents</b>	What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary	Parents	29
- lack of support of the school		Sacrament	20
- lack of time		Church	35
- lack of understanding		Catholic	68
- lack of interest in		Teacher	13

Religious Education	Catholic schools in general?		
<b>Schools as places of evangelization</b>		Community	9
	Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?	Priest	11
		Parish	21

The Religious Education teachers made substantial comments on the role of parents. The predominant view was that parents showed a lack of understanding and engagement with the Church, its teachings RE classes. When it came to the sacramental program and the celebration of sacraments they seemed to show a ‘lack of respect’ and ‘a lack of a sense of the sacred’ where behaviour in Church was like ‘behaviour in movie theatres’ (1RE1). The same teacher reflected that ‘at the Confirmation vigil night I felt like Jesus in the temple.’ The students demonstrated a ‘lack of prior knowledge before coming to school’ and ‘they didn’t even know the prayers, the Hail Mary, the Our Father’. There was a sense in which the teachers were ‘starting from scratch....I think you just have to assume they don’t know anything, and start from the basics’ (1RE3).

One teacher (1RE4) reflected on teaching a unit of work,

From cradle to grave, your development from baby to adult, and I said, “when you get married and you have a baby....” Well one of my kids put his hand up and said, “my parents aren’t married”. And I’m thinking, that’s fair enough, yes, you don’t have to be married to have a baby yet in a Catholic school I would have assumed.....that you would have been...I’ll never make that assumption again. (1RE4)

This is a simple yet stark example of the lack of consonance between what teachers assume and what student and parent beliefs and practices might be. A question is raised regarding the teaching of core Catholic values in an environment where these are not adhered to or necessarily believed. This question goes to the heart of the issue of authenticity which is a focus of this research. How does this teacher seek authenticity in this situation when the values expressed by the student are in contrast with Church teaching? Perhaps this is also reflective of the 'crisis of values' already referred to in CSTTM (1998)

This experience also pointed to a lack of a sense of community, and this seemed to give added responsibility to the school:

Because they don't go to Church there isn't that knowing each other.....they rarely know each other. So the school feels that it has had to take on the responsibility of making the community happen rather than the Church. They don't go to Church.  
(1RE4)

In this statement there seemed to be an acceptance that if the parish was struggling to attract families to Church at least the school could do this through the sacramental program. Another teacher summed up parent attitudes as follows, 'well they're teaching them (the students), so I don't have to worry', (1RE2). Nevertheless, parents still chose Catholic schools for their children because they thought 'they provide a caring environment and a more rounded education', (1RE2). As well, the students were quite positive about their Religious Education, especially in the younger grades. 'They show a huge interest in grade three, they're like sponges.....higher up it's worn out a bit', (1RE2). What is being 'worn out' is the 'huge interest'. This is the specific challenge of the RE teacher in upper primary and secondary school.

However, there was also an acceptance that parents were under pressure themselves to the extent that Church and Church activities were not an important part of their family lives. 'People are just too busy, too busy. You have a look at the kids at the out-of-school-hours program, amazing. There are lot of two working parents' (1RE1) and Church 'is not their priority on the weekend.'(1RE1). 1RE1 also put it this way,

The changes in society must play some role. People have less leisure time, they have less family time, because of all their commitments.....I am amazed at the materialism that happens and I am wondering whether Churchgoers have stopped because they're worn out with working for material things and running children around to sports of a Saturday....and Sundays are their only morning to have a sleep-in.

This also resonates very much with Mackay's (2001) analysis of society that secularism may be the result of an accumulation of social change that people are not able to deal with.

Finally, teachers believed that what schools were doing was 'evangelization because you hope that the majority were baptized before they came in the door.....it is probably their only experience of Church', (1RE1). To this extent there was still a future for the Catholic school. 'If there is a future for the Church then there will be. If there's no future for the Church then there won't be. You can't have one without the other', (1RE1). This last statement seemed to sum up the understanding that the Catholic school played a significant part in the educational role of the Church. It also interlinks Church and school inextricably in that the reason for the existence of the Catholic school lies in the educational mission of the Church and no other reason. It was interesting that these comments came from highly committed RE teachers who also seemed to reflect the crisis of belief and practice cited by Saker's research (O'Brien 2005; Rosengren, 2005) or that of Generation Y (Singleton, Mason & Webber, 2004 & 2006). The literature reviewed in Chapter two did not consider the experience of those teachers for whom there was no crisis of faith in teaching RE. In other

words, it is important to also give voice to the experience of committed RE teachers as much as it is to reflect on the practice of those teachers who have difficulty with their faith and yet teach in Catholic schools.

*Site One Religious Education Teachers' Questionnaire Data*

The questionnaire data is now examined to discover how consistent its themes were with the interview data and whether or not new themes emerged. The questionnaire first sought specific information about each RE Teacher (this is described in the demographic data in Table 4.5 above). Then it sought four specific responses, a) their reason for working in a Catholic school, b) what they appreciated about working in a Catholic school, c) the challenges they faced and then d) to comment on a specific statement. The data came from five questionnaires and the responses are summarized in Table 4.9.

*Table 4.9 Site one Religious Education Teachers Questionnaire Responses*

<i>My Reason for working in a Catholic school</i>
To continue working in the same setting they were taught in (4) To teach Catholic ethos and to show by example Christian values. All five responses expressed the desire 'share my faith and knowledge'.
<i>The things I most appreciate about working in a Catholic school</i>
The Principal (3), Priest (1) and REC (1) support. Colleagues, community spirit, common faith background
<i>The things I find challenging about working in a Catholic school</i>
When most children and their families do not attend Church (2) Private life being in conflict with Church teachings Expectations to attend religious functions when this is not as important to the families (2) Being a Religious Educator often without help from parents Limited resources and finances (2) To give emphasis to RE in all the interruptions
My reflections on the following statement: <i>Catholic schools are no longer institutions for the converted. It would appear that their purposes are challenged by a contemporary demographic which finds little formal relationship with the institutional Church. Yet these schools still hold a strong enough</i>

*attraction for parents to select them as their school of choice for their children: at a time when enrolments have never been higher identification with the institutional Church in its various forms has never been lower. This situation poses a challenge to the authenticity of the Catholic school.*

Agreement with this statement expressed in the following terms:

1. Catholic schools are not chosen for RE even though sacraments occur: parents do not see this as part of a faith journey and commitment. They are chosen for 'their good learning environments' and their caring and pastoral aspects (2)
2. Catholic schools are chosen because they want Christian values taught and because they went to Catholic schools, through a sense of tradition
3. Parents experience a warm community feeling in a Catholic school which instils confidence to make good choices, prepare children to cope with difficulties in life
4. Parents seem to expect that educators can give pastoral care and Church experiences without support from the home environment

There were similarities between the responses of school leaders and RE teachers in respect to reasons for working in a Catholic school. The leaders wrote of belonging to a faith community and the teachers expressed this in terms of sharing faith and knowledge, and wanting to continue working in an environment in which they were educated. The challenges expressed were almost identical and especially in respect to the lack of sharing of values between school and home.

Though there were many comments about the lack of consonance between home and school in respect to the purposes of the Catholic school, neither RE teacher or member of the leadership team actually proposed a way of dealing with this situation. Whilst reference was made to the supportive parish priest it was equally acknowledged that in a crisis families seemed drawn to the school first rather than the parish. This was significant for this research as it described a gap that may exist between how Catholic schools see themselves as operating and what parents believe they need for their children to be educated appropriately. The gap was in the seeming lack of alignment between the stated purposes of the Catholic school and the reasons why parents initially chose this school. How this gap may be closed is one of the

foci of this research. There was also the further gap in the personal faith experience of families as expressed in sending their children to a Catholic school yet not wanting to express this further by involvement in their local Church. This was once again reflective of the research reviewed in Chapter two (McLaughlin 2005; 2006). Bemoaning poor Church attendance and criticism of Catholic schools (Harrington, 2006) avoids the reality that at least the families align themselves with Catholic schools. This seems to be an indicator that perhaps the Church needs to review the role of Catholic schools more broadly than it has done so to date. The review of literature pointed to this actually being an ecclesiological problem and not just one with which school and education authorities must deal (Battams 2002, 2006).

#### *Site One Parents*

Both leadership team and teachers commented on the role of parents and the impact this had on their ability to manage the faith development of the young people they taught. They had much to say about parent attitudes and beliefs about school choice, in particular their lack of engagement with school and Church. That only two parents returned the questionnaire might also be an expression of this perception, and yet parents did not make similar comments about the teachers. Nonetheless, it was also important in the context of this research that parents too were given a voice. Both parents were female and both had attended Catholic schools. They also had one and two children respectively attending a Catholic school.

#### *Site One Parent Questionnaire Data*

The data shown in Table 4.10 came from two questionnaires provided by parents in this site.

Table 4.10 Site one Parent Questionnaire Responses

<i>Reflections on being educated in a Catholic school</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discipline, respect for teachers, academic, little sport, good reputation for high grades and discipline compared to the local state school</li> <li>2. Taught by two religious orders: what was taught at home was followed up at school. Sacramental years remembered with fondness.</li> </ol>
<i>Reasons for choosing a Catholic school for my child's education</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discipline and some teaching of faith/spiritual values. Main reason was for 'better class of families of higher socio-economic background compared to local state primary school'. The latter have moved away from traditional Christian beliefs</li> <li>2. Need for child to grow up with 'a faith system behind him' and 'the Catholic system is the best place for that to happen'.</li> </ol>
<i>The things I appreciate most about my child's education in a Catholic school</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Likeminded families/spiritual education</li> <li>2. Puts into practice the teachings of Jesus. 'Principal and teachers dedicated to their vocation'</li> </ol>
<i>What are your expectations of a Catholic school education for your child?</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To nurture and accept my child for who s/he is; to teach him/her faith and spiritual values; to teach discipline and respect; and to teach to a high standard.</li> <li>2. That he is taught the teachings of Jesus; receive and participate in the sacraments; learn and grow as an individual and be part of a Catholic community where he can develop his own faith</li> </ol>
<p>My reflections on the following statement:  <i>Catholic schools are no longer institutions for the converted. It would appear that their purposes are challenged by a contemporary demographic which finds little formal relationship with the institutional Church. Yet these schools still hold a strong enough attraction for parents to select them as their school of choice for their children: at a time when enrolments have never been higher identification with the institutional Church in its various forms has never been lower. This situation poses a challenge to the authenticity of the Catholic school.</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enrolments are high and people do not have the same commitment to Sunday attendance, it's not as high as when I was a child. Rarely attend. Life holds so much stress to achieve and have: this attitude leaves little time to for attending or being involved in Church. People work longer hours and Sundays are precious for family outings.</li> <li>2. I want my child to have the same education as I did. People still feel it is the best. People feel that attendance is not necessary to be a good person but still hold strong Catholic beliefs.</li> </ol>

A comparison between the two responses revealed the following. Firstly, parent one used the language of Church and Catholic education, 'faith system', 'strong Catholic family', 'I loved the sacramental years' more than parent two who used the more generic terms 'spiritual

values', 'spiritual education', and 'teaching of faith'. Secondly, the main reasons for choosing a Catholic school for their child were different. Parent one said 'to grow up having a faith system' and for parent two it was for 'better class of families of higher socio-economic background compared to local state primary school'. Parent one was also more specific about wanting a sacramental program for their child whereas this was not mentioned by parent two. Both parents made it clear that a Catholic school must also be a good school in that it must prepare their children for life, teaching them 'respect' and 'discipline'. Parent one implied a closeness to the Church but accepted that lack of Church attendance does not necessarily mean that Catholic beliefs are any the less important. On the other hand, parent two made it clear that she was not a Churchgoer, 'rarely', and acknowledged that the pressures of everyday life had an impact on Church involvement, 'this attitude leaves little time to for attending or being involved in Church'.

Both parent responses reflected the perceptions of the leadership team and RE teachers in respect to pressures faced by parents today which affected Church involvement, the reliance on the school as the main source of faith education but also the strong desire for some form of 'spiritual values' and sacramental preparation and involvement for their children. Both responses also reflected different perceptions about the purpose for sending a child to a Catholic school when it came to describing the interest of parents in RE, even though it was stated in the teacher interviews that parents rarely engaged teachers in discussion about RE. Only one teacher could recall a parent discussing RE with her and that was to question her about the difference in work brought home by each child in the same grade, (1RE1).

This comparison cannot be generalised as being typical parent understandings about reasons for choice of a Catholic school, but it reflected the perceptions of the teachers and

leadership team in site one. Beyond this, though, it is obvious to the researcher that such understandings are also descriptive of the gap already referred to above. Contemporary social settings are not as supportive of Church and school connections as they once were, one example of this being working hours (Mackay, 2001; Sullivan, 2000). There was a time when there was no work for half of Saturday and all of Sunday and this allowed leisure time on weekends where Church initiated activities could flourish. That weekends for many are now just two more work days in the working week must have an effect on how people prioritise their choices, whether this is going to Church or just socialising. This impact is seen in the number of young people now employed in casual work in their time off school on weekends. This reality, among others, affects how the Church and Catholic schools in particular go about the business of making the Christian message relevant. In other words working on weekends may not be a choice and this choice may also affect how one manages one's Church involvement. Chapter one reflected on the history of the foundation of the Catholic education system in Australia (O'Farrell, 1968; Campion, 1987; O'Donoghue & Potts, 2004; O'Brien, 1999), and to say that there are stark differences in the shape of society and Church then and now would be an understatement. This brief review of the history of Catholic schools did not reflect upon a comparison of assumptions underpinning the establishment of Catholic schools in the past and today. This would be of interest to determine how school and parish connections are set up and actually embedded in the fabric of the school from its inception.

#### Concluding remarks about site one data

Whilst the themes that emanated from the leadership team and RE teachers differed slightly, for example, the RE teachers emphasised the role of parents, there was clear consistency in

what both groups saw as their reasons for working in a Catholic school. It was also expressed another way in the perception that the enthusiasm by students for RE in the early years eventually gave way to disinterest in the senior years. The parent data, as small as it was, also reflected the concerns of the leadership team and RE teachers in that parent choice of a Catholic school did not always align with the purposes the teachers understood as underpinning the Catholic school. This was shown for example in one parent's concerns for discipline and good grades.

The data gathered in this site from the three groups of participants provided an interesting picture of how the purposes of Catholic education are expressed. The concerns of parents for an education which reflected their values was not always expressed in faith education terms, and this contrasted with the concerns of the leadership team and RE teachers in respect to the fact that the purposes of the Catholic school as they understood them did not seem to be a high priority for parents. Intertwined with these concerns was the relationship of the school to families and the school's changed role when families had little connection with the local Church. This analysis has shown that this is a complex situation which challenges the authenticity of this particular Catholic school. It has done this by showing how a school may not be able to be what it says it is because of the contrasting expectations of its stakeholders.

In what must be an irony for this school, the problem of parent disengagement with the purposes of the Catholic school and the effect that this may have on their children, is not something new. In a newspaper article of 1958 at the school's opening. Archbishop Tweedy had this to say:

Unless parents realise their responsibility.....the child will go to school inadequately prepared. It is lamentable to hear the complaint of teachers that a child comes to school in its earliest years without having heard those great prayers, Our Father and Hail

Mary, and without having heard those lovely stories of the life of Our Lord and his Blessed Mother. (The Tribune, November 20, 1958)

Both in this site and in site two there was much comment about parents not preparing their children adequately and engaging with the school efforts. Fifty-one years later not much seems to have changed. In 1958 state funding was still a distant dream. A certain Father Coghlan was reported as saying the following at the same opening:

In the matter of financial aid for education it seems that in this community Catholics are sometimes regarded as second class citizens.....the Catholic community is absolutely determined to carry on its schools. (The Tribune, November 20, 1958)

In 2009 state aid for Catholic schools is the highest it has ever been, and the challenge today concerns how to obtain more funding cited in Pascoe (2006). Irrespective of funding issues, however, parents of different generations still struggle with the faith development of young people and the extent of co-operation with the school in this vital part of their growth.

#### Site two: Preparatory to Year 12 school

##### Leadership Team

The leadership team of this school was larger than the school in site one because it was also a secondary school, catering for students aged five to eighteen. Even though this was a school which was only established three years ago, it still had a very experienced leadership team. The choice of such an experienced leadership group was perhaps reflective of the need for a new school to have a good foundation of commitment to the aims of Catholic education as well as experience with the structures of a good school. Table 4.11 provides information about the leadership team in this school.

Table 4.11 Site Two Leadership Team Demographics

Gender		Position of Leadership		Years of Experience
Female	Male	Current	Previous	
5	2	Deputy	Deputy, Curriculum Coordinator	33
		Dean of Faith & Ministry	REC, Level Coordinator, English Faculty Head	27
		Student Services	Faculty Head	31
		Principal	Level Coordinator, School Coordinator, Principal	30
		School Coordinator	Nil	19
		Dean of Learning & Teaching	Director of ICT, House Coordinator	9
		Dean of Finance	Business Manager	25

## Site Two Leadership Team Interview Data

Once again a word search was used to gain some insight into possible themes and the frequently recurring words are shown in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12 Themes and Word Frequency

Themes	Research Question	Word	Frequency
Catholic identity of the school	How do some Victorian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?	Catholic	53
Need for spirituality		Parents	16
Ambiguity: parish-school relationship		Parish	32
		Church	27
		Community	9
<b>Sub-themes</b>		Teacher	10
Parents lacking in Church literacy		Spiritual	11
	What impact, if any, have these changed circumstances had on the way	Identity	11
		Sacrament	11

	these schools arrange their work structures		
--	---	--	--

The Principal expressed a perception that parents were looking more for spirituality than for a Church experience. ‘The fastest growing religion in Australia was Buddhism and their greatest converts were Catholics, lapsed Catholics’, (2L1). This was sometimes expressed by parents as a search for ‘moral goodness, potentially a view that we are doing things that will grow the whole person’ (2L2). Was the school becoming the substitute parish? The view was that it was not as strong as this. ‘...the school is becoming an outpost of the Church’, (2L2). What Catholic schools were doing now assumed a special importance because ‘they (the parents) may not be sending them or bringing them along to Church’ (2L2). This was expressed another way when one of the leadership team said that in the past spirituality was generally associated with religious orders, and now these had decreased in numbers in Catholic schools ‘and is not as easily available....so we’re trying at least to keep it alive, through our school, our community’, (2L4).

The assertion that the school is ‘becoming an outpost of the Church’ was significant. If it is not a substitute parish then what is it? The term ‘outpost’ in this expression seemed to imply that the Church is there but on a foreign land, as in the expression, ‘an outpost of the Empire’. This is an interesting perspective that was expressed by the REC (2L2). In other words, there was a perception that the Catholic school may very well be the only expression of Church familiarity for those families where the local Church may figure very little in their lives. On the face of it, this would seem to be fulfilling the school’s part in the educational mission of the Church, but more than this, it might also be demonstrating the gap that exists between local Church and Catholic school on the one hand, and the gap between families and

local Church on the other. The common denominator in both these gaps is the family. Again, this begs the question whether school and local Church can actually work more closely together so as to be of more significance in the lives of the families. Both entities exist to serve the Church's educational mission yet seemingly not in consonance with each other.

Whilst schools were not equipped to become substitute parishes, 'we are not trained to take the part of the priest', (2L4) nonetheless it was still the case that 'the Principal in the Catholic school is actually taking the part of the pastor...they conduct the communion service, the funeral service...they are the face of the Church', (2L1). This statement by the Principal was reflecting on a situation that there were ten priests and thirty Catholic schools in a particular diocese in northern Australia, and hence great pressure on the Principals to assume more pastoral roles. Added to this whilst the students:

are the best behaved in Church, it's the parents you've got to teach to behave in the Church because they don't go. Because the school is the Church for a lot of these people we can actually engage the kids in our own way. It's the parents that are out of control. (2L1)

It was significant that this comment came from the Principal. One other team member saw an irony in the realization that 95,000 people could be silent for an Anzac Day commemoration at a football match but could not maintain similar silence in Church (2L4).

One interpretation of this data is that the use of the term "out of control" raises issues of relevance to the opinions held in the school by individual teachers about the parent body, and the relationships between the school and families. The views expressed in this way seemed to work against the development of true partnerships. However, to this researcher this did not appear to be the case. Schools already are focused on partnerships with parents in many ways through the variety of programs in the school like pastoral care, reporting and

school boards and the like. It appears that the language used by the Principal to describe the perception of parent involvement in the school faith programs was yet another expression of the gap that seemed to exist between parent and school expectations, and between the school and family experience of faith community. It is this gap which may be affecting true partnerships. The researcher did not detect any negativity towards parents as such, but rather a simple observation by participants in the research of the difficulties they faced in educating children and their families in faith, when there appeared to be diverse expectations of belief and behaviour compared with the expectations of the school. What was being expressed was a sense of frustration because there seemed little consonance between what parents seemed to want for their children and what the school believed was their main goal as a Catholic school.

These comments from members of the leadership team are supported by the research of Quillinan (1997) and Battams (2002, 2006) as analysed in the review of literature. Schools seemed to have become *de facto* parishes, a situation not of their own making, yet a situation with which they have had to deal. Because the school was becoming, for most families, the only experience of Church this posed a challenge to the parish as much as it did to the school. Battams (2006, p. 10) made the point that:

To be authentic, Catholic schools must be situated within the Church. Their nature and purpose are thus grounded in the nature and purpose of the Church. Understanding the nature and purpose of Catholic schools, therefore, is fundamentally an ecclesiological task.

