PRIMARY PRINCIPALS AS FAITH LEADERS

Helga Neidhart and Janeen Lamb

Australian Catholic University

Introduction

This paper reports the first stage of a research study, which focused on the role of the principal in Catholic primary schools in an Australian rural diocese. This particular focus is a consequence of the expectation in Church documents, diocesan policy and specific role descriptions that detail the principal's responsibility for faith leadership in the primary school. At the same time, researchers have identified the problematic nature of faith leadership in Catholic schools and the need for further research (Wallace, 1995; Hines, 1999; O'Hara, 2000). Also, religion and spirituality, and the potentially positive relationship between them, are not clearly understood. (Schneiders, 2000). It seems that today there are more questions than answers in respect to the faith leadership dimension of the primary principal's role. Even the concept of the Catholic school as a 'faith community' is contested. Such issues point to the fact that we do not have a clear understanding of *what* faith leadership is or *how* to go about faith leadership in the context of the Catholic primary school.

The challenge of faith leadership

Church documents on the Catholic school have for some time highlighted the importance of faith leadership. In 1982, the Vatican described the faith leadership role of lay Catholic educators in terms of "the task of gradually bringing about an integration of temporal reality with the Gospel, so that the Gospel can thus reach into the lives of all men and women. More particularly,, it [the church] has entrusted them with the integral human formation and the faith education of young people" (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, para.81). Nearly thirty years on, this task is further described as follows:

> This mission demands, from all the members of the educational community, the awareness that educators, as persons and as a community, have an unavoidable responsibility to create an original Christian style. They are required to be witnesses of Jesus Christ and to demonstrate Christian life as bearing light and meaning for

everyone. Just as a consecrated person is called to testify his or her specific vocation to a life of communion in love so as to be in the scholastic community a sign, a memorial and a prophecy of the values of the Gospel, so too a lay educator is required to exercise «a specific mission within the Church by living, in faith, a secular vocation in the communitarian structure of the school».

Following this lead diocesan education authorities in Australia have included the expectation of faith leadership. For example, Brisbane Catholic Education refers to faith leadership as follows:

> This dimension of leadership focuses on living and sharing the Catholic faith with the intention of influencing and enriching the lives of students, staff and other members of the school community. Leaders provide educational opportunities to encounter the Catholic faith, to experience its gift in community and to promote life decisions in response to it. Guided by faith, hope and love, leaders support a community of life and worship through which to recognise, to accept and to cooperate with the mysterious action of God in our lives. (QCEC, 2004)

However, by 2005 the practical implications of faith leadership remain problematic, despite increasing urgency. In this year the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) convened a forum to investigate the practices and issues surrounding faith leadership in Australia's Catholic schools and school systems. The forum brought together leaders in Catholic school education including Directors and Heads of Religious Education from diocesan offices, members of the NCEC as well as State and Territory Catholic Education Commissions, and academics.

The report (NCEC, 2005) emanating from the forum recognises the challenge of faith leadership in Catholic schools and education systems in terms of responding to "changes in Church and parish life and organisation, increasing diversity in school communities, and intensified accountability and compliance arrangements" (NCEC, 2005, p.2).

This report also summarises the deliberations of the forum by identifying three themes. The first theme, developed by Richard Lennan, focused on authentic Catholicity and "the 'person' of the leader as central to matters of Catholic identity and authentic practice" (p.2). In the second theme David Ranson addressed leadership in the "ecclesial identity of the Catholic school" (p.2). Here the emphasis is on "the historical and cultural foundations of Australian Catholic schools, changing parish school relationships and new models of organisation, and implications for the pastoral leadership role of school principals" (p.2). The third theme presents "a synthesis

of issues and opportunities" (p.2) in faith leadership identified by forum participants, particularly "system priorities and associated areas of policy and program evaluation and development" (p.2).

The report concludes with an invitation to readers to follow up on matters arising from the forum. The research study detailed below represents one response to this invitation.

Prior research

The use of the term faith leadership in relation to Catholic education and specifically to Catholic school principals is not clearly evident within the literature until the 1990s with research undertaken by Ciriello (1993), Wallace (1995), Hines (1999) and O'Hara (2000) in the United States and Grace (2002) in the United Kingdom. Here there is evidence, that Catholic school principals are seeking guidance on this aspect of their role and the lack of clarity regarding the faith leadership role of the principal remains problematic. Wallace's (1995) research among Catholic school principals in the United States found that lay principals in Catholic schools reported "serious discomfort" with themselves in the role of faith leader (p.122) as a result of a lack of intentional preparation (p.124), and that what was needed is "best summarized by the call for a greater clarity regarding what is being asked of principals, both personally and spiritually, as faith leaders" (p.104). Moreover, in the United kingdom, Grace (2002) found:

> … evidence that many candidates for the headship of Catholic schools in England can now talk confidently about achievements in test scores and examinations, business planning and budgets, marketing and public relations, but are relatively inarticulate about the spiritual purposes of Catholic schooling. (p. 237)

In Australia, Slattery (1999), Mellor (2005), Davison (2006), and McEvoy (2006) have investigated the impact of change on the role of the Catholic school principal, with specific reference to faith leadership from the perspective of the practitioner. Typical of this research effort, Davison (2006) describes the purpose of his research as "giving a voice" (p.13) to principals who rarely "express or articulate their thoughts and reflections in a way that is accessible to others" (p.13). Moreover, he posits that, "given the uneven and partial development of a clear theology of ministry in the Catholic educational context, it seems appropriate to explore the understanding and experience practicing principals have of their role

… and by so doing, add to the collective understanding of the role as it currently is, and as it might become, in the future (p. 36).

Such studies are of interest as they offer some direction for those seeking practical advice for principals intent on faith leadership. For example, Davison's (2006) research confirms the importance of sound theological education and spiritual formation in preparation for faith leadership and recommends formal commissioning of faith leaders, as well as development of an appropriate charism to support faith leadership. At the same time, researchers describe the challenge of faith leadership in the context of socio-cultural change. As Mc Envoy (2006) explains "leaders are charged with maintaining the charisms and nurturing the essential Catholic nature and purposes of the school in the midst of a complex, ever-changing secular and often antagonistic culture" (p. 268). For McEvoy this context means that traditional understanding of Catholicism as a 'single faith' no longer 'fits' the contemporary Catholic schools that is likely to be a multicultural and multi-faith organisation.

However, researchers focusing on the challenge of faith in the organisation suggest that there are forces at work here beyond mere demographic changes in Catholics schools. The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed a growing secularism within western society that has resulted in a "degree of ambivalence and neglect" (King & Crowther, 2004, p.83) in respect to the place and function of religious faith in