The view of the REC that his school was ‘an outpost of the Church’ and of the Principal, that the parents may be ‘out of control’ hardly situates the school within the Church. However, this is not a criticism of the REC or the Principal of site two or even the school. This is simply the situation in which the leadership team finds itself; it is their experience of the challenge this contemporary Catholic school is facing.

The question may be asked as to how teachers and leadership teams are to view those parents who obviously have little connection with the Church. Are Catholic schools only for those who participate in the parish-based planned giving campaigns and are recognised by the Parish priest, or will a Baptismal certificate of the child suffice as a right of entry into a Catholic school irrespective of the current practice of the parents? In respect to enrolments, there are now two concerns for schools, the number of non-Catholics as well as the number of non-participative Catholics seeking a place for their children. If Church participation was a significant criterion for enrolment then Catholic schools may not be as populated as they now are. That parents may be 'non-participative' is not a reason to suggest that they are 'out of control'. In other words, there is a suggestion here that Catholic schools may need to be seen as not only being for the converted but also for those who might be looking to **be** converted, whether or not they are involved with their local Church.

The leadership team then reflected on the relationship of the school to the local Church. As parish leadership changed so too did the concept of the school, in this case, there seemed to be a move from the concept of the "school as a Eucharistic centre" to just another Catholic school which shared in the educational mission of the Church alongside other parish primary schools yet to be built and developed in the area. There also seemed to be a tension in understanding the school as Eucharistic centre and yet not adequately connected with the parish as the base unit of the Church.

2L1: They bought an extra chunk of land here (in the area) despite us saying.....that you're going to have a 300 seat chapel here and you're building a 500 seat Church down there, so the new primary school was a parish primary school.

Interviewer: are parish connections hard to come by?

2L1: Well we have formal connections but we struggle here even as part of (name of parish) because of that.

The discussion then examined the idea of the identity of this particular Catholic school. Two aspects were identified as giving this school a clear Catholic identity. The first was that it employed a chaplain, a priest from a religious order, who was almost full-time in the school. 'If we did not have access to a chaplain here we would not have access to liturgy as much as we have', said the Principal, (2L1). Another team member took this further when she said:

2L2: You have a member of the religious here and the students see that as significant.....he's an earthy guy, he's down to earth, and the kids appreciate that....they can talk to him and that puts a different face on what they deem as being Catholic, religious and that probably makes it more human for them.

Interviewer: could that become a model for Catholic schooling?

2L1: Well, I think it's certainly an opportunity even to the extent that the governance structure here is quite different to the governance structure in other (Catholic) schools.

This latter point was elaborated upon when it was explained that in this school the canonical administrators are not necessarily priests, they also included lay people, 'and that's a recognition that there is a need to look at other models (of Catholic school), with governance structures let alone the infrastructure of the school', (2L1). In other words parish connections, at least in this school, did not seem to be an essential element in its identity. Having a priest on staff also did not make the parish connection a necessity either:

We have a school board accountable to the canonical administrators. There happens to be two priests on it at the moment but they're not there because they happen to be priests. That's a totally different model. It's a kind of model which sits between the congregational schools and the regional schools. So it is an opportunity (for a different model) for sure. (2L1)

This description was of a school that was not necessarily tied to a parish base as such, even though it does serve the local Church. This is, in effect, broadening the notion of Preparatory

to Year 12 schools beyond the traditional boundaries of regional secondary schools with parish priests as canonical administrators, to that of a Catholic school still serving the local Church but not necessarily linked to specific parishes. By implication, then, it might also be asserted that since parish connections are no longer embedded in the school structure then so too it may not also be necessary for parents to have this parish connection either. In other words, it may be that the separation of parish and school is embedded in how the school is being set up. If this is the case then this is a clear departure from the traditional reasons for setting up Catholic schools as was described in Chapter one of this thesis. This idea is further analysed in the final chapter of this thesis.

It has to be stated that this school is fortunate in having a priest on staff and this is clearly acknowledged by the school leadership. However, what of the majority of Catholic schools which do not have on-site access to a priest? A priest on the staff of a school makes it possible to enliven RE programs through the ability to provide a sacramental life in the school, but also access to the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation that would not be accessible to those families who do not participate in their local Church. It could be argued that this particular school has sought to fill the gap between family involvement in Church and their need for children to be educated in the faith by appointing a priest. Does this, therefore mean that families need not have a connection with their local Church because the school is already offering more than just the basics? On the other hand, can schools like these provide the infrastructure for a Church community? These questions are also examined further in the two chapters that follow.

The second aspect which made this school distinctive according to the leadership team was that the school was able to adopt the charism of a religious order. 'I think it's a real help:

aside from the broad Catholic identity there's also this other ethos', said 2L4. The chaplain's religious order also had a similar charism to that adopted by the school. A simple inspection of the school showed that there were busts of the founder of the religious order in prominent display, as were descriptions of his educational philosophy. Students were also able to discuss the significance of this in their RE program as is described later in this chapter.

This school is neither order-owned nor governed yet it was able to adopt the model and ideals of a religious order owned school, and as far as the researcher was aware the order in question had nothing to do with the founding of the school, and neither was it represented on the board. In the interview this was taken as a given and was not questioned other than to say that this charism supported the other initiatives of the school. It was hard to understand what thinking was employed in making this choice, other than that this provided a framework and focus for a spirituality for the school. However, the current college website did not cite any linkages between the school and the ideals and model of the religious order. There are other regional schools similar to site two who have adopted the charism of religious orders in order to frame and contextualize their educational mission, and some of these have historical reasons for doing so. It was not clear to this researcher whether the adoption of a particular charism was a decision of the board, the Principal or even the archdiocese of Melbourne. That its connection with the charism of a religious order was symbolically evident around the school and obviously taught in RE classes was simply an unquestioned fact.

The discussion of the Catholic identity of the school seemed to be uppermost in the minds of the leadership team. Commenting on surveys administered to the school community through the School Improvement Framework (SIF) the Principal stated that:

people see the Catholic identity (of the school) as the least significant...the people who see it as being moderately important beyond the staff are the students, and they would

rate it as more highly important than the parents. And it's quite fascinating. (Yet) the parents say they want a Catholic education for their children. (2L1)

The REC (2L2) also made the point that she wished it was the RE teachers doing the parent interviews for enrolment so that they could judge for themselves the kinds of attitudes parents were bringing to the enrolment interview.

I think it would be interesting because some of the youngest teachers.....deep down, some of them still buy, in inverted commas, the secular message, that it's (Catholic identity) is pretty well irrelevant and that deep down we're all actually dinosaurs here. I mean I've been doing this for a long time, and I get this sense from the X and Y generation of teachers. (2L2)

These two ideas require a comment. First, if the findings of the SIF survey revealed parent disinterest in the Catholic identity of the school then this may be an indicator for possible further action by the school as well as a further indication of the gap between parent and school expectations already described. In other words, there is a need to investigate the cause of this disinterest and somehow seek to address this practically. How this is to be achieved is another question. This experience raises the question of the authenticity of this school's participation in the educational mission of the Church because the school may not be able to be what it says it is. Perhaps this task is beyond the capacity of the school alone and should involve the broader Church community. Second, the REC's reflection that RE teachers seem to regard the educational mission of the Church as irrelevant is itself expressive of a challenge to authenticity. Catholic schools require committed Catholics as RE teachers responsible for the growth in faith of its students. Yet the data thus far also seems to be pointing to the reality that this alone will not suffice. More seems to be needed and this may be more explicit communication and co-operation with the local Church. Both of these issues point to the need to examine how schools can meet the challenge to authenticity presented by such experiences, and this is further discussed in the chapters to follow.

Finally, two more elements were added to what was an extensive focus on the Catholic identity of the school in the group interview. The first was the Principal's response to the question of whether there was a future for Catholic schools:

Well I would say that they're the future of the Church...it's the strength of the Church in Australia. And I would say that if you did not have a Catholic school system in Australia the Church would fade totally. So I think it is the future. (2L1)

The REC (2L2), added that 'the Catholic school was safe for a generation' but if the state schools pursued 'pastoral care and values' then parents would start moving again back into that system.

However, what made this school distinctive, and this was the second element, was that it offered both the pastoral **and** the sacramental, something state schools cannot provide. 'The people see the Preparatory to Year 12 thing as a possibility of the future. They are obviously keen for the sacramental program to exist', (2L1). This was referred to by two other members of the team as 'the community model...what people at this stage, in this location need', (2L5 and 2L6). They also pointed to the practicality of being able to drop off children at the one location rather than multiple locations especially when work hours were inflexible – there was a comfort in knowing that the older siblings could look after the younger ones because they were in the same school. The Catholic school is a locus for meeting the spiritual needs of people who regard themselves as Catholic even though their own practice may not reflect this, what Rolheiser has called the experience of post-ecclesialism (Rolheiser, 2008). This has also been discussed in Chapter one.

This discussion with the leadership team reflected very clearly the issues raised in the review of literature regarding school and parish dissonance. However, this is also reflective of a larger dissonance between the Catholic school and the Church. Simply expressed, more

families have a presence in Catholic schools than in their local Church. How then, can school and local Church work together to meet this challenge? On the evidence presented so far very little has been done, and it is not clear how the two can come together on this issue of strong mutual concern.

#### *Site Two Leadership Team Questionnaire Data*

Seven questionnaires were completed by members of the leadership team. Their responses are summarised in table 4.13.

*Table 4.13 Questionnaire Responses for the Site Two Leadership Team*

<i>My Reason for working in a Catholic school</i>
5 described their reasons as connected with their faith background and commitment and 2 of these tied this to being educated in the Catholic system. 2 described their reasons in more generic terms such as pastoral care, compassion and core values
<i>The things I most appreciate about working in a Catholic school</i>
4 indicated a sense of community 2 indicated the sense that the individual is valued 2 indicated that faith was a major underlying factor of the school 1 mentioned the social justice focus of the school
<i>The things I find challenging about working in a Catholic school</i>
3 made mention of finance and resources The values of disengaged parents and the values of the school are sometimes in conflict: working in a community which is not as homogeneous as it once was The apathy of X & Y generation RE teachers shown as lack of world awareness The relationship between school and parish Students lacking basic faith background yet also thirsting for it
My reflections on the following statement: <i>Catholic schools are no longer institutions for the converted. It would appear that their purposes are challenged by a contemporary demographic which finds little formal relationship with the institutional Church. Yet these schools still hold a strong enough attraction for parents to select them as their school of choice for their children: at a time when enrolments have never been higher identification with the institutional Church in its various forms has never been lower. This situation poses a challenge to the authenticity of the Catholic school.</i>
The reasons parents choose a Catholic school for their children are not necessarily the same as those reasons for which they exist. Therefore Catholic schools are becoming an important outpost of the Church.

The Catholic school is the only experience of Church for many students whereas Church involvement is not a priority for parents, and so schools become a place of pre-evangelization. This poses a problem for schools.

The Catholic school lies somewhere between the more expensive privates and the government schools.

Catholic schools are places where students feel wanted and belong: they fulfil this more than the parish.

Young people are more spiritual than religious. Christian values are not difficult to inspire kids with but Catholic practices are a different story. The Holy Spirit is alive here!

Catholic schools cannot be islands working in isolation of family values

Parents feel that Catholic schools give their kids the ability to know their religion and the ability to choose.

There was consistency between the interview and questionnaire data and a deeper reflection on the realities and difficulties the leadership team faced. One such difficulty was that of dealing with the situation where the children seemed to be more informed about Church teachings and practice than their parents. On the other hand the Catholic school was described as an 'outpost' of the Church. There was also a concern about the relationship of the school to the parish, or the lack of it, and where this was felt most was in the RE classes. The statement that 'Christian values are not difficult to inspire kids with but Catholic practices are a different story' summarized the responses to the questionnaire. This pointed to the growing gap between Catholic school and Catholic Church that seemed to be felt within the school. In many ways this was not surprising as students in this Catholic school were exposed to contemporary approaches to the teaching of RE and experienced liturgies regularly, and apparently, more than their families might. This is perhaps another gap, that gap in faith development between families and their children.

### Religious Education Teachers

Similar to the group in site one these RE teachers were either all accredited to teach the subject or specialised in it, or had it as a method in their teaching qualifications. Table 4.14 provides further information about this group of teachers.

*Table 4.14 Site Two Religious Education Teacher Demographics*

Gender		Religious Education Qualification	Year levels Taught	Years of Experience
Female	Male			
6	1			
		Dip. Ed.	Infant School	23
		B.Arts. Minor in Theology	P – 6	7
		Grad Dip RE (ACU)	P – 6	20
		B.Ed. ACU	Year 1	3
		ACU Accreditation	Year 3	3
		Masters in Religious Education	1, 3, 5, 6	24
		Grad. Dip. Ed. ACU	7 & 8	3

The following statement exemplified this.

I came from a Catholic school and my faith was important so I just saw that as an important part of teaching. If I was going to be a teacher it was going to be in a Catholic school and I was going to be teaching RE. (2RE1)

Others added to this idea by saying it was also the ‘pastoral care’, ‘gospel values’ and ‘culture’ which drew them to teach in a Catholic school.

### *Religious Education Teachers Interview Data*

The teachers felt that having the qualification to teach RE made a difference, ‘we have a better understanding so we are better able to express exactly what it is we are trying to teach’ (2RE6). Another teacher put it this way, ‘the enthusiasm rubs off. They (the students) see how interested you are, and they feel the same way. It’s just like any subject really’,

(2RE5). However, having the background to teach RE was not without its challenges. The first of these was dealing with those students who lacked religious background whether they were involved in Church or not, 'that's where the challenge is in a Catholic school that they're still expected to participate in an RE class' (2RE2).

One area the review of literature did not explore was the experience of those RE teachers with the qualification to teach the subject and who deliberately chose to teach Religious Education in a Catholic school. The RE teachers in site two discussed the confidence their background gave them, and this was quite positive. It would be informative to explore the experiences of those teachers of RE who regard themselves as specialists, to hear how they viewed the student and parent involvement in faith development as it was presented in the Catholic school.

The perception of RE teachers in site two was that there was little parent interest in the RE. One teacher recounted the situation of a Greek Orthodox child who went home talking about RE so much the mother made an appointment to talk to her about the program. The others could not say they had parents who had this kind of interest, indeed, quite the opposite, 'you also get the negative comments thrown at you too such as children going home and telling their parents that they want to go to Sunday Mass but the parents say, "go and tell your teacher we are way too busy".' (2RE5). This variation between school expectation and actual family response was referred to often in the group interview.

Teachers commented on the availability of a priest on staff, 'he gives another insight, another perspective to the students. Taking in all his knowledge and his extensive background is something that has been a positive thing, not only for myself as an RE teacher but also for the students' (2RE2). Another teacher said that having a priest involved in the school 'brings a

sense of intimacy with the Church that they may not otherwise connect with....it gives a sense of being very much a part of the Church community' (2RE5).

This idea of Church as community was elaborated upon by other teachers. Connections between parish and school were important, 'ideally a close relationship is the best relationship...if they've got that link between school and parish then you've got that bigger sense of community....rather than segregating it' (2RE5). As to the idea that the future of the Catholic Church was the Catholic school the same teacher interpreted this as meaning that all responsibility for faith development was being taken away from parents:

I have a real problem with this because I think that if the parents have made a decision to send them to a Catholic school then they support them in that and one of the challenges I have with the older kids is that you're often competing with the parents because the parents are sending a completely different message....the kids are getting huge mixed messages from school. (2RE5)

This last comment seemed to sum up the main theme of the interview with this group of RE teachers, namely, the lack of consonance between what they were trying to achieve in the RE program and how parents' regard for this effort was, if not necessarily negative, at the very least disinterested.

Again this could be read as being critical of parents. However, the researcher did not find this in either the interview or the questionnaire data. Rather, the point made here was the urgency some teachers felt about the need for real partnership between school and home when it came to faith development. That this was lacking was a challenge to the school, and the awareness of this did not necessarily lead to an understanding as to how it might be dealt with, by the RE teachers themselves or by the school. Once again, the question as to whether this was merely a problem for the school to deal with or a problem with the wider Church is relevant. The lack of connection between school and home, between home and local Church

and between school and local Church as reflected in these interviews points to the gaps and dissonances which have already been discussed in the data presented thus far. It is these same gaps and dissonances which also challenge the authenticity of the school in that schools are not always able to carry out what their mission statements might describe.

As with the data generated in site one, the role of parents seemed to figure prominently in the discussion of faith development in young people in a Catholic school in site two. This is shown in Table 4.15, which has a high frequency of both words ‘faith’ and ‘parents’.

*Table 4.15 Themes & Word Frequency*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Word</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Variance between school RE and parent response	What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general?  Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?	Community	5
<b>Sub-themes</b>		Parents	16
Essential to have a background in RE to teach it effectively		Faith	15
Sense of community makes a difference			

*RE Teachers Questionnaire Data*

Seven teachers completed the questionnaire and their responses are shown in the following table.

*Table 4.16 Questionnaire Responses*

<i>My Reason for working in a Catholic school</i>
Because of my Catholic background expressed in terms such as ‘natural to work in my faith community’ and ‘being on a faith journey with students’: all teachers.
<i>The things I most appreciate about working in a Catholic school</i>
6 of 7 said community expressed as ‘network of professionals who share faith and vision’, ‘support from teachers and parents’, ‘pastoral nature of relationships’, ‘working with others who are committed to the Catholic faith’.
<i>The things I find challenging about working in a Catholic school</i>
Only 6 responded to this section. The responses were as follows: Dealing with children at different points on their faith journey 3 teachers said lack of parent involvement in ‘Catholic practice’ Trying to instil faith attitudes/behaviours/morals in some students Towing the party line on Church teachings that create injustice
<i>My reasons for teaching Religious Education</i>
To provide a counter-culture My own faith background (2) Part of my obligation to teach in a Catholic school Motivated and inspired to teach RE after studying it and university Have always done it, can’t imagine not doing it I wanted to help children learn about their faith
<i>The Challenges I find teaching Religious Education</i>
Texts do not have child-friendly language Making units inclusive for non-Catholics and non-Church goers I may be the only role model to instil values and morals Teaching students who aren’t from a religious background (2) Struggle with some Church teachings and find these difficult to authentically pass on That RE needs also to teach other religions
My reflections on the following statement: <i>Catholic schools are no longer institutions for the converted. It would appear that their purposes are challenged by a contemporary demographic which finds little formal relationship with the institutional Church. Yet these schools still hold a strong enough attraction for parents to select them as their school of choice for their children: at a time when enrolments have never been higher identification with the institutional Church in its various forms has never been lower. This situation poses a challenge to the authenticity of the Catholic school.</i>
Pastoral care integrates academic, social and religious dimensions to provide a strong sense of wellbeing, belonging and security What does ‘converted’ mean today? Because people are not expressing their faith as they have

traditionally done, does this make them less or more authentic?  
 The difficulty is when parents send their children to a Catholic school and this is not supported in the home (4)  
 Many parents are viewing Catholic schools as the next best thing to private schools

Even though a sense of community was a sub-theme in the interview amongst the teachers, it appeared as a dominant theme in the questionnaire. Nevertheless, the parents' lack of involvement in the faith development of their children was still a concern for a number of the teachers. This was expressed both in the question about the challenges of teaching in a Catholic school, and again in the responses to the question about the particular challenges of teaching RE. This represented a kind of consistency between the two forms of data gathered from this group. The concern with lack of consonance between school and home as it affects faith development was uppermost in the thoughts of this group.

### Students

The students who were interviewed were keen to be involved and spoke openly and clearly about their experiences in the relatively new Catholic school. Table 4.17 describes some characteristics of this group.

*Table 4.17 Site two Student Demographics*

Gender		Year Level	Number
Female	Male		
3	2	8	2
		9	3

This interview with students was based around several questions. The first question was, 'as a student, what do you like most about being in this school?' Because the school was new and the student population was relatively small, the idea of a sense of community was important;

teachers were friendly and 'cool'; 'you get to know everyone' and 'everyone knows you'. It was very clear that the size of the school added to this sense of 'everyone knows each other...like one big group of friends', (2ST2).

The second question was 'how important is it to you that this school is a Catholic school?' Four of the five students were Catholic and the other was Greek Orthodox. The following statement by one of the students summed up the feeling of the group, 'being in a Catholic school you get taught good morals and stuff, how to survive in society and be nice to people', (2ST3). Being taught about other religions was also important as well as access to the sacraments. Significantly, the students also mentioned the patron of the school, 'we have that (name) guy. We get taught about what he did so they will follow and do that as well', (2ST1). All reported that they had a say in whether or not to come to this school and all were happy to be in the school.

The third question was 'what does it mean to you to be a Catholic?' Only one student was Greek Orthodox and he stated that 'coming to a Catholic school means I get taught the Catholic beliefs as well', (2ST3). All felt comfortable coming to a Catholic school even though two of the five had not attended a Catholic primary school. A Catholic school has 'discipline' and 'because at a public school there's a lot of bad stuff. At a Catholic school it's swell, there's good discipline and the kids dress well', (2ST3). But one particular member of the group was more articulate about her being in a Catholic school:

I do believe that it's important to go to a Catholic school because as a Catholic you have to grow into your religion as you grow older. To go to a Catholic school and study your religion is really important because that's a part of who you are meant to be as a Catholic, the way you grow. (2ST1)

This statement was made by a Year 9 student and neither did it draw smirks or sniggers from the others; the researcher received the impression from this group that they were comfortable with what the student had said.

The fourth question was, 'what things does the school do that makes it Catholic in your eyes?' Students were unanimous in stating that the patron of the school was a role model for them and that RE and regular Mass were also part of being a Catholic school. RE was regarded positively with the students mentioning topics like studying fundamentalism, and 'talking about things like respect and all that stuff', (2ST2). Specific mention was also made of the topic 'Jesus, this is your life' where a classmate even dressed up like him. RE lessons were good, 'they're interesting because like basically every lesson you learn something new', (2ST2) and 'I like hands on but I like it when the whole class is talking in their opinions', (2ST1).

Reflection on having a priest in the school community drew the following descriptions, 'awesome' (2ST4), 'easy to talk to', 'on our level' (2ST3), 'communicates well' (2ST1), 'down to earth', 'very approachable' (2ST2), and 'just like talking to a normal person' (2ST5). All believed that having a priest in the school was a positive for the students.

During the interview the students were asked whether they regarded themselves as Church-goers. Two indicated that they attended every week, one every second week or less, and the Greek Orthodox student stated once or twice a year indicating Easter as the most important celebration for him as well as Christmas 'and maybe Pentecost' He believed that it was important 'but not once a week stuff' (2ST3), whereas the two who attended every week agreed that it was an important part of their life, and one of these did not attend their home parish but another parish because their parents had friends and family connections in another

parish. All students agreed that the school was most encouraging of Church involvement by all.

Is this the picture of post-ecclesial youth? There was openness and even a welcoming of faith development in the RE classroom even though this was not extended to Church involvement. This and other questions which will need further analysis in the following chapters will include an analysis of this experience as well as leading to some suggestions as to how this experience can be better understood.

Site two students were generally positive about their experience and the kinds of activities which they liked in their RE program. The review of literature provided in this thesis did not examine the experience of students in Catholic schools in any great detail, and in particular, the experience of those students for whom the RE program was a positive experience. An exploration of what students appreciated about their RE program in conjunction with the experience of RE specialist teachers would provide an interesting picture of a situation that is not always seen as a positive experience. It might also provide approaches to what contributes to successful programs and perhaps even the structures that support them such as liturgies, camp retreats and the like.

#### Parents

Three parents in site two completed the questionnaire. Two had been educated in a Catholic school and the third had never been in a Catholic school. Table 4.18 summarises some of the characteristics of this group.

Table 4.18 Site two Parent Demographics

Gender		Attended a Catholic School & No of Years	Number of Children attending a Catholic school
Female	Male		
2	1	Yes – 12	5 + 4 older children
		No	1
		Yes – 11	1

The questionnaire data is summarized as follows.

Table 4.19 Questionnaire Responses

<i>My reflections on being educated in a Catholic school</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Family was very religious. We were expected to work at our best because our parents used to do without to send us to Catholic schools.</li> <li>2. Primary school was good but secondary was challenging and did 11 &amp; 12 in a government school</li> </ol>
<i>Reasons for choosing a Catholic education for my children</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Very involved in Church: neo-catechumenal way. Parents are the first teachers of the children and I want this supported by the schools but this is not always the case.</li> <li>2. Discipline, standard of school work better.</li> <li>3. Building on the strong values base of the government primary school; did not want this foundation go to waste in government secondary. Further develop his faith as a tool to get through the ups and downs of life</li> </ol>
<i>The things I most appreciate about my child's education in a Catholic school</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Schools conform to teachings of the Church. Children are prepared to receive sacraments of reconciliation, communion and confirmation and this is part of the curriculum.</li> <li>2. Discipline, encouragement and support.</li> <li>3. Teaching of values. Appreciation of faith to make him a better person and strong discipline</li> </ol>
<i>Expectations of a Catholic school education</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Christian values of love, forgiveness, mercy and acceptance of the other. To be educated to do and be their best.</li> <li>2. For my son to be challenged, encouraged and supported.</li> <li>3. To be taught in an environment that reflects strong values, high achievement and has a strong discipline policy</li> </ol>
<p>My reflections on the following statement:  <i>Catholic schools are no longer institutions for the converted. It would appear that their purposes are challenged by a contemporary demographic which finds little formal relationship with the institutional Church. Yet these schools still hold a strong enough attraction for parents to select them as their school of choice for their children: at a time when enrolments have never been higher identification with the institutional Church in its various forms has never been lower. This situation poses a challenge to the authenticity of the</i></p>

*Catholic school.*

1. Catholic schools were opened to educate the poor and large families: this is not the case today. Important moral teaching on sex before marriage, virginity, contraception, abortion, marriage, homosexuality, are being whitewashed due to the apparent acceptance in our society.
2. Catholic education has always been a higher standard than other schools – to send him to a Catholic school I could not pass up.
3. Many parents do not choose Catholic schools as a way of developing Catholic faith, they choose it because they think the discipline is better and hence a better learning environment. Also, children get their sacraments there rather than attending after school sessions. Authenticity is only undermined when Catholic values are not supported and has nothing to do with being non-catholic. '(These) don't have to be taught by just in-depth study of the bible that some students can't relate to. They are taught by the way we deal with each other in everyday life, accepting others and treating them with kindness and respect. These are values which should be accepted regardless of whether a person is Catholic or not.'

One of the three parents expressed her understanding of the purposes of the Catholic school in familiar terms making reference to sacraments and important Church teachings in moral matters. The other two hardly used this language; however they asserted quite strongly the need for their children to be taught core values for life. Both believed that the Catholic school was strong in this area and they did not have the same faith in the state school's ability to do so. Comparing these responses with the comments of the RE teachers and the leadership team it is interesting that they seemed to identify many parents in the category of parents two and three rather than parent one, that is, the category of possibly un-Churched but seeking a strongly values based education with some faith component. Parent two did not attend a Catholic school but still chose a Catholic school for their child. All three parents believed in the value of Catholic schooling but for differing reasons, and two of these only partially described the purpose of the Catholic school in terms which might be found in mission statements, 'accepting others and treating them with kindness and respect' and 'Parents are the first teachers of the children'.

Far from challenging the purposes of the school these parents supported its ethos, and one of them used the language of the Church to express their ideas more than the other two. Does this choice of a Catholic school for their children make it any less valid than the other parent? This is a redundant question because all their children had been accepted into the school. However, this does relate to the question of enrolment policies and whose children are chosen for enrolment. Is enrolment only for those who have clear allegiance and connection with their Church or should enrolment be open to all? If enrolment is open to all then this must mean that the school needs to learn to cater for the differences in faith adherence and practice as well. How this is managed is a challenge to both school and Church authorities, and not the school alone.

The Principal made mention of the parent data collected through the SIF questionnaires and how parents seemed to rate Catholic identity as the least important when it came to choosing a school for their children. Parent views about their schools are very important. How do schools obtain feedback from parents, and will the SIF adequately facilitate this process? Of what importance will this information be for education and Church authorities as they ponder the purposes of the contemporary Catholic school? These questions are raised here because without effective parent contribution and response it would be difficult for schools to know how well they are fulfilling their mission statements, and whether or not what they say they are doing is synchronised to the reality of young people and their families.

#### Concluding Remarks about Site Two Data

Again, because of the small number of questionnaires returned it is difficult to make generalizations, however the ideas expressed by the parents were adequately reflected in what

RE teachers and leadership team said parent views were about what they wanted for their children. In comparing these responses with the responses of the students it was interesting to note that no parent mentioned the priest working at the school or indeed the specific charism adopted by the school to build its Catholic ethos. However, it can also be argued that the questions in the questionnaire were not necessarily structured to elicit reflection on these matters. Apart from one parent who quite obviously wanted a specific Catholic education for their children, the other two parents spoke in more generic terms about basic values being supported by good pastoral care and discipline. In comparison, the Principal saw the Catholic school as the future of the Church yet one of the RE teachers argued that this was putting too much pressure on the school and not making the parents responsible and accountable enough for the faith development of their children.

The themes that emerged from sites one and two were similar. There were concerns with parent involvement in the Church and the impact this had on faith development. There was also the realization that the place of the Catholic school was important, however, suggestions as to how to confront these difficulties were not easily forthcoming apart from a desire to build community. Connections with parish were seen as important but not always essential, yet the presence of a priest was essential to the sacramental life of each school. There was also the tension which existed between what was proposed and practised in the RE classroom and the support of families in this process. The data from these two sites provided a base from which to explore this in the following two chapters.

### Site Three: Special School

At this school there was a total of six staff including two youth workers, three teachers and the Principal. Three questionnaires were received from the staff and ten questionnaires from students. The researcher also conducted an interview with the Principal and a group interview with the rest of the staff. Because of the small size of the school the Principal was effectively the 'Leadership Team'.

### Staff

Unlike other schools this staff group included two youth workers, and details of the staff are shown in Table 4.20.

*Table 4.20 Site three Staff Demographics*

Gender		Position	Previous Experience in a Catholic school
Female	Male		
5	1	Principal	35 years
		Youth Worker	3 years at this school only
		Teacher	No
		Teacher	Yes, schools in Melbourne & London
		No other information made available though some information comes out in the group interview	

### Principal Interview Data

The origins and current practices of this school espoused core values of Catholic education. 'It is the most Catholic school I have ever taught in.....and we don't teach RE here...and the healing that we do is so Catholic that it epitomizes all the goals of Catholic schools'. This school was not a regular years 7 to 12 or Preparatory to Year 12 school as it had a small staff,

two of whom were youth workers, and a small number of students who only attended for one semester. The Catholic nature of the school was described thus.

This is a welcoming, inclusive, forgiving school so that the atmosphere here is “yes we make mistakes but we love you and we care what happens to you, and we have absolute faith in you, and we forgive you and you have to forgive yourself and you have to forgive those around you”. We epitomize what schools should be about, we engender hope. (3L1)

The Principal described the school in terms of values with expressions such as, hope, future, love, ‘never turn anyone away’, ‘never give up’ and community. Whilst the Eucharist may not be celebrated there ‘the sharing that goes on between staff and students and parents is a religious experience’.

The question arises here as to whether a school such as this can in fact be called Catholic without an RE program.<sup>8</sup> The Principal answered this by saying that the values and practices were Catholic and they guide the school in its structure and philosophy. It also gave preference to those students who were at the margins not only of schooling but of family and society itself. However, there were tensions:

Walking the line between wanting to express and celebrate our Catholicity and the expectations of my funding body is a constant stress for me. It’s the child not the religion that’s important, but I would love to be a beacon and say that we are a beacon of Catholic schools, because we are what Catholic schools should be. (3L1)

The researcher did not regard the statement that ‘it’s the child not the religion that’s important’ as disparaging of the school’s Catholic educational origins or of religion itself. Rather, it seemed to be a pragmatic assessment that for the school of this size to survive it requires full government funding to enable it to reach out to the young people marginalised in the mainstream. The Principal regarded it as a ‘beacon’ in the sense that it also proclaimed

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<sup>8</sup> As a fully state funded school it is not registered as a Catholic school and must maintain an open enrolment policy and not exclusively enrol Catholic students.

Christian values implicitly through its program, and not as directly in a traditional Catholic school setting.

The Principal was quick to point out, however, that the school cannot be copied, 'we can only be a sign of hope', hope that even large schools can do the kinds of things with young people that this school does with its small staff and student numbers. She described the unique relationships the school had with other education bodies. She described her school as a 'sub-part' of all the schools who sent their children here, 'we share their charism, and their enthusiasm and their love for kids, and it cross fertilizes'. The school was not formally connected with the Catholic Education Office Melbourne but was within the 'special schools' network. The school was wholly funded by the government but still had strong connections with a religious order which had founded it. Ideally the Principal wanted '50% Catholic kids and 50% state kids' but the school had to be committed to open enrolment.

She was then asked how the workings of this school aligned with the educational mission of the Church.

We are the person of Christ for these children. We don't catechise them, we don't try and convert them, we don't try and baptize anybody but if giving that person religion means giving them hope, healing their wounds, making them feel valued and valuable, when it's appropriate I say to them, 'God loves you', and I say to them, 'you are a loved person'. (3L1)

This statement was typical of many more the Principal was to make in describing the Catholic nature of the school. The following extract from the interview is offered because it gives further context to the above statement.

Interviewer (I): Now what about the Catholic parents of these Catholic kids who come here, do they ever engage with you at a level of, 'are my kids getting faith here or what?'

Principal (3L1): occasionally we have a parent who says, ‘when do you teach religion?’ My response is 24 hours a day. And it doesn’t take very long for a child to settle in our school, for the parents to see the effect, and for that question not to be asked again.

I: So your RE curriculum is in fact a tangible living out of those Gospel values?

3L1: Very much so. Yep.

I: So would it be fair to characterize what you’re saying to me as faith is something that’s caught not taught?

3L1: it’s a lovely old fashioned saying, isn’t it? And I really believe that, I’m committed to it and it’s probably for me a comfortable line being a Principal of a Catholic school, where we don’t have a curriculum in RE. Obviously I’ve spent a lot of time reflecting on it, what children should and shouldn’t be doing, the expectations of a Catholic school. I’ve had a lot of conversations with wise heads about where it fits, and for many of our children using the Catholic curriculum of religion would make nonsense of their lives for many of them. So I really believe that it’s a lived care and forgiveness and day-to-day. You know, this is a safe, warm, comfortable, accepting Catholic environment.

The Principal was then asked how she saw the work of mainstream Catholic schools.

She believed that especially in the past fifteen to twenty years she had seen ‘a real shift towards a school with charism’ expressed in terms of stronger pastoral care through the appointment of counsellors, the way the schools care for students, putting the best teachers in the classroom and making sure that they care for the most marginalized and the most needy. ‘I think (Catholic schools) are more aligned with what I regard as genuine Catholicism than I think in the previous fifteen years’.

When asked why Catholic schools were more popular with parents, the Principal responded:

I think that what families are looking for in Catholic schools are what we offer to their children, that extra degree of care, that sense of right, the sense of justice, the standing up for the marginalized, the standing up for the disadvantaged, Catholic action. Today, these young people are very hands on, very action oriented. (3L1)

Because 'today's kids are very practically oriented' the Church of young people is a practical Church where things get done. They are very religious because 'they are reflective, they are holy people, they are committed to their fellow man, they have a love of the world around them, the environment'. She argued that the Church was in an 'evolutionary stage' and that 'evolution does not mean revolution...we need to trust that things will emerge in the right direction'. That young people have not aligned themselves with 'the ritualistic Church' was no cause for alarm. These have developed over time and will be replaced by newer rituals which reflect the aspirations of contemporary Catholic youth. She instanced World Youth Day 2008 as an experience with immense power to transform, and an important avenue for young people to embrace the Church.

The Principal of site three believed that there was a certain disenchantment with the 'ritualistic Church' amongst young people today, but this was not a concern because schools like hers were working at the fundamentals that would eventually draw out newer rituals, and as a consequence she believed that the Church was undergoing an 'evolutionary stage'. The answer to the question as to what schools do when family and school were not as connected as they could be, for this Principal, lay in practising Gospel values in attitudes, values and structures in the school, what the Principal called 'a lived care and forgiveness and day-to-day'. The rest would follow.

We closed the interview with the question of what message she would give to those working in mainstream Catholic schools. Her response was quite succinct and the most telling statement was that Catholic schools are schools for the 'non-perfect'.

I: Perhaps as a way of closing, what would you be saying to people such as myself, you're already conducting these professional development activities for people in your standard or mainstream schools, what kind of messages are you giving to us in this current environment keeping in mind what you said about evolution and so on?

3L1: I am now working with a lot of state schools, Catholic schools and primary schools which gives me an interesting and unique perspective on education. A lot of the state schools and well to do private schools can give the kids experiences that Catholic schools can't give them. The thing to me that differentiates Catholic schools, and I believe we've got to hang on to, from state and privately run schools, is our degree of pastoral care, our set of values, the thing that says to a child, 'we will not give up on you, that you are a valued soul, you are a loved soul', and my message to mainstream Catholic schools is the thing that makes us different is our willingness to spend time with children, to find pathways for them, to not make them something the juggernaut eats and spits out, to know that justice doesn't mean the same, that justice might mean a different pathway for a different kid and to be prepared to work harder and smarter with the different groups we work with, to work collegially with people like myself, who know some of this stuff so that we are better at loving these children. We are not the people who spit out any kid who's not conforming because they're different.

I: So would it be fair to say that just as Jesus favoured the poor, the leper, the paralysed....

3L1: Jesus was a misfit

I: So there are the new poor, the new misfits that are actually alive and well in our schools. We're no longer the old catechized....

3L1: No

I: .....children of Church attending families...

3L1: we should be the schools of the non-perfect; we really should be the schools of the non-perfect. Now in an outcomes driven society that's hard to balance over publicized outcomes, quality schools and goodness knows what and all those other tests and blah, blah, blah, blah but we have to find our way through it. It has to be a priority for every Principal; every admin in every school board that it is the policy of this school that we will explore every avenue to enable this child to be a success, and success does not mean he gets in the top 10% of the state. It means that this child has a life and a future and a self-concept that makes him a positive member of society. We're a global people and putting a kid through a constructed curriculum and saying, 'you don't fit, we don't want you', has to be an anathema to Catholic schools.

The significance of choosing this school as part of this qualitative study was borne out in this interview. The school was not typical of how Catholic schools are arranged in the archdiocese of Melbourne, yet its work was closely aligned with the purposes of Catholic Education as

stated by the Principal. Yet as the interview unfolded it was clear to the researcher that this was a school that was both at the heart of the Catholic school enterprise and on the edge of what is commonly regarded as a contemporary Catholic school, at least in its educational practice. Inclusion of this school in this research was justified on the grounds that it provided an alternative perspective and experience regarding how Catholic schools saw their purpose and put it into practice. The advice the Principal offered to mainstream Catholic schools, that they should be schools for the 'non-perfect', emphasised the need for the Catholic school to be open to all who come there. For this school the main concern was in closing the gap that was experienced in loss of personal identity through difficult life experiences that placed these young people not just at the edge of mainstream schooling, but also the edge of life itself. Perhaps it was also a reminder that schools are also places for non-perfect parents as well.

In the literature on contemporary Catholic schooling the focus was very much on what are regarded as typical Catholic schools, including parish primary schools, regional secondary schools, religious order owned schools and the increasing development of preparatory to year 12 schools. There was no specific focus on other schools such as site three.

#### *Staff Interview Data*

This interview involved the whole staff with the Principal joining the group in the middle of the interview. She chose to say little and was there as a supportive presence for the staff. Questioning focused on how staff worked with the students. Normally this interview would have also been with the RE teachers but as RE was not taught formally at this school the interview focused on the general work of the teachers and the special challenges they faced with a small group of students who would change every six months.

The interview began with the question of what motivated these staff to work in a non-traditional school setting.

3SM1: My background is as a junior primary teacher with 5 – 8 years olds. I always had a soft spot for the child who was not coping in mainstream. While other teachers blamed this child all the time I was the one who stuck up for the child who was probably having a hard time. Always had a soft spot.

3SM2: I am a counsellor really but working as a youth worker. I've worked in a behavioural program with students, young kids, and so I think that the transition to the schools is something that I wanted to do.

3SM3: I started off like (SM1). I was primary trained and then I got into Special Ed. We ended up working with kids who were older and older, and I just find that, it's often a group that's quite neglected, the adolescent group, even in mental health settings. People are reluctant to work with them because they're difficult.

3SM4: I have a similar background to (SM1). Then when I got back into mainstream, I was just itching to get back into Special Education. There's always three or more kids in your class you know are not getting the attention they deserve and you really feel sorry for them, so that's what really motivated me.

3SM5: I basically have a passion for working with disadvantaged young people. I've been in this job for 3 and ½ years now and this is my first youth work job.

The majority of the interview was taken up with understanding how they worked with the students in their setting and how they compared this with their experience with mainstream schooling. Mainstream schooling is also taken to include Catholic schools even though these were not always specifically referred to in the interview.

Descriptions of their experience with students reflected the approaches, values and philosophies described by the Principal in her interview. 'I love working with adolescents...people are reluctant to work with them because they're difficult'; 'they're not going to learn anything if they're not emotionally available for learning. We need to give them the space to feel comfortable to learn' (SM3). 'I basically have a passion for working with disadvantaged young people' (SM5). 'Students come to us and they can pinpoint the teachers

that don't like them. How can you ever step up again and be positive, if you know someone like that?' (SM1). The concept of emotional availability for learning was a clear focus of discussion with this staff, the notion that inattention to the whole person by teachers may render useless any attempt to impart curriculum. How Catholic schools respond to the challenge of those students who do not seem able to focus on school work when their lives might be in personal turmoil is a constant challenge. The extent of the use of punitive measures employed could be a measuring stick of the validity of school mission statements, and perhaps even an indicator of authenticity in respect to adherence to Gospel values like care for the weak. How Catholic schools close the gaps that exist in the lives of so many young people and their families remains a constant challenge. This is itself a sign that the Catholic school has assumed such a large importance in the lives of families. Earlier in this chapter it was asserted that for many families the school was their main connection with the Church. It might also be asserted that for many of these families it might also assume the role of core social centre or community.

Discussion then focused on comparing their school experience with that of mainstream schools. Should a school of this kind exist in a larger school as a separate school? It was agreed that it was its separateness from the mainstream which made this school distinctive. 'They all come here with a fresh start so that this is their place. So it's not like they're the ones who are standing out because they're being naughty or falling behind' (SM5). 'It takes them out of that environment and creates a whole new environment' (3L1). 'They can heal each other too' (SM5). 'The older kids like helping the younger ones' (SM2). These experiences occurred in a separate environment rather than in a mainstream environment where these students could be singled out. 'There's a stigma attached to that' (3L1). 'I don't think we

should be on school campuses because of all those issues around labelling and ostracizing and just making things worse' (SM5).

How have parents responded to their children working in this environment? 'Here when you ring parents they are amazed to hear the good news..... "look x has had a fantastic session this afternoon, I just wanted to let you know". Whereas in the mainstream schools it's usually the opposite' (SM5). The connection with the home seemed paramount in this school.

We've also got time to find out what's going on at home. They have counselling sessions and after that they come to class and talk. That's where it all comes from. They may have had a shocking night the night before, and then they come here and talk. Imagine coming to school the next day and not being able to talk about it at school. (SM1).

The experience described here may be posing a question about the nature of community experience in a Catholic school. The other unique element of this school was that after six months the student usually returned to their mainstream school, and this was complemented with twelve months outreach where a staff member maintained a relationship with the student to see how they were progressing. 'They think it's great when we turn up, and that's really taking an interest in them and supporting them along the way, they love it and I think it's important' (SM3).

The interview with staff provided a sense of great positive work amidst many interesting situations and people. The staff were committed to the values described by the Principal and had stories to back these up. Perhaps the best summary of what the staff did with the students in this school came from the Principal herself, 'we haven't done anything special, we're just here'. Of course, the small setting made this viable, six staff and eighteen to twenty students. This sense of 'availability for the other' in this school community was palpable

during the research. It prompted the question as to how one achieves this in a large school setting, perhaps another dimension to the challenge of building a community of meaning.

### *Staff Questionnaire Data*

Three staff responded to the questionnaire. Two were teachers and one was a youth worker.

Only one of the teachers had worked in a Catholic school. Their responses are documented in table 4.21.

*Table 4.21 Questionnaire Responses*

<i>The things I most appreciate about working here</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. school structure – morning program and afternoon activities enable one to get to know the students well; relationship with other school mentors; and the leadership of the Principal.</li> <li>2. Supportive work environment. Seeing the positive results in the students.</li> <li>3. the ‘community feel’ that staff and students experience; the 1 on 1 work with the outreach students; supportive Principal.</li> </ol>
<i>The things I find challenging</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. working with some of the difficult students</li> <li>2. heavy workload; getting work at the right level for the students; sometimes parents aren’t supportive.</li> <li>3. having to step in when a teacher is absent and pick up their duties</li> </ol>
<i>Your reflections on this statement: <b>The purpose of this research is to investigate the situation of contemporary Catholic schools. Your school is unlike other Catholic schools in its operation and structure. In significant ways it works at the edges of mainstream Catholic education yet its charter is also aligned with the educational mission of the Church. I am interested in your experience and your reflection on these experiences.</b></i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. My school gives kids an option other than expulsion or being moved on. Our caring community reflects the values of the Church.</li> <li>2. This school gives struggling kids real options. It is rewarding to see such good results: closing of educational gaps, academic improvement, increase in self-confidence.</li> <li>3. The school provides an important educational opportunity for students who would otherwise fall through the gaps. We can empower them with a sense of hope. I wish there were more schools like ours.</li> </ol>

Only one of the three staff who responded made reference to the ‘values of the Church’, and that was the teacher who had previously worked in a Catholic school. There was consistency

in what the Principal and staff had already said in their separate interviews, especially in what it meant to work in a school such as this. The suggestion in these responses was that perhaps mainstream schools needed to be judged by the extent to which students ‘fall through the gaps’ and are empowered with ‘a sense of hope’. How schools make space for those students who struggle academically as well as socially and emotionally is a challenge faced by all schools but especially Catholic schools whose mission statements bespeak core values such as care for the weak. The employment of youth workers in this school is interesting because it is not a common practice in other Catholic schools. There seems to be an acceptance here that care for the students extends beyond the classroom because these youth workers continue a connection with these students for twelve months after they have left this school.

The employment of youth workers is atypical of the kind of work required in Catholic schools. The review of literature focussed on teachers and leadership teams, and the closest approach to other workers in Catholic schools was the notion of Lay Ecclesial Ministry, a concept and practice enunciated by the US Bishops, (Fay, 2005). It is the hope of this researcher that a possible outcome of this research is that it opens up discussion as to what other forms of work exist in Catholic schools which can be performed by other workers who can bring specific skills, such as youth workers. Parishes also employ pastoral associates and pastoral workers, and so it is also worth asking if these roles could also be developed in schools. These ideas are explored in the following chapters.

### Students

Ten questionnaire responses from a possible eighteen students were returned. Table 4.22 summarises some of the characteristics of these students in site three.

Table 4.22 Site three Student Demographics

Gender		Previous School	
Female	Male	Catholic	State
1	9	5	5

The questionnaire for this group of students asked for responses to five questions. These are set out in the table below.

Table 4.23 Questionnaire Responses

<i>What do you like most about being at this school?</i>
Teachers are nice (2) The afternoon program (7) More attention on my work (2) It's a small school Awards It's not like a school, it's like a house, a loving family There's a lot of people that help you I like the improvement I have made in work and attitude It's very good
<i>What do you think about the school setup?</i>
Morning meeting is very good (2) Small classes and it's easy to talk to the teachers Maybe a bit more of a play area other than that it's great The setup is cool It helps you improve your work and your behaviour It is awesome The setup is great It's different and fun It's really good and you have a kitchen
<i>After finishing at this school I will.....</i>
Plan to go back to my school and proudly finish Year 10, go up to Year 11 and get into the building industry. Be a better learner. Go back to school and do my best Go back to school (3) Do Hospitality at another school Go to a new school so I can expand my education further Go to the Island, Trade school Go back to my old school and tell people about the great experience at this school
<i>Would you recommend this school to other students? Explain your answer.</i>
All 10 said they would recommend it for the following reasons: You get extra help (5)

<p>It got me back on track and I want everyone to have that chance          You can get things right with life          A good school for learning (2)          It change me a lot for the best</p>
<p><i>What do you think life at my old school would have been like without this school?</i></p>
<p>Expelled or keep getting suspended. I would be getting nowhere in life          I would not be concentrating on work as much as I am now          Very difficult          I think it would be crap          I would be on the dole because I could not read or spell very good          I most likely would not be at school          I would of went straight down the gutter          I would be in deep shit          A lot different. I would still be my anonymous self. I would probably still be teased          I wouldn't be doing my work and wagging school</p>

These responses were remarkably candid in their self-appraisal and very positive. All students would recommend this school experience and not one student was disparaging of their teachers. The alternative setup of the school with its afternoon program and formal lessons in the morning was also quite popular. These responses reflected a sense in the students that they were moving forward in their lives and this was obvious when their responses to the questions, 'after finishing at this school I will...' and 'what do you think life at my old school would have been like without this school?' were compared. It is important to point out that this questionnaire was completed by the students as they approached the end of their six months at the school, so in this context the students had been at the school for a reasonable amount of time and were getting ready to take the next step, a return to mainstream, alternative school setting or even work pathways.

#### Concluding Remarks about Site three Data

There was an obvious consistency between the values and educational philosophy espoused by the Principal and the staff. This was also reflected in how the students saw

themselves in this school. The one missing element in this research data was parent feedback. Indirectly the staff indicated how positive parents felt when they received good feedback about their children although one staff member mentioned the difficulty of dealing with unsupportive parents. However other data suggested that this school remained popular with parents and that the numbers of applications per semester were nearly always more than the places available. The school only takes between eighteen and twenty students per semester. Despite its location on the outskirts of the central business district of Melbourne it still managed to attract students from schools quite a distance away. The researcher was left with the question as to whether this school's experience represented a microcosm of what a mainstream Catholic school could be like. Should there be centres like these for mainstream schools to work with cooperatively? Could schools in a region share the costs of running these centres not as substitutes but as extensions of their campuses?

#### Conclusion to this Chapter

The first of the research questions was concerned with how some Victorian Catholic schools understood and interpreted their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society. The interviews and questionnaires were designed to allow the teachers, students, parents and leadership teams to describe this understanding as well as they could.

The first site was a primary school which could be described as the traditional school next to the parish Church. The second was perhaps not as traditional, a Preparatory to Year 12 archdiocesan school, described by its Principal as 'sitting between a regional and a

congregational school' in its governance and structure. The third school was termed a Special School operating near the central business district but taking students from the larger metropolitan area. These distinctive school settings were chosen so as to explore how these school communities saw themselves as fulfilling the educational mission of the Church. The first research question was answered in the descriptions provided of the data based around interviews and questionnaires. The data presented in this chapter pointed to tensions in understanding and practice, tensions that were described in detail in the review of literature in Chapter two. For example, the tension between what parents expected of a Catholic education and what the school believed it needed to do to fulfil the educational mission of the Church, and also the tension that existed in variance between lack of involvement in the local Church and a desire for enrolment in Catholic schools. It became obvious in analysing the data that these communities were confronted with having to deal with gaps in student and family experiences. The further analysis of these gaps is the focus of the chapters to come.

There were differences in each school, not the least of which was in the numbers attending each, from 18 in the special school to 800 in the archdiocesan school (and this was only up to Year 9 at the time the interviews were done and still growing). The special school was only one of two in Victoria, whereas the primary school was typical of many parish primary schools with an enrolment of approximately 600 students. The archdiocesan school was only one of a number of such schools being developed in the major growth corridors around Melbourne, and their populations will expand once they are fully operational to Year twelve.

Each school provided a picture, both explicitly and implicitly, of how each understood its purposes. The special school carried on its work more in an implicit mode, especially since it did not have an RE curriculum and even its name did not readily identify it as Catholic. However, in its selection of staff, in its philosophies and practices there was a clear alignment with what the Principal regarded as essential principles and practices of any Catholic school. The Principal of this school regarded it as a 'beacon' for Catholic schools and the school was aligned with the Catholic system.

This chapter has also examined the themes emerging within each school and discussed briefly the similarities and differences between the groups within each school. Chapter five provides a thematic analysis across each school site and seeks to develop a clearer picture of what similarities and differences existed between each site which has only been analysed briefly in this chapter. More than this, this chapter examined the second and third research questions of this research, a) what impact, if any, have these changed circumstances had on the way these schools arrange their work structures and b) what implications this has for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and Catholic schools in general. Interpretation of the data along these lines has already commenced in this chapter, and a broader horizontal thematic analysis will extend these considerations.

Chapter six responds to the fourth research question which underpins the research, which was concerned with how it might be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?

## CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS & ANALYSIS – PART 2

### Introduction

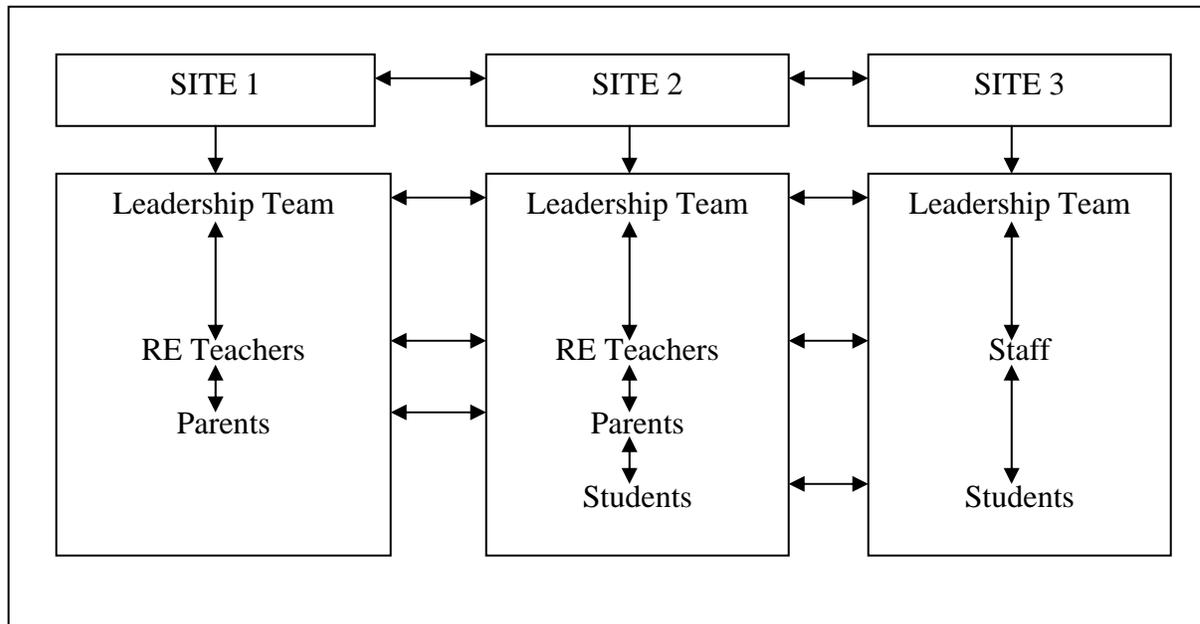
The previous chapter presented data which was collected from interviews and questionnaires obtained from leadership teams, teachers, students and parents across the three sites. It also addressed the research questions. Each site's data was analysed and internal thematic comparisons and contrasts were made between each group. The themes identified within each site represented the experiences and reflections of the groups in regard to their work as part of the educational mission of the Church, the challenges, tensions and difficulties as well as their successes and hopes.

A critique of the data also raised issues about apparent gaps and dissonances between the school and other relevant agencies. The first of these dissonances was identified between understandings of the educational mission on the part of the Church and what the school understood about this same educational mission. There was also dissonance between Church and society. Despite an appearance that the Catholic school might be separate from the secular and pluralist society, the school is also a part of this society, and everyone in the school community, parents, leadership team, teachers and students experienced this dissonance within themselves. A discussion of dissonance between the parish and the school was presented in Chapter two of this thesis. These metaphors of gaps and dissonances are now analysed.

A **gap** suggests that there is nothing in between two points whereas **dissonance** suggests that all the essentials are together but there is conflict and lack of alignment. Does the data reveal gaps or dissonances or both? The notion of authenticity as it was used in this research is also partly suggestive of the need for consistency between purposes and actions,

between stated aims and reality. The metaphors of 'gap' and 'dissonance' suggest a lack of consistency, not necessarily deliberate but perhaps endemic in how these interpret their vision for a Catholic school, but perhaps also endemic in the way the schools attempted to interpret their mission in the current social climate which has been described at some length in the review of literature provided in Chapter two of this thesis. There was also an apparent lack of consistency in the way the local Church related to the school. For reasons best understood by these Church communities there seemed to be little coordination or relationship between the Catholic school and the local Church. Another way of putting this is to suggest that the boundaries between local Church and the Catholic school have become blurred. It was suggested that the concept of Lay Ecclesial Ministry may be a way of clarifying these boundaries into lines of co-operation, communication and joint action. To distinguish and splinter the educational mission of the Church into parish work and school work may be a false distinction, and the data analysed thus far suggested that the work of both should actually be part of a continuum.

Chapter four presented a vertical thematic analysis, comparing and contrasting the themes which emerged between each group in a specific site. This chapter now focuses on a horizontal thematic analysis, comparing and contrasting themes across the three sites. These vertical and horizontal thematic analyses enable the data to be checked for consistency as well as for patterns of themes emerging both within and between each school. The following figure depicts this process.



*Figure 5.1 Comparative Thematic Analyses across the Three Sites*

This chapter also responds to the second and third research questions, and these concern the impact, if any, the changed circumstances have had on the way the schools which took part in the research arranged their work structures, and what implications this had for the future of these Catholic schools in particular, and Catholic schools in general. Chapter six responds to the final research question, which concerns how it might be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school. Before continuing, however, it is now important to also continue the reflection, commenced in Chapter one, on the key term of this research, namely, authenticity.

#### The Complex Question of Authenticity

Before continuing this analysis it is useful to stand back from the data briefly to examine the larger context again with respect to the question of the authenticity of the Catholic school,

analysed also in Chapter one. In reflecting on how people understood the role of the Church in their lives Rolheiser stated that ‘They haven't left their Churches; they just aren't going to them. We aren't so much post-Christian as we are post-ecclesial. The problem is not so much atheism or even religious affiliation, but participation in the Church’, (Rolheiser 2008, p.1). In light of the data analysed so far one take this further. If the people ‘haven’t left their Churches’ but simply ‘aren’t going to them’ they are nonetheless sending their children to Catholic schools. Facts pointing to this reality were examined in the review of literature in Chapter two. Rolheiser’s comment that ‘we aren’t so much post Christian as post-ecclesial’ (p.1) is a telling point for commenting on the data. Applying this idea of ‘post-ecclesial’ to the contemporary experience of Catholic schooling, it could be claimed that lack of participation in the Church has not led to a lack of desire in many parents for their children to be formed in the spiritual values they still believe are fundamental for the growth and education of their children, and for many this is to be found in the Catholic school. This has emerged as a problem for Catholic schools and the data analysed suggested that leadership teams and teachers alike did not seem to have a sense of how to deal with this situation. As Rolheiser put it, ‘they admit their need for God and for spirituality, but not their need for the Church’ (p. 1). There is, therefore, a gap between people’s need for a fundamental attachment to what they perceive as core values, and what the Church sees as the legitimate expression of these by participation in the Church. In other words, the question needs to be asked as to how the work of Catholic schools could be seen as being authentic or consistent when the Church which charges the school with a specific educational mission is not regarded as an essential partner in the educational enterprise by the families who send their children to these Catholic schools.

Not only might it not be seen as an essential partner by parents, but it also appears that the Catholic school and local Church do not see themselves as partners in a joint enterprise.

It is an argument of this research that the significance of the Catholic school somehow lies in narrowing this gap, seemingly created by this experience so aptly called 'post-ecclesial' by Rolheiser (2008, p.1). The schools' perception and understanding of this reality, will determine how they formulate strategies which will help close the gap. Some of these strategies will need to include looking at how schools define their work through the various roles that exist there like the REC but also whether or not the time has come to introduce new roles like youth workers and pastoral workers as was suggested in Chapter 4. It is an open question as to whether the local Church understands this gap and the impact this has on the school's efforts. The argument that the parish is central to this enterprise (Harrington, 2006) is somewhat glib when it appears that the reality is that the Catholic school is where parents seek to express their need for connection with values and not the parish. There appears to be a need for a combination of Church and school working together if the gap of post-ecclesialism is to be narrowed or closed altogether. Battams' research (2002, 2006) examined in Chapter two echoed this same concern. The 'post-ecclesial' experience is described in his use of the metaphor of the Church as 'absentee landlord' and 'irrelevant fringe-dweller', an attempt at describing the experience of some contemporary Catholic schools:

Schools currently strive to offer students a meaningful and relevant experience of the Church. Because the Church is perceived to be a distant and irrelevant fringe-dweller, however, this is an experience that will rarely if ever be extended on or nurtured in the parishes. Consequently, schools are beginning to become self-contained Churches. In many ways they are involved, albeit reluctantly, in developing an alternative identity, not only to the demands of the world but also the Church, at least as it currently exists as a historical reality. In trying to help participants engage with the Church, in other words, they are sometimes required to do this in spite of the Church. While this is not their desired intention and they are in reality striving to build bridges to the wider

Church, these by and large remain virtually untrodden by the increasing majority of their participants. (Battams 2002, p.382)

The data examined thus far suggested that Catholic schools were heavily engaged in seeking to 'build bridges to the wider Church' (Battams, 2002, p. 382). Battams' analogy was telling in that the 'landlord' (the Church) had for many families actually become a 'fringe-dweller' in the Catholic educational enterprise. If, as Battams suggested, the Catholic school's efforts to engage participation in the Church may be leading to families ignoring the local Church, then this inconsistency or lack of alignment may go to the heart of the authenticity of the educational mission of the Church as it is understood by both school and local Church. This dissonance between Catholic school and Catholic Church now needs to be addressed. Chapter six attempts to describe how this might be achieved. The question of the authenticity of the Catholic school is, therefore, also an ecclesiological question as much as it is a question of educational leadership. Church and education authorities working together will need to address this situation if the contemporary Catholic school is effectively to respond to the post-ecclesialism which can be so prevalent in school communities, and which was revealed in the findings of the research in the three schools which were the focus of this research.

The analysis in the following section now examines the similarities and differences in themes across leadership teams, RE teachers, parents and students.

## Leadership Teams

### *Introduction*

What similarities and differences existed between the leadership teams of each site? Table 5.1 below highlights these.

Table 5.1 Comparative Thematic Analyses across Leadership Teams in the Three Sites

Site 1: Primary School	Site 2: Preparatory to Year 12 School	Site 3: Special School	Research Questions
<i>Leadership Team</i>	<i>Leadership Team</i>	<i>Principal</i>	<p>How do some Victorian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?</p> <p>What impact, if any, have these changed circumstances had on the way these schools arrange their work structures?</p>
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	
School as Church	Catholic identity of the school	RE curriculum implicit in the values and attitudes which inform practices daily	
Role of the REC	Ambiguity: parish-school relationship	Catholic schools are distinctive in the degree of pastoral care they offer, willingness to spend time with the children	
	Need for spirituality	This school is a sign of hope, healing and never turns anyone away	
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>		
Role of priest	Parents lacking in Church literacy		
Role of teachers	Role of priest		
Parents need for the school			

Leadership teams in Catholic schools have the important task of defining and implementing the vision of the Catholic school for students, parents and other staff. It is their beliefs and practices that eventually shape the kind of Catholic school it becomes. Nowhere is this more evident than in the pivotal role of Principal. The Principals in each of the sites where data was gathered also saw themselves as part of a larger leadership group in their school. Analysis of the themes which emerged in the data collection focused on the leadership teams' and not just on the Principals' ideas. In site three this was not possible because of the small

staff of six. The coloured sections in the Table 5.1 above point to the thematic similarities in each leadership team and these are examined in more detail below.

### *The Role of the Priest and School as Church*

In two of the three sites the role of the priest was seen as highly significant. Site one was a primary school and maintained a close relationship with the priest since the parish was on the same property as the school, whereas in site two the priest was employed as a chaplain at the school. In site three the staff made no mention of priest involvement in the school. In site one the role of the priest was seen as pivotal by the REC in sending an important message to the school community, ‘you try to run the line that says here’s the best of what it’s like to be a Catholic. It says, “you are welcome, you are accepted, and you are loved”. That’s our Parish priest. You are loved, wanted, accepted, come as you are.’ (1L2). In site two the Principal indicated that the presence of the priest was far more pragmatic, ‘If we did not have access to a chaplain here we would not have access to liturgy as much as we have.’ (2L1). The similarities stop here though.

The involvement of the priest in site one was a function of it being a parish primary school where school and Church were physically on the same site with the presbytery across the road, typical of so many Catholic primary schools. However, site two being an archdiocesan school was, like so many religious order owned and regional schools, physically removed from parish sites, as was access to liturgy as the Principal indicated. There was difficulty in gaining access to liturgy from the priests of the feeder parishes. The employment of a priest as chaplain bridged this gap. There is a concern here that parents, therefore, may not need to concern themselves with parish involvement, given that their children already had

access to the sacraments in their school. Yet, given the dearth of priests in the archdiocese in which the research took place, it is unlikely that secondary schools would be able to employ a priest as a chaplain. It is a legitimate question, given this experience, to ask if the growth of Preparatory to Year 12 schools is enhancing or diminishing the role of the parish, in view of the effective separation of the primary school from the parish. On the other hand, this development could also be pointing to a new paradigm for enacting the educational mission of the Church. Another argument of this thesis is that Catholic school and local Church need to find new and effective ways of connecting with each other if both are to fulfil their respective roles in the educational mission of the Church. This is made all the more urgent by the ever increasing number of parents wishing to enrol their children in Catholic schools. What shape this might take is further examined in Chapter six, but the suggestion which arose from the review of literature is that this may be assisted by a clearer application of what the US Bishops have called “Lay Ecclesial Ministry” (CW, Fay 2005, p. 5).

This is not an argument for dismantling the traditional pattern of parish and primary school, an arrangement which has for so long been the cornerstone of Catholic education in Australia. Rather, with the continued growth of Preparatory to Year 12 schools, more attention will need to be given to how this larger entity can develop important connections with the wider Church. This development is removing the Primary school from the traditional physical linkage with the parish. This is a challenge for those schools who will not be able to employ a priest and whose families may very well continue to have little or no formal relationship with their local Church community. This is really the educational expression of what Rolheiser called the ‘post-ecclesial’ (Rolheiser, 2008, p. 1) experience of so many today. Battams describes this as a situation where the Church ‘is perceived to be a distant and irrelevant

fringe-dweller' (Battams 2002, p.382). One way of engaging with this issue is to look at the work structures in Catholic schools and question whether these may be contributing to keeping the Church as an 'irrelevant fringe dweller' (Battams 2002, p.382). It may be of concern that there could be a duplication of roles when schools employ REC's, Chaplains, Faith Education Coordinators, Coordinators of Faith and Mission, and parishes employ Pastoral Workers, Pastoral Associates and Youth Workers. It only becomes duplication when both sets of workers have no relationship with each other, and yet, in the case of regional secondary schools, their constituencies are (or should be) exactly the same.

'In trying to help participants engage with the Church ..... they (the schools) are sometimes required to do this in spite of the Church' (Battams 2002, p. 382). This appeared to be the case in site two where the school actually employed a priest from a religious order. The involvement of a priest was not an issue in the case of site three, and was never raised in any of the interviews and questionnaires undertaken there. Yet the Principal in site two, deprived of the possibility of allowing access to the celebration of the sacraments, had decided to employ a priest perhaps making it, in appearance at least, a substitute parish. However, nowhere in the interviews and questionnaires was there a sense that this was a core purpose of the school. The Principal asserted clearly that the school was not structured for this role. The researcher did not observe or hear any member of the leadership team say that the school was equipped to take the place of the Church for its community. In many ways this bears out the point that Battams expressed so succinctly:

While Catholic education is an ecclesiological endeavour, it is not the schools' role alone to engage in the processes necessary to nurture a reconciliated ecclesiology that can authentically engage with the world. As one part of the fabric of the whole Church, schools can make a contribution, but even though in reality they are the Church for many participants, schools are not equipped theologically and organisationally to

achieve what this requires. This is the responsibility of the whole of the local Church. (Battams, 2002, p.383)

This reiterates the point that the question of the authenticity of the Catholic school is also an ecclesiological question that goes beyond glib responses like Harrington's calling, effectively, for a separation of parish and school (Harrington, 2006). It may very well have become the case that traditional parish primary and secondary school paradigms no longer relate to contemporary circumstances especially when the local Church has become radically disconnected from them.

If in sites one and two there was a perceived dissonance between Church and school, there was no such perception in site three. The Principal of this school described its Catholicity by seeking to adhere to simple Gospel values:

We are the person of Christ for these children. We don't catechise them, we don't try and convert them, we don't try and baptize anybody but if giving that person religion means giving them hope, healing their wounds, making them feel valued and valuable, when it's appropriate I say to them, 'God loves you', and I say to them, 'you are a loved person'.... I think that what families are looking for in Catholic schools are what we offer to their children, that extra degree of care, that sense of right, the sense of justice, the standing up for the marginalized, the standing up for the disadvantaged, Catholic action. (3L1)

What was happening in this school was neither catechetical (where faith is assumed) or even evangelical (the announcement of the Gospel) but pre-evangelical, that is, it was setting the ground so that faith might develop, a task that Pope John Paul II called all Catholics to participate in (RM, 1990). In contrast with sites one and two what seemed to cause leadership teams and RE teachers most concern was that their task could not even be considered as catechetical but more evangelizing or even pre-evangelizing. Pope John Paul II would go on to call this "re-evangelization" or "new evangelization". In site three the program was not

built around specific assumptions about Church involvement and enrolments that require a baptism certificate, but rather enrolling those students who were at the margins of mainstream schooling. The Principal in this school was adamant that the work this school did was as authentic as any other Catholic school run along more formal lines. This school existed alongside the more traditional models of traditional Catholic schooling and could be pointing to a more inclusive mode of Catholic education which clearly targeted those children and families marginalized from these same traditional forms of Catholic schooling.

### *Parents and Catholic schools*

Each leadership team reflected on the role of parents. In sites one and two there appeared to be ambivalent attitudes to the role of parents and this was also reflected in the interviews with RE teachers later. In site three parents were only mentioned in respect to the need for the staff to maintain positive communication for the sake of the improvement of the child.

Major concerns for the leadership teams in both sites one and two were that parents did not seem interested in the Catholic nature of the school so much as the standard of its pastoral care and facilities. The development of a Catholic ethos in the school, so important to the leadership team, seemed to be ignored by many parents and was not seen as relevant in making a choice for the Catholic school ahead of a state school education. Statements that reflected this were 'being Catholic does not really rate highly' (site one) and 'people (parents) see the Catholic identity of the school as the least significant' (site two). Both leadership teams also saw a major challenge in how parents seemed to hand over faith education to the school, 'our challenge is to assist the Church in educating our parents' (site one). In site two the Principal stated that parents 'were looking more for spirituality than for a Church

experience'. But it was also in site two that a member of the leadership team made the comment that 'it's the parents you've got to teach to behave in Church because they don't go' and the Principal who made the comment that 'it's the parents that are out of control'. This seemingly disparaging view of parents was not generally reflected elsewhere in the data collected at other sites. Nevertheless, the lack of parental involvement in the Catholic school was seen as a major challenge to the contemporary Catholic school.

Even though it was not stated in so many words, the core of the problem seemed to lie in how to assist parents in aligning their children's education with the Church's goals. Catholic schools, according to those interviewed, did not see themselves as substitute Churches or parishes for their school populations in the same way parishes are set up to be. Site two employed a priest to help do this, but other schools which are not able to employ a priest will continue to struggle to provide access to the sacraments. This is an important problem when it comes to the matter of the authenticity of the contemporary Catholic school – if a school needs a priest to assist in the task of faith education, and especially through access to the sacraments, this will not always be possible for the majority of Catholic schools when there is a decreasing numbers of priests already even for parishes. Beyond employing priests, schools are not equipped and structured to take the place of the local Church, and would not want to do so. The reality is, however, that many families choose Catholic schools and ignore their parishes, their local Church. Both school and local Church are committed to similar missions yet how they might be drawn closer together so that their efforts may be better coordinated for the benefit of all their respective constituencies requires important examination and reflection by both Church and educational authorities.

*Conclusion to this section*

Leadership teams are charged with enacting the mission statements that guide their schools, and each interprets its share in the educational mission of the Church in its own specific circumstances, socio-economic realities, and religious and spiritual realities of the community. There was a dissonance between the local Church and the school. The school was not designed to do the task of the Church but the question arose as to the extent of the local Church's involvement in the shaping of the many Catholic schools that are now being built around the archdiocese. Beyond the formal connections of School Boards and canonical administrators, there is the question of how to shape community, and in the case of the Catholic schools, the community that is largely absent or uninvolved in the local Church. To say this is not to disparage the local Church or even to say that schools should take over the role of the local Church and become a substitute parish. It would appear that dissonance exists in the lack of a sense of shared mission. The Catholic school and local Church are both confronted with the same reality, and this may very well be what could draw them together to meet the challenge of a contemporary society that has built pressure on Catholic families as well as the Catholic school. As already discussed in Chapter two, the task of leadership in contemporary Catholic schools is a much broader enterprise than that of being tied to the single role of Principal. It was suggested that this role might be seen in the light of the much broader notion of Lay Ecclesial Ministry (Fay, 2005), and this will be examined in more detail in the chapter to follow.

## Religious Education Teachers

### *Introduction*

The teachers in sites one and two who were interviewed and completed questionnaires as part of this research made significant comments on the role of parents. Compared with the staff in site three, who reported positive connections with the home, teachers in sites one and two cited significant problems with parental response to and cooperation with the school when it came to faith development and RE. Table 5.2 summarises the similarities and differences in themes across the three sites.

*Table 5.2 Comparative Thematic Analyses across Teachers in the Three Sites*

<b>Site 1: Primary School</b>	<b>Site 2: Preparatory to Year 12 School</b>	<b>Site 3: Special School</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>
<i>Religious Education Teachers</i>	<i>Religious Education Teachers</i>	<i>Staff</i>	
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general?  Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?
Role of parents	Variance between school RE and parent response	Students need to be emotionally available for learning	
- lack of support of the school	Significance of having a priest on staff	This school supports mainstream schools but should be separate	
- lack of time		Regular and positive connections with the home	
- lack of understanding		Sense of community a foundation for progress	
- lack of interest in Religious Education	<b>Sub-themes</b>		
<b>Sub-Themes</b>	Essential to have a background in RE to teach it effectively		
Schools as places of	Sense of community		

evangelization	makes a difference		
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### *Teachers and the Role of Parents*

Teacher perceptions of parent involvement were not dissimilar to those of the leadership teams in sites one and two. With the leadership team, teachers in site two also commented upon the significance having a priest on their staff made to the whole school community. The common thread between sites one and two in respect to the relationship between parents and the school was that teachers found it hard to teach RE when there was a lack of parental involvement in the faith education of their children. There was a strong perception that parents were content to leave this almost entirely up to the school, and that it was not a major concern for the parents. If Church was not seen as their priority on the weekend this was most probably because of so many other pressures on families and the paucity of leisure time. Yet, the Catholic school was perceived as the family's only experience of Church, and it was a sense of community and pastoral care in a Catholic school which drew parents to send their children to a Catholic school. In site two one teacher made the point that even if this was the case it did not seem fair that the Catholic school should be seen as the 'future of the Church' (2RE5). This was asking too much of the school and not enough of the parents who chose the school for their children, 'because the parents are sending a completely different message...the kids are getting huge mixed messages from the school' (2RE5).

Feelings of frustration about parents were expressed and there was also frustration felt by teachers at having to manage the students' faith education alone when this same development was not broadly supported by their parents. One way to describe this experience would be like teaching English to non-English speakers, a sense of having to start from the very beginning – this is the researcher's analogy not one that derived from the teachers

interviewed. Again this comes back to the distinctions already referred to above between catechesis, evangelization and pre-evangelization. This experience of the teachers needs to be taken seriously. The same perception of dissonance expressed by teachers was not reflected in the responses of the parents who took part in the research. Perhaps this was not surprising in view of the fact that these same parents also pointed to other important values and practices they looked for in a Catholic school. There was also the impact of the teacher's own personal beliefs as these affected their teaching of RE. It was pointed out in Chapter two of this thesis that there is research which also shows that a good proportion of staff in Catholic schools have their own struggles with belief and practice (McLaughlin 2005), an experience shared by the parents. Interestingly, none of the teachers interviewed or who returned questionnaires made reference to this situation, either explicitly or implicitly.

How schools managed this dissonance between school and home and whether they were appropriately resourced to respond to this situation was not reflected on in the interviews or questionnaires. Neither teachers nor leadership teams who reflected on this dissonance could suggest practical ways of managing this problem. It is an open question, therefore, as to what more Catholic schools can realistically be asked to do. This question is all the more important for those schools which do not have a resident priest on staff, and that is the majority of Catholic secondary schools. Primary schools are usually geographically linked to their parishes and the consequent access to sacraments. This is changing with the ever increasing development of Preparatory to Year 12 schools in the major growth corridors of Melbourne, because there are primary schools now developing alongside secondary schools, and the former have no direct parish link. This represents a marked departure from the paradigm of primary school and parish connection which has existed since the beginning of

Catholic education in Australia. If it is true that for many families the Catholic school is their 'only experience of Church' then there is a challenge to the efficacy of the educational mission both of the Catholic school and the local Church. It is the task of the next chapter to make some recommendations about this situation.

### *Importance of Community*

Teachers in sites two and three also pointed to the positive need for building and retaining a sense of community in the school, and that this gave the school an important role. What this sense of community may mean was not discussed in any detail by the staff, but there was a sense that there was a real need for the elements of the school to connect in meaningful ways. This connection was perceived to be absent in sharing faith between families and school. If there was little or no connection between the families who sent their children to Catholic schools and their local Church community, then little sense could be made of building communities of meaning, school and Church communities which interlink and share the educational mission of the Church. There is also an absence of 'a sense of community' once a student finishes at that school or all the children in the family have left school and families cease any formal connections, a challenge for both the school and local Church. If there is no local Church community to connect with, then that would appear to be the endpoint. So while building a sense of community in a school environment is important, a sense of community which is not linked to the broader Church community will not suffice if it merely stops when school ends. Building community is a larger enterprise than what a Catholic school ordinarily can accomplish if it is not somehow linked into the broader Catholic community which gives the Catholic school its reason for existing. There was no

doubt that in site three the teachers and students regarded having a sense of community as integral to its success and this aspect made it special over the six months that a student was enrolled there. It was also a smaller school which made building connections all the more important.

Questions need to be asked as to why, after thirteen years of Catholic schooling, young people seem so detached from the Church that nurtured them. The research of McLaughlin (2000, 2005, 2006) and Saker (2005) has pointed to some understanding about this phenomenon, but it is becoming increasingly important to understand this phenomenon better if schools and local Churches can improve on what they already do.

The question as to what made sites one and two communities of meaning was an important question for both schools. It was stated in the review of literature in Chapter two (Battams, 2002, p. 384; Quillinan, 1997) that schools could not be substitute parishes because they are not prepared for this task. This is clearly the case expressed in the data gathered in site two especially. Schools and parishes operating as almost separate communities, each working hard to build and retain their own Catholic identity but never quite intersecting in meaningful connections, poses a challenge for both, and not just the Catholic school. The review of literature also introduced Church statements that the Catholic schools 'were part of the particular local Church..... and share in the life and work of the local Christian community.' (RDECS, paragraph 101). The data showed that this was more the ideal than the reality. Catholic schools with their increased numbers, and parish communities with their decreasing numbers of involved members, both shared in the mission of the Church, and the dissonance between the two poses a challenge to each to find ways that bring their work together.

### *Conclusion to this section*

In concluding this section, it was essential to the purposes of this research that the analysis presented thus far was not seen as being negatively critical of either the contemporary Catholic school or the local Church because the research was seeking to simply allow school communities to describe their situation. The analysis of data established that the dissonance between parish and school required a more considered understanding and an attempt to deal with the situation than was currently the case. The further dissonance of which this is a symptom was the dissonance between Church and society. Schools were not separate from this experience. Dissonances within the individuals who make up these school communities were also a factor. The teachers and leadership teams interviewed for this research hardly talked about their own difficulties with Christian faith, yet there is research elsewhere as already indicated, that points to the felt internal dissonances many young teachers experience in working in a Catholic school (O'Brien, 2005; Rosengren 2005). The few parents who responded to the questionnaires were equally not forthcoming. In the chapter that follows an attempt is made to address these dissonances by making suggestions about how Catholic schools might change their ways of working in response to the circumstances.

### Parents

The ideas and views of parents who took part in this research were represented by a small amount of responses yet these still require comment. It was significant that whilst leadership teams and teachers were seemingly critical of the levels of parental support for the Catholic ethos of the school, there was no equivalent criticism of the teachers and school leadership by the parents. However, all three groups in sites one and two showed that parents tended to rely

on the school for faith education, and accepted that social pressures had an impact on the family's ability to participate in the local Church community. The latter was not seen as inconsistent with the choice of a Catholic school for the education of their children. Table 5.3 summarises the similarities in views of the parents who responded to the questionnaires.

*Table 5.3 Comparative Thematic Analyses across Parents in the Three Sites*

<b>Site 1: Primary School</b>	<b>Site 2: Preparatory to Year 12 School</b>	<b>Site 3: Special School</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>
<i>Parents</i>	<i>Parents</i>	<i>Parents</i>	What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general?
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	
Need for spiritual values	The school supports Catholic values and practice	n/a	
Need for a faith system for children as part of a Catholic community	Catholic school promotes basic values better than state system		

Parents in sites one and two indicated their reliance on the school to support their need to educate their children with important values for life, and these also included 'spiritual values' and 'Catholic values'. None of the parent data suggested that the school ought to be the substitute parish for the family, yet it was clear that the parents were looking for leadership and guidance from the school in terms of faith development. Neither did parents make any comparison or contrasts between local Church and school except in reminiscing about past experiences.

The research also showed that parent-school connections were quite clear and straightforward when it came to reporting on the progress of students and the provision of important resources to enhance learning. Yet it remained a concern that leadership teams and teachers were ambiguous, at best, as to how they should deal with the seeming lack of parental

support for the RE program of the school. There was much comment from the staff of both sites one and two about the inability or unwillingness of parents to fully participate in liturgical and prayer life of the school, yet there was little indication as to how they might also address this situation. In the case of site one this was to be left to the parish, and in site two there was already a priest on site. Both sites acknowledged the importance of building and sustaining community yet this was not necessarily related to a Church community as such.

Despite a systematic RE program backed by texts and large faculties, there was still some concern about how Catholic schools engage parents in the all important task of religious and faith education. Beyond the use of mandated texts, with an expansive content that can be assessed and reported on, there was a prevailing sense that more could be done. Leaving the 'more' to the parish does not suffice as an answer because the parish, for the majority of these parents, was not a locus of faith expression or community.

One way in which some of this situation could be addressed is through the School Improvement Framework (SIF) as developed by the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM, 2006). The framework is designed with the purpose of enabling schools to critically evaluate and plan strategies for not only meeting government requirements for all schools, but also for enabling Catholic schools to examine whether they are able to meet the important requirement of sharing in the educational mission of the Church. It identified five spheres of schooling, and two of these are significant in the context of this research. There is one sphere called 'Education in Faith' and within this sphere specific mention was made of 'parish connection'. The other sphere is called 'School Community' and specific mention was made of 'parish' and 'parents'. The Principal in site two made reference to this framework in one of his comments when discussing parent responses to the school's efforts in faith development,

'I'm not sure that people answer the questions correctly but interestingly at our school, in both years it's been done, the people see the Catholic identity as the least significant' (2L1).

This process is significantly different from the former Registered Schools Board process which it now replaces. The SIF broadens the scope of reflection, evaluation and strategic planning and now seeks to actively involve parents and parishes, at least in how its purposes are defined. This framework is set down for adoption by both Catholic primary and secondary schools, and is in its early phase of implementation across the Catholic school system. It also needs to be remembered that the SIF is set within the broader framework of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority which:

delegates its ongoing quality assurance responsibilities to the owners and operators of education and training providers. School systems will be able to apply to the Authority to be licensed to manage ongoing quality assurance against the defined standards for their system, organisation or provider. (CEOM, 2006, p. 3)

It remains to be seen how seriously the attempt to involve parish and parents in this larger process of evaluation and strategic planning will enable the development of closer ties and cooperation. At the very least the CEOM, as a key arm of the Church's educational mission, must encourage schools to take these aspects seriously and go beyond mere gathering of data from online questionnaires. In other words, Catholic schools must be encouraged to go beyond tokenistic consultation to appropriate dialogue. For example, one way this might occur is to involve the local deanery<sup>9</sup> authority in the SIF process. This may be important to ensure that both the parish community and parents are enabled to have a clear voice in how the Catholic school relates to the local Church community and the needs of families. Leaving the process to the school authorities alone may not guarantee the transparency needed to engage the

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<sup>9</sup> A deanery is a cluster of parishes working together on common ministries, fostering mutual support, sharing resources and working together.

broader Catholic community. In other words, if the SIF is to have efficacy in relation to parish connection and education in faith, terms used by the framework itself, then these need to be tested by the broader Catholic community and not only by the school.

### Students

As with the RE teachers in sites one and two, students in sites two and three identified a sense of community as key to their positive experience of schooling. Table 5.4 summarises the similarities and differences.

*Table 5.4 Comparative Thematic Analyses across Students in the Three Sites*

<b>Site 1: Primary School</b>	<b>Site 2: Preparatory to Year 12 School</b>	<b>Site 3: Special School</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>
<i>Students</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Students</i>	How do some Victorian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?
	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	
n/a	Sense of community	Size of the school was a positive	
	Necessary to be taught good morals	This school has made a difference	
	Growing up Catholic is not the same as going to Church	Sense of community	
	<b>Sub Theme</b>		
	School patron is a great role model		

Students in site two said that a sense of community was made tangible for them by the presence of a priest on staff as well as having a special patron of the College as a model. The latter, especially, imbued an ideal for living and the former was able to embody this spirit by his involvement in the life of the school. For site three students this was expressed in terms of the school being quite small in size and only lasting for one semester. For the students, it was

a major scaffold for developing a positive future pathway where previously, in a different school setting, there was aimlessness and failure.

It was significant that in site two one of the students commented in their questionnaire that 'growing up Catholic is not the same as going to Church' (2ST1). This was significant because it implied a real sense of a divide between Catholic school attendance and Church involvement, and this from a teenager (the student in question was in Year 9). With no parish connection or Church involvement it remained an open question as to what Church involvement was retained after students finished Year 12. In addition, after having been in involved in an extensive RE program, retreat camps, reflection days and major school liturgies, there is no certainty that any similar activities are likely to be pursued. This situation describes yet again the dissonance between parish and school when young people exit thirteen years of Catholic schooling and possibly have no further connection with a community of faith.

In the context of the SIF described above, it may be easy to find the data that establishes literacy and numeracy scores and averages of all students, as well as documentation that the Victorian Essential Learning Standards have been adopted, but there is also a need to find data that describes the success or otherwise of the RE program and the extent to which schools have been successful at building community. In other words, ways will need to be found to ascertain the extent to which schools have been successful at fulfilling the following goal, 'Catholic schools offer an education imbued with an authentic Catholic understanding of Christ and his teaching, as well as a lived appreciation of membership of the Catholic Church' (SIF, page 3). However, leaving this task to the school alone seems to be more than what the schools can manage, at least on the data presented in this research, yet it

was also true that local Churches were struggling to retain the numbers that support this aim expressed so clearly in the SIF.

Examination of the data seemed to suggest that how students respond to the faith education and religious education programs in Catholic schools is largely determined by their teachers and parents working together, their attitudes, knowledge and faith. The parents are the first educators in faith, as so many Church documents are at pains to point out, (CS, 1977) and the teachers are there to assist the parents. Whatever the outcome of thirteen years in Catholic schools, it always remains important that these young people know and learn from dedicated adults, not only what they need to lead a successful life but also what it means to have a 'lived appreciation of membership of the Catholic Church', (SIF, page 3). Judging by the statistics that emanate from census studies and research by the Pastoral Projects Office in Melbourne (Dixon 2008), the perception is that by this criterion alone Catholic schools may not be that successful.

### Conclusion to the Chapter

The purpose of this chapter was to compare the data across the three sites to determine the extent of similarities and contrasts in themes. Analysis of these themes in this chapter and the chapter to follow also leads to possible findings in response to the fourth research question, based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school? It has been shown that the themes that have emerged across the three sites are quite similar, that their experience of being contemporary Catholic schools poses challenges that their communities may not always be able to meet. Data emerging from sites one and two specifically highlighted the dissonances between school and local Church,

and between schools and families. These dissonances also seem to challenge the authenticity of Catholic schools in that there is a lack of alignment or consistency between the expressed goals of the schools, the experience of their stake holders, parents, students, teachers and leadership teams, as well as connections with the local Church. The thematic analyses of Chapter four and this chapter also reflected the themes that emerged in the review of literature in Chapter two. This horizontal thematic analysis of the data will now lead to a broader examination of conclusions and findings in the final Chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

The purpose of this final chapter is to explain the conclusions which can be drawn from the data and to make recommendations with regard for the four research questions which underpinned the research. These were as follows;

1. How do some Victorian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?
2. What impact, if any, have these changed circumstances had on the way these schools arrange their work structures?
3. What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general?
4. Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?

These questions, which have focused this research, now need appropriate responses as they have arisen in the data that has been gathered from the three school sites.

#### *First Research Question: **understanding and interpreting Catholic identity***

How do some Australian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society? The purpose of this question was to allow school communities to have a voice in describing how they viewed their role as Catholic schools. All three sites expressed a clear alignment with the goals of Catholic schooling which were expressed variously as building a connection with sacraments, community building and inspiring the school community with Gospel values. However, sites one and two described their greatest frustration as the lack of connection between parents and school in respect to the faith education of the students. Site three differed from sites one and

two in that this was a school where students only came for six months, for an intense educational experience prior to returning to their home school. The staff at this site saw their role as working in cooperation with mainstream schools to assist those students whose educational experience had been negative and who were at risk personally as well as educationally.

Each site also provided data that parents often sought out a Catholic education for their children because of the strong values in the schools and this was sometimes expressed as a need for spiritual values. This preference for Catholic schools was not necessarily being linked with allegiance with the local Church. This lack of consonance was partly described as the difficulty parents had in managing busy weekends and sometimes struggling to attain a work-life balance. Teachers and leadership teams were well aware of this situation, and this was also reflected in the interview with the students in site two. Even though the terms 'secular' and 'pluralist' were not often used by the respondents to the questionnaires or in interviews, what each had to say expressed an understanding of what impact these elements not only had on families but also on the nature of the RE and faith development programs in the school. For example, the perception of increased secularism in society did not mean that parents were not seeking a values based education based on Christian principles. In other words, secularism had more to do with disenchantment with the Church often expressed in poor attendance figures rather than a rejection of spirituality or the need for faith.

As a consequence, respondents at each site, and especially those at sites one and two, expressed the concern that the Catholic identity of the Catholic school was challenged by this experience. This was reflected in the poor understanding by children of even the fundamentals of faith like simple prayers, but it was also expressed in terms of parent experiences of divorce

and separation, and lack of interest in parish-based or school-based liturgies. The challenge to the Catholic identity of the Catholic school was something that the personnel especially at sites one and two did not always feel able to deal with, admitting that RE programs and liturgical initiatives were not enough. However, it was not clear to the schools what more could be done to deal with this situation.

In sites one and two there was also a sense that the Catholic identity of the school had been eroded by the lack of connection of parents with the local Church. In site one it was pointed out that families seemed to more readily align with the school for an experience of community rather than with the parish simply because they did not identify with the parish. In site two a priest was employed who could provide access to the sacraments thus opening up the possibility of families having no need for the local Church. Yet, while building community was seen as a core part of the work of the Catholic school, none of the schools believed that they were equipped to provide the infrastructure for a Church community in the same a parish was able to.

In this thesis, these experiences have been expressed as gaps or dissonances. It seems that gaps have indeed opened up in different ways, between home and school, between home and local Church, and now between school and local Church. It has been a premise of the research reported in this thesis that at a time when enrolments in Catholic schools have never been higher, Church attendances and participation have never been lower, and this experience was clearly reflected in the research carried out at the three sites. This was expressed in another way when students in site two expressed an interest and curiosity in RE, however did not necessarily see how this was linked with Church attendance and involvement. Further, Rolheiser's notion of 'post-ecclesialism' seemed best able to describe this experience, the idea

that 'people still believe in God and their Churches even when they don't often go to Church. They haven't left their Churches; they just aren't going to them', (Rolheiser, 2008, p. 1). Extending this to include Catholic schools, even though people are not going to Church they are still looking for a meaningful educational experience for their children and this includes religious and faith education. If this was not so then enrolment numbers would suffer, and there certainly was no issue with numbers in each of the three schools used for the research reported in this thesis.

In summary then, the aggregated data gathered in relation to the first research question indicated that Catholic **schools struggle to convey the message of Catholic identity**. Some of the reasons for this are beyond the control of the schools themselves, such as lack of parent involvement in the local Church, lack of access to the sacraments, changed social circumstances for parents such as working on weekends (this was more the case in sites one and two than in site three). Whilst for school personnel there was a sense of frustration experienced in the obstacles they faced, there was also a sense that what they were doing still had significance, even if this was not reflected in Church involvement and practice on the part of the students and their families. One school, site two, even saw itself as an 'outpost of the Church', still seeking to build community and sharing in the educational mission of the Church despite the lack of local Church connection.

*The Second Research Question: **the impact of changed social circumstances on the work structures of schools***

What impact, if any, have the changed circumstances of society and the schools themselves had on the way these schools arrange their work structures? Implied in this question was the sense that the contemporary Catholic school no longer retains the stable Catholic school

culture of the mid-twentieth century where the leadership and teaching staff were primarily composed of members of religious orders. So the research in the three schools sought to ascertain how these three schools met this challenge of spreading the Gospel to people who have little affiliation with their Church, those wanting an education in the Catholic system yet not seeing the necessity for any allegiance to the broader Church community for whom the Catholic school fundamentally existed. By work structures is meant those roles and strategies which assist in the implementation of a school's mission statement or goals and vision. For example, beyond having an REC working with RE teachers to deliver a systematic and extensive program in religious education, what other roles had schools implemented? The second research question is actually pointing to a suggestion that **if there are new demands being placed on schools then these would need to be met by introducing new approaches and maybe even newer roles than those which currently exist in schools.**

Site one was typical of most Catholic primary schools in being located on the same property as the local Church and across the road from the priest's residence. The leadership structure also displayed a particular reliance on the REC, whose role went beyond managing the class-based program to management of young RE teachers as well as liturgy and sacraments. The role of the REC was also perceived as having a strong pastoral element. The Principal of this school explained the extent to which the school relied upon the REC pastorally as well as being a leader of other religious educators in the school.

Site two was a Preparatory to Year 12 school, one of an increasing number of such schools in Melbourne. Its leadership structure was not dissimilar to other secondary schools; but it was distinctive in two ways. Firstly, it employed a priest so that the school community could have access to the sacraments. His presence was seen as highly significant by staff and students, yet

none of the three parents who returned their questionnaires mentioned the priest or commented on his value to the school. Secondly, whilst the school was regional in that it was catering for a certain geographical area in Melbourne, its Board of Management was not made up of parish priests as canonical administrators of each feeder parish, but of other members who did not necessarily have a link with the region or local parish. As a Preparatory to Year 12 school, the primary and secondary schools were based on the one site, a contrast with other primary and secondary schools which traditionally have been separate. The development of this kind of regional school is a recent phenomenon in Catholic education in Victoria.

Site three was atypical of Catholic schools in general because it only enrolled a maximum of twenty students for six months before they returned to their home school or found an alternative educational pathway. It employed youth workers as well as teachers and had developed a follow-up program for after the students returned to their home school. Its development had evolved from an earlier initiative of a religious order seeking to cater for its own students who struggled to remain within mainstream schooling and experienced failure. It was a fully government funded school and took students from government as well as non-government schools, but especially Catholic schools.

Another purpose behind the second research question was to see how schools adapted to the challenges they experienced in educating Catholic families. Sites one and two employed highly experienced RE teachers to meet the challenge of students unacquainted with the simple elements of faith, whilst site three did not teach RE but had a program that continued beyond the specific enrolment period of the student in the school, and therefore employed two youth workers to carry out this task as a form of outreach for the graduate. Site three also described a positive and fruitful relationship with parents whereas sites one and two described

their struggles with managing parent disinterest in faith education, with the parent body leaving this task primarily to the school. In site two this disinterest was tangibly expressed in the School Improvement Framework surveys of parents which indicated a lack of interest in the Catholic identity of the school. This was further compounded by the perception of the REC in site two that RE teachers also seemed to regard the educational mission of the Church as irrelevant. The personnel in sites one and two were unable to elaborate how they might respond to these challenges. Beyond the leadership and work structures they already had in place there was no suggestion (other than employing a priest in site two) as to what other roles or forms of work might be adopted to deal with the situation they had identified.

In summary then, the aggregated data gathered in relation to the second research question indicated that **work structures were not dissimilar to what they had been in the past**, with the exception of site two. However, as has already been pointed out in the previous two chapters, there is little likelihood that other schools would be able to employ a priest as had the school in site two. It is a suggestion of the research for this thesis, that because of the increased demands on Catholic schools in the areas of faith education, and the experience of dissonance between home and Church and between school and Church, **it is now timely to re-examine the ways Catholic schools arrange their work structures, and then examine how these may relate to the structures of the local Church**. This is further elaborated later in this chapter in the section on recommendations which flow from the research.

#### *The Third Research Question: implications for Catholic schools*

What are the implications of the experiences of three Catholic schools for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general? Site three is a

school whose work appears likely to continue along the patterns it has already established, and this is because of sustained enrolment applications. Further, it has developed an approach for working with young people that complements the work of mainstream schools. Its model of building community, sustaining relationships together with support structures beyond the specific period of enrolment provides a model worthy of consideration by larger schools. The Principal herself suggested that site three was a 'beacon' for mainstream Catholic schools. Certainly, the employment of youth workers in a Catholic school is distinctive and not generally adopted in mainstream schools.

The personnel in site one, the primary school, described their difficulties in managing the dissonance between home and school and between the Church and home, but also the dissonance between the school and the Church even though both school and Church were on the same property. In this instance their geographical proximity was not sufficient to ensure a more cooperative relationship, something which the personnel indicated was most desirable. It was the lack of a close relationship with the Church and consequent involvement in a community by parents that made their task in education in faith more difficult to manage. None of the school personnel were able to make recommendations regarding how this situation might be addressed. This in itself raises important questions which focus attention on the purposes of the Catholic school. If the local primary school struggles to maintain a focus on those values and practices which specifically identify its Catholicity, then how can school and local Church work more closely together to each share in the educational mission of the Church? The school may not be lacking in numbers but its families do not see themselves as part of the larger Church community. This remains the specific challenge that both parish and school may need to focus on together rather than as separate entities.

Site two as part of an increasing pattern of school structures in Melbourne seemed to have its future assured. How long it can retain the services of a priest on the staff will be a significant issue for the future. That its relationship with the local Church was in question had as much to do with its being a relatively new school as it had to do with the experience of the staff of the dissonances already identified. Its model of schooling certainly provided an attractive proposition for parents because of the ability to have all their children in the one location, and over a long period of time (thirteen years) would provide consistency of educational development. Both students and staff expressed satisfaction with what was described as a community model of schooling. Primary and secondary sections were together on the same site, and this pattern of schooling has many curriculum and pastoral benefits. However, there did not appear to be an immediate connection with local parishes, and the employment of a priest on staff did not seem to make this an urgent requirement either.

As for personnel in site one, site two teachers and leadership teams cited the pressing need to deal with the dissonance between home and school and between home and Church, but were not able to suggest how this might be done. Employing priests can only be a short term solution. Even though in the past two years there has been Federal Government funding for chaplaincy in Australian schools, likely to be discontinued beyond 2009, the money offered will not suffice to pay a proper wage for chaplains. Neither is there room in the current funding formulae for Catholic schools to bridge the gap in wages for chaplains, clerical or non-clerical, unless the chaplain or priest was also employed as a teacher, but this, too, seems unlikely due to the shortage of priests.

The employment of a priest, though, has a more general significance. This school's response to the need for a sacramental life in the school also became its response to dealing

with dissonances between school and home and Church. The point being made here is that this site is not trying to substitute for the parish but taking an initiative **in spite** of the parish.

School personnel already admitted that they cannot do the work of parishes, however, having a priest on staff at least provided access to what they regarded as being at the centre of a Catholic community, the celebration of the sacraments. What implications might this experience have for the future of Catholic schools?

In summary then, the aggregated data for this research in relation to the third research question is suggestive of two implications for Catholic schools. First, **there is more that the local Church could do in terms of involvement with the schools within their established regional boundaries, if not with priests, then perhaps in the involvement of pastoral workers, pastoral associates and youth workers in the schools.** These are the people located in the local Church community who could develop and sustain parish connections where none may already exist. Second, there is more that the Preparatory to Year 12 school could do to work with the local Church. Secondly, as a regional school its purpose is to provide Catholic education for Catholics in the region. **The cluster of parishes, or deanery, to which it belongs could be permitted to have an office or some form of established presence in the school.** But there are also other practical ways schools can support their local Church. Schools are resource-rich centres of education where facilities generally lay idle most weekends, and for most of the 12 weeks when students are not at school. Parishes could be invited to make use of these facilities, and the school could also be a place of gathering for the local Church.

*The Fourth Research Question: an authentic Catholic school*

Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school? As has already been suggested from the outset of this thesis the aggregated data for this thesis suggests that the answer to this question is quite complex. Authenticity for these schools is a context specific notion. Whilst the official literature of the Church is full of carefully worded descriptions of the Catholic school which provide models of inspiration (CS, 1977, par 29, p.27), the experiences of the three schools researched for this thesis present a different picture. The site three Principal was in no doubt about the Catholic identity of the school, even though it lacked the structures of what would be regarded as a regular Catholic school such as a systematic RE program. However, the experience of sites one and two suggested that Catholic identity was more challenged and more difficult to identify because of circumstances out of the control of the school such as family participation in the local Church.

Treston has suggested that this situation may be compounded by another issue, that of 'level of compliance issues'.

Compliance concerns embrace the whole gamut of school life in such areas as, curriculum, work place health and safety, buildings, financial accountability, diagnostic net testing, strategic planning, reporting, duty of care and public liabilities. Compliance is tied to funding and accountability. The increment of bureaucratic imperatives, important as they are for the viability of schools as learning communities, tends to absorb energies of school personnel. Ethos questions can readily be relegated to the margins of school life consciousness, not through intentional neglect but simply because of the immediacy of system demands. (Treston 2009, p. 2)

In site three there was regard for compliance with the need to allow open enrolment and not just enrolment for Catholic students, and this was a requirement of full funding without which the school could not survive. Site two made mention of the SIF, and the regular self-checking

that this now requires of the Catholic school. In Chapter five of this thesis questions were raised as the extent to which the SIF allowed for an appropriate examination of the Catholic identity of the school beyond quantifiable data like satisfaction with the curriculum and the like. Does the SIF make it possible for Catholic schools to address core issues of identity and connections with the local Church? This is not to diminish the importance of the need schools have to meet compliance needs set by their funding bodies. However, if these need to be evaluated, then so can the question as to whether the school is able to carry out its part in the educational mission of the Church, and therefore its Catholic identity.

Treston also said that:

Given the complexity of the social and religious pluralism of people in Catholic school communities and respect for multicultural and multi-faith beliefs, the reality of implementing Catholic identity is difficult to promote if the character of the identity assumes explicit commitment by members of the school community to a Catholic culture and religious practices. (Treston 2009, p. 4)

One wonders how the Catholic school can have any Catholic identity if there is not this explicit commitment and witness at least by a critical mass of staff. This ‘explicit commitment by members of the school community’ can now no longer be assumed, and the findings in each of the three sites bear this out. This is seen as a challenge to the Catholic identity of the Catholic school and consequently its authenticity, especially in sites one and two. **If Catholic commitment on the part of the teachers cannot be expected or guaranteed, there will continue to be a steady erosion of the Catholic nature of the school.** Cultures of any kind, Catholic schools included, need leaders and committed significant people to sustain their authenticity.

**A definition of an authentic Catholic school may be elusive because schools and local Churches do not seem able to come to terms with the post-ecclesial reality of many**

**of its adherents or potential adherents.** The consequence, as Battams so rightly states, is ‘an impoverished notion of the Church and Catholic education.....schools would be left to question whether they belong to two Churches, or one Church with split personalities’ (Battams, 2006, p. 15). Even so, the data gathered from three Catholic schools seems to suggest that at the very least the first step towards defining an authentic Catholic school must involve a consonance of action between local Church and Catholic school in seeking to respond to the post-ecclesial reality of those who frequent Catholic schools yet see no relevance for their own Church involvement. In different ways, the research data demonstrated the dissonances which existed between local Church and Catholic school: this now needs to be addressed or both local Church and Catholic school remain the poorer for not having sought to find common goals.

The findings of this research reflected Battams’ conclusion **that the authenticity of a Catholic school is primarily defined by its relationship, or lack thereof, with the Church.**

To be authentic, Catholic schools must be situated within the Church. Their nature and purpose are thus grounded in the nature and purpose of the Church. Understanding the nature and purpose of Catholic schools, therefore, is fundamentally an ecclesiological task. (Battams, 2006 p. 10)

Defining this ‘ecclesiological task’ is a challenge for both Catholic school and local Church, and both will need to find common points of interest and purpose because both share the same constituency, the post-ecclesial Catholics who want their children educated in a Catholic setting.

*Conclusion to this section*

The research questions which framed this research have led to the conclusion that both Catholic school and local Church find themselves in a new paradigm, not only in modes of living and working in society but also of challenges to how they have both been traditionally situated. Whilst teachers and leadership teams remain frustrated at their unsupported efforts to advance the educational mission of the Church, there was nonetheless a sense that something more needed to be done. Site two employed a priest thus setting itself apart from the present structures in other Catholic schools, and site three focussed on education for the marginalised, socially and educationally. It is obvious from this research that the Catholic school cannot stand alone. Whilst the literature on the purposes of the Catholic school abounds with references to Church connections, these assumptions can no longer be made for parents, staff or students. School and Church authorities need to find ways to cooperate and these will also need to be defined beyond the traditional structures which persist at both parish and school level.

The findings in relation to the research questions for this thesis are summarised in the Table 6.1.

*Table 6.1 Summary of Research Questions and findings*

Research Questions	Findings
How do some Victorian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a lack of connection between school and parents regarding Catholic identity.</li> <li>• Increased secularism is not the same as lack of concern for spiritual values. It has more to do with disenchantment with the Church, what Rolheiser (2008) has called 'post-ecclesialism.'</li> <li>• Schools struggle to convey the message of Catholic identity, even amongst the staff, and this is often</li> </ul>

<p>What impact, if any, have these changed circumstances had on the way these schools arrange their work structures?</p>	<p>beyond their control.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There seemed to be more of reliance on REC's, while one school also had a priest on staff.</li> <li>• Growth of Preparatory to Year 12 schools with governance different from regional secondary schools.</li> <li>• One school employed youth workers, unlike the other two schools.</li> <li>• Not much change in work structures compared with they have been in general.</li> </ul>
<p>What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The practice of having youth workers on staff as a form of outreach in one school could be a direction which mainstream schools could take.</li> <li>• Two of the three sites identified dissonances between school and Church, between home and school and between home and Church. These were difficult for schools to deal with.</li> <li>• These dissonances are at the heart of problems with the Catholic identity of the school, and even the local Church.</li> <li>• Schools can neither be nor want to be, substitute parishes, but this is what they may have become without wanting to.</li> </ul>
<p>Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools' experience of Catholic Education differs from the descriptions in the official literature.</li> <li>• Lack of connection between school and local Church challenges authenticity.</li> <li>• If the Catholic commitment of teachers cannot be expected or guaranteed there will be a steady erosion of Catholic identity.</li> <li>• Authenticity may be elusive because schools and local Church seem unable to come to terms with post-ecclesialism in the community.</li> <li>• The question of the authenticity of the Catholic school is grounded in the nature and purpose of the Church; it is</li> </ul>

	therefore an ecclesiological question.
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### The Issues that Remain

The research undertaken for this thesis only focussed on three Catholic schools, and three very diverse ones at that. Ultimately, the research was only able to give a partial picture of the state of Catholic schools, but it was also able to give voice to those in schools entrusted with the Church's educational mission as well as those who chose Catholic education for their children, their frustrations as well as their ideals, their concerns as well as their dreams. The research also gave rise to some complex questions as well as ongoing and unresolved issues.

One area in which the research was limited was in the dearth of parent representation in the data. Despite the co-operation of school authorities in promoting the research in their schools only five parent questionnaire responses were obtained from two schools and none from the third. No interview was possible, despite efforts made at providing support such as childminding during the interviews. In site one, one parent wrote to the Principal expressing concern about possible participation because of a possible negative impact on the enrolment of her second child in the school. It is a limitation of this research that more parents were not able to be represented in the research and thereby add balance to the perceptions of RE teachers and leadership teams. Perhaps this lack of parent participation in the research is itself indicative of the broader non- involvement of parents in the Catholic school often commented upon by teachers.

In site two the REC made the point that 'the school is becoming an outpost of the Church' (2L2), a sense that the Church was present as if in a foreign land. For this teacher the school was an outpost because this is where families were experiencing, in some measure, the life of the Church. The Catholic school, as has been stated by participants in the research, is

not a substitute parish (2L1), and neither is it empowered nor resourced to be a parish in any shape or form. However, that it has become an outpost of the Church for families is a reality that needs to be seriously examined. It will not be enough to assert that Catholic schools should not replace the work of the parish e.g. access to sacraments, when families no longer have any access because they choose not to be involved in their parish. The contemporary Catholic school cannot avoid finding new ways to interpret and enact their share in the educational mission of the Church, with or without a tangible connection to the local Church. In other words, for many of the families sending their children to a Catholic school, this school **is** the Church. However, it is not enough that the school should merely be an outpost of the Church, with the implication that the “Church” is a distant and largely unknowable entity. Despite the difficulties, connections need to be made between the outpost and the missioning body. Employing a priest and adopting the charism of a religious order (site two), whilst in themselves contributing to building school ethos, may not necessarily bring about important connections with the Church community beyond the school. Yet it is these very connections which will, in the long term, sustain both the Catholic school and the local Church.

This separation and dissonance between Catholic school and local Church cannot continue. That a Preparatory to Year 12 school, such as site two, could develop and practically stay distant from the local Church cannot be good for either the school or the local Church. This lack of ‘conversation’ between the two cannot be seen as enhancing the educational mission of the Church. As this model of Catholic schooling continues to be implemented, care will need to be given as to how communication and linkages between school and local Church will be developed and sustained, otherwise this separation and lack of conversation may continue to the detriment of both. In summary then, as this thesis concludes, the following

recommendations could set the agenda for discussion for what the authentic Catholic identity of the Catholic school might be.

#### Recommendations which flow from the findings

A number of recommendations flow from the findings for schools, Catholic Education Offices and school boards.

#### *Recommendations for Schools*

Findings from the data suggest that current roles alone may no longer be adequate to deal with the situation of parents disengaged from their faith as well as their Church community, and the separation or lack of conversation between school and local Church. The role of REC needs to be re-conceptualised as being more than just managing the classroom program. In site one the Principal commented frequently on how important the school's REC was to the school community. In other words this comment pointed to all the other tasks she performed beyond her work as manager of the classroom program. This is not to say that the latter is not important. Rather, for some REC's their work goes beyond the RE curriculum to liturgy and faith development as well as pastoral care, and this certainly was the case in site one. Schools are now developing other roles to complement the role of REC such as Faith Development Coordinator, Liturgy Coordinator, Wellbeing Coordinator, Retreat Coordinator and the like. But if schools and local Church need to work more closely then there is more that could be done, and this needs to be further explored.

Parishes employ Pastoral Workers and Pastoral Associates who work in the local community. If members of this community send their children to the Catholic school but have

no connection with the local Church, the possibility emerges that one or both of these workers might also spend some time working in the school with the specific task of making contact with these families. Site three employed two Youth Workers to provide follow-up support for students after they left the school. Youth workers working in parishes and schools could provide that extra communication path with young people as they moved through and beyond the school, assisting them to retain connections with the school and parish communities. This could, in effect, be a form of community outreach, a task shared between school and local Church.

If these suggestions are taken seriously then this means that the Catholic school and local Church need to re-imagine how they might work together. This also poses a challenge to accepted notions of school and Church leadership. The review of literature pointed to notions of distributed leadership becoming important in the contemporary Catholic school, 'the concept of leadership is not viewed as being either conferred or bound by role, but as being accessible to any individual within a school' (CEOM, 2005, p. 2) For the school this could also mean that educational leadership extends beyond the formal roles of Principal and REC but to other forms of shared leadership with others in the local Church. The purpose of these roles is not only to build connections between Catholic school and local Church, but also connections between families and the broader faith community. There may also be a need to re-examine concepts of Church leadership in general and to determine how these can also be aligned to include leadership in a Catholic school environment.

The recommendation of involving roles like Pastoral Worker and Pastoral Associate in the Catholic school also reflects the proposal of the US Bishops for the development of

Lay Ecclesial Ministry (CW, 2005, p. 25), as was discussed in Chapter two, the review of literature. Lay. This document referred to the work of those ‘men and women of every race and culture who serve in parishes, schools, diocesan agencies, and Church institutions’ (p. 5). In the context of this research, I am proposing that the notion of Lay Ecclesial Ministry be adopted as mode of defining the work of those in schools as well.

The ministry is *lay* because it is service done by lay persons. The ministry is *ecclesial* because it has a place within the community of the church.... It is *ministry* because it is participation in the threefold ministry of Christ, who is priest, prophet and king..... the Church’s members continue the mission and ministry of Christ.....The application of ‘ministry’ to the laity is not something to be confused with ordained ministry. The lay ecclesial minister is called to service in the church and not necessarily to a lifelong commitment which happens in Ordination. (p. 12)

The question of the authenticity of the Catholic school which has been the focus of this research may be addressed by being able to give focus and context to the work of those involved in Catholic education. Ministry is an appropriate description for the work of those who seek to manage the dissonances to be found in Catholic schools confronting the disconnections of families and school staff with the Church and the disconnections of schools with their local Church.

#### *Recommendations for Catholic Education Offices & Commissions*

The funding structure of Catholic schools in Victoria is such that funding received from State and Federal governments is distributed by the CECV which works in cooperation with the Directors of Catholic Education in each diocese. The decision to build new schools lies clearly within these responsibilities. A recommendation that flows from the findings of this research relates to the structuring and planning of new schools.

In recent times the development of new Preparatory to Year 12 schools has taken place in the large growth corridors around Melbourne. Clearly, this is a response to the growth in population in previously undeveloped areas. The demographics have grown to such an extent that a Catholic education presence in these regions is required. Much attention, of necessity, needs to be paid to setting up the school according to relevant compliance requirements and conditions in respect of grants as imposed by a government agency. Beyond these obligations, however, it is suggested that there also be a further requirement that due consideration be given to how these new schools will relate to the local Church in these regions. Data from site two suggested that relationships with the local Church were ambiguous at best. Even in site one where school and parish were contiguous, there was still the question regarding who took responsibility for assisting a family who had suffered a bereavement. The family seemed to identify more with the school than with the parish, yet this situation begs the question as to why both could not have been involved in the provision of a pastoral response to their situation.

In other words, there is a recommendation that the local Church could be involved in the initial planning of the new school. This could involve, for example, establishing what ministries could exist in this new community to support school and local Church in managing the expected enrolment. Rather than having a duplication of ministries, attention could be given as to how best to share ministries and resources that benefit the Catholics in the region who choose a Catholic school for their children's education. The measure of the success of this joint effort could be ascertained through the SIF, as was suggested in Chapters four and five. This framework could be expanded in scope to incorporate evaluation of joint programs

and roles so as to plan for improvement and appropriate change as needs were identified and responded to.

The joint effort of sharing resources, including joint programs and even workers is a form of community building that looks at the specific needs of the whole community rather than a separation into smaller communities unrelated to each other. In other words, it is a suggestion of this research that the connectedness of local Church and Catholic school is possible when both see their educational mission as part of one enterprise. This is not only possible but becoming a reality in some places<sup>10</sup>.

#### *Recommendations for School Boards*

The School Board is the only body in the school's structure that contains representatives of parents, students, staff and canonical administrators. As such, it is also able to represent the diversity of experience and views of the school's constituencies. This flow of feedback and experience would become essential in seeking to ascertain the extent to which the school is fulfilling its mission in collaboration with the local Church. This body could also give shape to the partnership that should exist between the two if the education offered jointly is to be authentically Catholic. In this context, authenticity refers to the need for school and local Church to be in dialogue about joint action. The situation observed in this research depicted one of separation and lack of conversation, hardly the platform for the provision of an authentic Catholic education.

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<sup>10</sup> [www.nazareth-catholic.org.au/communityhome/](http://www.nazareth-catholic.org.au/communityhome/). 'The Adelaide Church wants to connect across the lifespan of families from newborns to pre-schoolers, secondary students and beyond. It is about parents and grandparents to make their lives and that of their children happier and healthier as members of a wider, vibrant Catholic Community in Adelaide.'

Another recommendation, therefore, which flows from the research, is that School Boards need also to have as their core agenda item school and local Church connections, a reflection on, discussion and implementation of ways in which the school and local Church can work together. In particular, the School Board could look at strategies for outreach to make contact with the post-ecclesial Church, those families who want a Catholic education for their children but do not seem to have the need to find an expression of this by participation in the local Church. This kind of input could also influence the way RE is taught and how liturgies are celebrated. Liturgies could be both school and parish-based. This outreach could also involve welfare elements looking to support those families who may not be able to afford to send children to a Catholic school, and who might also be struggling in general.

#### Conclusion to this Section

These recommendations are made with the proviso that it is understood each school and local Church community has its own unique needs and challenges, and the process of discernment must be context specific. Each local community will have to develop its own discernment process. Neither will they all be alike in how they structure approaches to co-operation and dialogue. Many school and local Church communities may already be working towards more active cooperation. Whatever shape this eventually takes, it is essential that all authorities remain committed to a process that recognises each other's needs but also remains focussed on the realization that one of the elements of an authentic Catholic education will be a partnership between school and local Church.

The following table brings together the findings from the research reported in this thesis and their related recommendations.

Table 6.2 Research Questions, Findings and Recommendations

Research Questions	Findings	Recommendations
How do some Victorian Catholic schools understand and interpret their Catholic identity in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a lack of connection between school and parents regarding Catholic identity.</li> <li>• Increased secularism is not the same as lack of concern for spiritual values. It has more to do with disenchantment with the Church, what Rolheiser (2008) has called ‘post-ecclesialism.’</li> <li>• Schools struggle to convey the message of Catholic identity, even amongst the staff, and this is often beyond their control.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>For Schools</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a need to examine current roles within the school, in particular how to align leadership roles in school and local Church.</li> <li>• Role of REC needs to be conceived as being more than managing curriculum.</li> <li>• It is time to determine if the roles of Pastoral Worker, Pastoral Associate and Youth Worker could be viable in a school setting. This could be established in the context of Lay Ecclesial Ministry.</li> </ul>
What impact, if any, have these changed circumstances had on the way these schools arrange their work structures?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There seemed to be more of reliance on REC’s, while one school also had a priest on staff.</li> <li>• Growth of Preparatory to Year 12 schools with governance different from regional secondary schools.</li> <li>• One school employed youth workers, unlike the other two schools.</li> <li>• Not much change in work structures compared with they have been in general.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Office of the Deanery could be located in large Preparatory to Year 12 and Regional schools to enhance school and local Church relations.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>For Catholic Education Offices and Commissions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Local Church needs to be more closely involved in the establishment of Catholic schools. This could avoid the duplication of ministries, for example.</li> </ul>
What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The practice of having youth workers on staff as a form of outreach in one school could be</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The School</li> </ul>

schools in general?	<p>a direction mainstream schools could take.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two of the three sites identified dissonances between school and Church, between home and school and between home and Church. These were difficult for schools to deal with.</li> <li>• These dissonances are at the heart of problems with the Catholic identity of the school, and even the local Church.</li> <li>• Schools can neither be nor want to be, substitute parishes, but this is what they may have become without wanting to.</li> </ul>	<p>Improvement Framework could be used as an evaluative tool to measure the success of the above joint involvement – this would go to the core of Catholic identity.</p> <p><i>For School Boards</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School and local Church connection needs to be a core agenda item for school boards.</li> <li>• The board could make recommendations for joint action, e.g. liturgies being both school and parish based, but this could also extend to Pastoral care initiatives.</li> </ul>
Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools' experience of Catholic Education differs from the descriptions in the official literature.</li> <li>• Lack of connection between school and Church challenges authenticity.</li> <li>• If Catholic commitment of teachers cannot be expected or guaranteed there will be a steady erosion of Catholic identity.</li> <li>• Authenticity may be elusive because schools and local Church seem unable to come to terms with post-ecclesialism in</li> </ul>	

	<p>the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The question of the authenticity of the Catholic school is grounded in the nature and purpose of the Church; it is therefore an ecclesiological question.</li> </ul>	
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### The Significance of the Research

The research carried out for this thesis was introductory, and was limited by some factors. These were as follows: the students interviewed and from whom questionnaires were received were only in years eight and nine; only fifteen students in total were involved; no interviews or questionnaires were able to be obtained from School Boards; no parents were able to be interviewed, though a limited number of parent questionnaires were returned; this has already been referred to in Chapter four. Nevertheless, much data was generated and the findings related generally to the findings of other research in this same area (McLaughlin 2006, Battams 2002). More than this, the findings of this research have clearly identified the gaps and dissonances that exist even though Catholic school and local Church may be committed to the Church's educational mission from differing perspectives. Even so, the findings and recommendations provide an ongoing agenda for those concerned with identifying the nature of an authentic Catholic school.

These findings are worthy of consideration by education and Church authorities as they offer a window on a contemporary experience faced by schools and local Church alike. The research data seems to suggest that the purposes of contemporary Catholic schools must be found in substantial co-operative effort between Catholic school and local Church. The

findings indicate that much of this seems to have been assumed both in the official literature of the Church, as was shown in the review of literature, and even in the current governance structures of schools. Newer paradigms for cooperative effort have to found, and it has been a suggestion of this thesis that the notion of Lay Ecclesial Ministry may very well be a starting point. This co-operative effort would also seem to be fundamental in seeking to define the authenticity of the contemporary Catholic school.

#### Possibilities for further Research

The findings and the recommendations which followed also point to possibilities for further research. There are two obvious areas for further research which stand out. The first is an examination of what other roles might be adopted in Catholic school settings for Lay Ecclesial Ministry. An exploration of whether the current models of Pastoral Worker and Pastoral Associate would fit the school setting, or indeed, whether there needs to be more specificity for these roles as school based ministries. The second is an exploration of the relationship of Catholic schools to their parishes in particular, and to the local Church in general. Research in this area could look at primary, regional, Preparatory to Year 12 diocesan schools as well religious order owned schools. An exploration of these relationships, both historical and contemporary, might lead to ran understanding how these may need redefining in contemporary social settings.

Then there is the area of Religious Education. The data collected for this thesis came from students who were given permission by their parents to participate in the research. It would be of interest to specifically question those students for whom RE had been a positive experience. This could provide insights into the motivations and aspirations of these young

people, as well as point to those areas of RE that need enhancement for other students to benefit. Understanding what students appreciated about their RE program would shed further light on processes as well as curriculum. Allied to this could be research on specialist RE teachers. This could aim to understand why they chose to be specialist RE teachers, whether this is seen as a commitment to ministry, and what pre-requisites are needed to become a specialist teacher of RE. At a time when governments are discussing performance based pay for teachers, consideration might also be given to special salary rates for those teachers who commit specifically to the teaching of RE, and all that this would entail especially if this is to have connections with specific local Church communities. Whilst in recent years there has been much emphasis on the RE teacher needing to present courses of study, assessment structures and the like, perhaps the time has come to look beyond the RE teaching within four walls to the RE that could be taught beyond the school. In other words, an attempt to define the work of the RE teacher in a changed social and school paradigm may also lead to the realization that this role is fertile ground for a new way of understanding ministry in a Catholic school setting. This could also extend to the role of the REC. Research on how this role is defined across a number of schools would shed light on the extent this role can be developed into a specific Lay Ecclesial Ministry.

Further research is also possible on the processes that have led to the development of the new Preparatory to Year 12 schools that are quickly becoming the new paradigm of Catholic schooling in Melbourne, in particular, the extent to which these will lead to increased co-operation with the local Church or increased separation. Site two resorted to employing a priest to ensure that the school community had access to the sacraments on a regular basis. Questions need to be raised about the sustainability of such practices into the future, but more

importantly, there needs to be an understanding of how these schools will meet this need in co-operation with the local Church.

One final area of further possible research would be an exploration of other models of Catholic schooling as exemplified in site three. Whether this model is sustainable and could be multiplied across Catholic schools in various regions does bear some investigation. The ability to offer an alternative to mainstream schooling, even if it is only for six months, may be a way of responding to the neediest of those students who are enrolled in large Catholic secondary schools, and who are at risk of leaving school early and being lost to the Catholic system.

Table 6.3 summarises these recommendations for possible further research.

*Table 6.3 Recommendations for possible further research*

1.	<b>Lay Ecclesial Ministry as an emerging notion:</b> An examination of what other roles might be adopted in Catholic school settings for Lay Ecclesial Ministry. Extension of the models of Pastoral Worker and Pastoral Associate or development of new school based ministries.
2.	<b>School and Parish relationships:</b> An exploration of the relationship of Catholic schools to their parishes in particular, and to the local Church in general. Research in this area could look at primary, regional, Preparatory to Year 12 diocesan schools as well religious order owned schools. An exploration of these relationships, both historical and contemporary, might lead to a understanding how these may need redefining in contemporary social settings.
3.	<b>Religious Education:</b> It would be of interest to specifically question those students for whom RE had been a positive experience. This could provide insights into the motivations and aspirations of these young people, as well as point to those areas of RE that need enhancement for other students to benefit. Understanding what students appreciated about their RE program would shed further light on processes as well as curriculum.
4.	<b>Religious Education teachers:</b> research on specialist RE teachers. This could aim to understand why they chose to be specialist RE teachers, whether this is seen as a commitment to ministry, and what pre-requisites are needed to become a specialist teacher of RE. Is it time to pay specialist RE teachers special salaries for this commitment?
5.	<b>Preparatory to Year 12 schools:</b> the processes that have led to the development of the new Preparatory to Year 12 schools that are quickly becoming the new paradigm of Catholic schooling in Melbourne, in particular, the extent to which these will lead to increased co-operation with the local Church or increased separation.
6.	<b>Site 3 Special School:</b> exploration of alternative models of Catholic schooling as

exemplified in site three.
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### In conclusion

This research began with the observation that at a time when Catholic schools have never been larger in terms of enrolments, Catholic Churches have never been lower in terms of attendances. On the one hand, the popularity of Catholic schools, even in a very difficult economic climate, must be a cause for satisfaction to Catholic education authorities in that families are recognising the efficacy and value Catholic schools have to offer their children. On the other hand, slowing Church attendances perhaps reflect symptoms of broader social pressures, but also broad disaffections with the Church. Though some would argue that the secularist and pluralist nature of society have largely contributed to this situation, it is nonetheless true to say that people are still seeking meaning, even spirituality. However, these people are not looking to the Church to express these needs although many of these same people are sending their children to Catholic schools.

Beyond this, however, schools in general have been seen as a priority for the development and implementation of policies and programs by governments, families, Church and employers for such aspects as literacy, discipline, personal responsibility, well being, citizenship, respect and sex education. The capacity of principals and staff to achieve most of these outcomes effectively and sustain them seems almost an impossibility.

This situation seems to raise a problem of authenticity not only for these schools, but also for the Church. As has already been argued in this thesis, this authenticity has proven to be elusive because of a seeming lack of co-operation or even separation between the Catholic school and local Church. The research conducted for this thesis has suggested that rather than

letting Church and Catholic school manage these tensions alone or separately, it is better to find new ways to co-operate in paradigms yet to be defined and explored. This thesis has also shown that what defines the authenticity of the Catholic school is also an ecclesiological problem. Because of this co-operation between Catholic school and local Church must be an imperative and not an option.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Ethics Approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee

## Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

**Principal Investigator/Supervisor:** A/P Kath Engebretson Melbourne Campus

**Co-Investigators:** A/P Denis McLaughlin Melbourne Campus

**Student Researcher:** Fulvio Frijó Melbourne Campus

**Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:**

Catholic schools seeking authenticity in a secular and pluralist society.

**for the period:** 08.02.2008 to 31.07.2008

**Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number:** V200708 26

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (2007)* 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 low risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of negligible risk and low 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)

## Appendix 2: Letters to Participants

### Parent Letter

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** Catholic Schools Seeking Authenticity in a Secular and Pluralist Society

**NAME OF SUPERVISORS:**

Associate Professor Kath Engebretson, Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Fulvio Frijo, Educational Doctorate student

Dear Parent,

You are invited to take part in a research project which focuses on the experiences of contemporary Catholic schools. In particular, the research project is seeking to draw on the experience of parents who choose to send their children to Catholic Schools to understand better how they understand their choice of a Catholic school for the education of their child.

Placing this project in the wider context of the Catholic Church's educational mission contemporary research suggests the following:

Catholic schools are no longer institutions for the converted. It would appear that their purposes are challenged by a contemporary demographic which finds little formal relationship with the institutional Church. Yet these schools still hold a strong enough attraction for parents to select them as their school of choice for their children: at a time when enrolments have never been higher identification with the institutional church in its various forms has never been lower. This situation poses a challenge to the authenticity of the Catholic school.

The Principal has given permission for your school to take part in this research project

Your involvement would include the following:

- You will be invited to respond to a questionnaire which should take no more than 20 minutes to answer. It is attached here.
- I have also attached a consent form (one copy for you to sign and keep and one to be returned to me).
- Once you have completed both the questionnaire and consent form please return them to the Principal at X School, (name of Principal).

There are minimal risks to you and the school, and you will be asked to only give up the time indicated above to participate in the questionnaire. Your identity and that of the school will be known only to the student researcher. This identity will not be disclosed in any report or publications that arise from the research.

Your participation will help the student researcher to make recommendations for Australian Catholic schools, in regard to what makes them authentically Catholic in a secular and pluralist society, and what are the structures and programs that make this identity clear.

You are not obliged to take part, and if you choose not to, you do not need to give a reason. If you begin to take part and then change your mind, you also do not need to give a reason. You can withdraw at any time.

Your participation and that of the school will be confidential. You and the school will not be named in any report or publication that comes from the data. If you have any questions about the conduct of the research you should contact the Supervisor:

Associate Professor Kath Engebretson

(03) 9953 3292

St Patrick's Campus

Australian Catholic University

115 Victoria Parade

Fitzroy

Victoria 3065

[k.engebretson@patrick.acu.edu.au](mailto:k.engebretson@patrick.acu.edu.au)

After the whole research project has been completed, your school will receive a report on the findings, which may then be shared with your school community.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Australian Catholic University National. If you have any complaints or concerns about the way you have been treated during the research, or if you have any questions that the student researcher has not been able to answer you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of:

Chair of ACU HREC

St Patrick's Campus

Australian Catholic University

115 Victoria Parade

Fitzroy

Victoria 3065

Phone: 03 9953 3158

Fax: 03 9953 3315

Any complaint or concern will be confidential, will be fully investigated, and the person who complained will be informed of the outcome. If you agree to participate you should sign both copies of the Consent form, keep one copy for your own records and return the other to me in the enclosed envelope by handing it in to your school office. You can also include the completed questionnaire in the same envelope. If you agree to participate the student researcher will make arrangements in consultation with your Principal for a suitable

time for the activities already described above. You will be advised as soon as these arrangements have been made.

Thanking you for taking the time to consider your involvement in this research project.

With Thanks,

Fulvio Frijo, Student Researcher

## Letter to Parents of Students

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** Catholic Schools Seeking Authenticity in a Secular and Pluralist Society

**NAME OF SUPERVISORS:**

Associate Professor Kath Engebretson, Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Fulvio Frijo, Doctor of Education (EdD) student

Dear Parent,

You are invited to allow your child to take part in a research project which focuses on the experiences of contemporary Catholic schools. In particular, the research project is seeking to draw on the experience of children in Catholic Schools to understand better how they perceive the benefits of a Catholic education. The year levels of the students to be involved will include students from years 6 to 8 in three separate schools. These schools include a primary school, a preparatory to year 12 school and a specialist school containing students in years 7 & 8.

Placing this project in the wider context of the Catholic Church's educational mission contemporary research suggests the following:

Catholic schools are no longer institutions for the converted. It would appear that their purposes are challenged by a contemporary demographic which finds little formal relationship with the institutional Church. Yet these schools still hold a strong enough attraction for parents to select them as their school of choice for their children: at a time when enrolments have never been higher identification with the institutional church in its various forms has never been lower. This situation poses a challenge to the authenticity of the Catholic school.

The Principal has given permission for your school to take part in this research project and the group interview is proposed for 20 minutes at a time that will not interrupt the daily school program of the students. The student researcher would like to speak to your child about the following questions:

1. As a student what do you like most about being in this school?
2. How important is it to you that this school is a Catholic school?
3. What things does the school do that makes it Catholic in your eyes?

You are not obliged to make your child to take part, and if you choose not to, you do not need to give a reason. If your child begins to take part and then changes his or her mind, you and your child also do not need to give a reason. You can withdraw your child's involvement at any time.

There are minimal risks to you, your child and the school, and your child will be asked to only give up 20 minutes of their time to participate in a group interview with other students from your child's school. With the cooperation of the school Principal, this time and date would be

arranged during school time with minimal interruption to their daily program. With your permission, the interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed, but your child's identity and that of the school will be known only to the student researcher. This identity will not be disclosed in any report or publications that arise from the research.

Your child's participation and that of the school will be confidential. Your child and the school will not be named in any report or publication that comes from the data. If you have any questions about the conduct of the research you should contact the Supervisor:

Associate Professor Kath Engebretson  
(03) 9953 3292  
St Patrick's Campus  
Australian Catholic University  
115 Victoria Parade  
Fitzroy  
Victoria 3065  
[k.engebretson@patrick.acu.edu.au](mailto:k.engebretson@patrick.acu.edu.au)

After the whole research project has been completed, your school will receive a report on the findings, which may then be shared with the school community. If you feel comfortable with the involvement of your child I kindly ask that two forms be completed:

1. Parent/Guardian consent form.
2. Assent of Participants aged under the age of 18 form. This also requires your child's signature.

Please retain one of each form for your own records and return the others to the Principal of DOXA school.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Australian Catholic University. If you have any complaints or concerns about the way you or your child have been treated during the research, or if you have any questions that the student researcher has not been able to answer you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of:

Chair of ACU HREC  
St Patrick's Campus  
Australian Catholic University  
115 Victoria Parade  
Fitzroy  
Victoria 3065  
Phone: 03 9953 3158  
Fax: 03 9953 3315

Any complaint or concern will be confidential, will be fully investigated, and the person who complained will be informed of the outcome. If you agree for your child to participate in this project, the student researcher will arrange for a suitable time and date for the group interview in consultation with the Principal of your child's school.

I thank you for taking the time to consider this invitation. If you agree for your child to participate in this project please sign the attached consent form, keep one copy and return the other one to me in the envelope provided by handing this into the school office. I will be in contact soon regarding dates and times of your child's involvement in the project.

With Thanks,

Fulvio Frijo, Student Researcher

## Letter to the Principal

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** Catholic Schools Seeking Authenticity in a Secular and Pluralist Society

**NAME OF SUPERVISORS:**

Associate Professor Kath Engebretson, Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Fulvio Frijo, Doctor of Education (EdD) student

Dear (Name),

I am commencing the third year of my Doctor of Education (EdD) at Australian Catholic University (ACU) National, and have just completed the coursework requirements. I am now enrolled in the thesis component of the course and my thesis topic is '*Catholic Schools Seeking Authenticity in a Secular and Pluralist Society*'. Please find attached a copy of the approval from the ACU National Human Research Ethics Committee which allows me to continue my work in the Educational Doctorate. As well, I have attached a copy of my research proposal approval of the Director of Catholic Education Melbourne.

The research project I wish to undertake will focus on the experiences of contemporary Catholic schools. In particular, the research project is seeking to draw on the experience members of leadership teams, Religious Education teachers, parents and students in Catholic Schools to understand better how they understand their purpose and mission as a Catholic school.

Placing this project in the wider context of the Catholic Church's educational mission contemporary research suggests the following:

Catholic schools are no longer institutions for the converted. It would appear that their purposes are challenged by a contemporary demographic which finds little formal relationship with the institutional Church. Yet these schools still hold a strong enough attraction for parents to select them as their school of choice for their children: at a time when enrolments have never been higher identification with the institutional church in its various forms has never been lower. This situation poses a challenge to the authenticity of the Catholic school: this project will, therefore, explore how Catholic schools respond authentically to this situation.

The questions that will guide the research are:

1. How do some Victorian Catholic schools understand and describe their purposes in the changed circumstances of a secular and pluralist society?
2. How do schools arrange their work and program structures in a changing paradigm of Catholic school?
3. What are the implications of this for the future of these Catholic schools in particular and contemporary Catholic schools in general?

4. Based on this research how might it be possible to frame what constitutes an authentic, contemporary Catholic school?

To do this research project I ask your permission to invite the participation of members of your school community. The questions I would like to discuss with members of each of these school communities are as follows:

#### MEMBERS OF THE LEADERSHIP TEAM

4. What do you regard are the pressures on contemporary Catholic schools to maintain their authenticity?
5. How does your school engage the school community in activating the purposes of your Catholic school?
6. What challenges do you face as a leader in a Catholic school community?

#### RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHERS

1. What do you regard are the pressures on contemporary Catholic schools to maintain their authenticity?
2. How does your school engage the school community in activating the purposes of your Catholic school?
3. What challenges do you face as a Religious Education teacher in a Catholic school?
4. What are your motivations for being a Religious Education Teacher?

#### PARENTS

1. As a parent what were the prime motivations in choosing this school for your child's education?
2. How important is the faith development of your child in this school context?

#### STUDENTS

1. As a student what do you like most about being in this school?
2. How important is it to you that this school is a Catholic school?
3. What things does the school do that makes it Catholic in your eyes?

The activities they would be invited to participate in are as follows:

Members of Leadership Teams, Parents and Religious Education Teachers: completion of a questionnaire (20 minutes), focus group interview (45 minutes) and follow-up interview (20 minutes). Students: a 20 minute group interview. All of these activities would take place on school premises and at a time and date convenient to the participants and the school with your support. In regard to the parents, when a time has been organised for the parents to come together at the school for the focus group interview, would it be possible to have a staff member keep an eye on the students whilst their parents are in the 45 minute group interview?

There are minimal risks to the schools, and the participants will be invited to participate in the activities mentioned above. With the permission of the participant, the interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed, but the identity of the participants and the school will be known only to the student researcher. This identity will not be disclosed in any report or

publications that arise from the research. No person will be coerced or made to feel obliged to participate or continue to participate. Each participant is free to withdraw from the project at anytime without having to offer any explanation.

The confidential participation of your school will help the student researcher do two things:

1. Gain a deeper understanding of the experience of those involved in Catholic education at a time when society could be described as both secular and pluralist.
2. To make recommendations about what might constitute a contemporary description of an authentic Catholic school.

After the data has been collected in the individual schools, you will receive a full report on the findings on your school, and ultimately you will receive a report on the entire project and be offered an opportunity to discuss the findings with the student researcher.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Australian Catholic University National. I would hope to commence the field work as soon as possible.

I look forward to hearing from you soon and thank you for taking the time to consider this request.

With Thanks,

Fulvio Frijo, Student Researcher

## Letter to teachers

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** Catholic Schools Seeking Authenticity in a Secular and Pluralist Society

**NAME OF SUPERVISORS:**

Associate Professor Kath Engebretson, Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Fulvio Frijo, Educational Doctorate student

Dear Teacher,

You are invited to take part in a research project which focuses on the experiences of contemporary Catholic schools. In particular, the research project is seeking to draw on the experience of teachers and other staff in Catholic Schools to understand better how they view their work and experience, as well as their reasons for working in a Catholic school.

Placing this project in the wider context of the Catholic Church's educational mission contemporary research suggests the following:

Catholic schools are no longer institutions for the converted. It would appear that their purposes are challenged by a contemporary demographic which finds little formal relationship with the institutional Church. Yet these schools still hold a strong enough attraction for parents to select them as their school of choice for their children: at a time when enrolments have never been higher identification with the institutional church in its various forms has never been lower. This situation poses a challenge to the authenticity of the Catholic school: this project will therefore explore how Catholic schools respond authentically to this situation.

The Principal has given permission for your school to take part in this research project and I wish to discuss the following questions with you:

1. What do you regard are the pressures on contemporary Catholic schools to maintain their authenticity?
2. How does your school engage the school community in activating the purposes of your Catholic school?
3. What challenges do you face as a worker in a Catholic school?
4. What are your motivations for working at (school)?

Your involvement would include three parts:

1. You will be invited to respond to a questionnaire which should take no more than 20 minutes to answer on-line, and can be done in your own time. This is attached to this

letter along with a consent form, one for you to keep and one to return to me via your Principal.

2. You will also be invited to participate in a focus group interview with other workers in your school. This will take no longer than 45 minutes of your time. This would take place at your school and the time and date will be arranged in consultation with your Principal so as not to interfere with your work.
3. You may also be contacted at a later time either for a follow-up short interview of approximately 20 minutes or by email so as to check the transcript of the interview for accuracy of representation. The latter would also take no more than 20 minutes of your time.

There are minimal risks to you and the school, and you will be asked to only give up the time indicated above to participate in an on-line questionnaire, group and/or one-on-one interviews. With your permission, the interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed, but your identity and that of the school will be known only to the student researcher. This identity will not be disclosed in any report or publications that arise from the research.

Involvement is completely voluntary. You are not obliged to take part, and if you choose not to, you do not need to give a reason. If you begin to take part and then change your mind, you also do not need to give a reason. You can withdraw at any time.

Your participation and that of the school will also be confidential. You and the school will not be named in any report or publication that comes from the data. If you have any questions about the conduct of the research you should contact the Supervisor:

Associate Professor Kath Engebretson  
(03) 9953 3292  
St Patrick's Campus  
Australian Catholic University  
115 Victoria Parade  
Fitzroy  
Victoria 3065  
[k.engebretson@patrick.acu.edu.au](mailto:k.engebretson@patrick.acu.edu.au)

After the whole research project has been completed, your school will receive a report on the findings, which may then be shared with your school community.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Australian Catholic University National. If you have any complaints or concerns about the way you have been treated during the research, or if you have any questions that the student researcher has not been able to answer you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of:

Chair of ACU HREC  
St Patrick's Campus  
Australian Catholic University

115 Victoria Parade  
Fitzroy  
Victoria 3065  
Phone: 03 9953 3158  
Fax: 03 9953 3315

Any complaint or concern will be confidential, will be fully investigated, and the person who complained will be informed of the outcome. If you agree to participate you should sign both copies of the Consent form, keep one copy for your own records and return the other to me in the enclosed envelope by handing it in to your school office. You can also include the completed questionnaire in the same envelope. If you agree to participate the student researcher will make arrangements in consultation with your Principal for a suitable time for the activities already described above. You will be advised as soon as these arrangements have been made.

Thanking you for taking the time to consider your involvement in this research project. I will be in contact soon regarding dates and times of your involvement in the project.

Yours sincerely,

Fulvio Frijo, Student Researcher

## Appendix 3: Consent Forms

**Under 18 Participants**

ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS AGED UNDER 18 YEARS  
**(copy for the participant)**

NAME OF SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_

**TITLE OF THE PROJECT:** Catholic Schools Seeking Authenticity in a Secular and Pluralist Society

**NAME OF SUPERVISORS:**

Associate Professor Kath Engebretson, Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Fulvio Frijo, Doctor of Education (EdD) student

I \_\_\_\_\_ have discussed my involvement in this research project with my parent/guardian. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to:

1. Take part in a group interview for 20 minutes with other students at my school during school time on a date to be decided by the school Principal.
2. I am aware that I will be discussing the following questions –
  - a. As a student what do you like most about being in this school?
  - b. How important is it to you that this school is a Catholic school?
  - c. What things does the school do that makes it Catholic in your eyes?

I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way. I realise that my parent/guardian or I can withdraw my participation in this project at any time without having to give a reason for my decision.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT UNDER 18: \_\_\_\_\_  
 BLOCK LETTERS

**Parent Guardian Consent**

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM (Participant's copy)

NAME OF SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_

**TITLE OF THE PROJECT:** Catholic Schools Seeking Authenticity in a Secular and Pluralist Society

**NAME OF SUPERVISORS:**

Associate Professor Kath Engebretson, Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Fulvio Frijó, Doctor of Education (EdD) student

I \_\_\_\_\_ have read and understood the information provided in the letter to parents. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my son/daughter (please circle), named below:

1. May participate in a group interview of approximately 20 minutes in school time on a date to be decided by the school Principal.
2. The questions to be discussed will be as follows –
  - a) As a student what do you like most about being in this school?
  - b) How important is it to you that this school is a Catholic school?
  - c) What things does the school do that makes it Catholic in your eyes?

I realise that I can withdraw consent at any time. I agree that research data collected from the study may be published, or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my son/daughter (please circle) in any way. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN: \_\_\_\_\_  
BLOCK LETTERS

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME OF CHILD: \_\_\_\_\_  
BLOCK LETTERS

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Upon completion of this consent form please retain it for your record. I will be in touch with you soon to finalise arrangements for the involvement of your child.

**Participant**

CONSENT OF PARTICIPANTS (participant's copy – retain for your record)

NAME OF SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_

**TITLE OF THE PROJECT:** Catholic Schools Seeking Authenticity in a Secular and Pluralist Society

**NAME OF SUPERVISORS:**

Associate Professor Kath Engebretson, Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Fulvio Frijo, Doctor of Education (EdD) student

I \_\_\_\_\_ understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked has been explained to me. I agree to take part in a group and one-on-one interview, realising that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision. I agree that the interview will be audio-recorded and I understand that the recording and its transcript will only be used by the researcher and that I will not be identified at any stage. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: \_\_\_\_\_

BLOCK LETTERS

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Upon completion of this consent form please retain it for your record. I will be in touch with you soon to finalise arrangements for your further involvement.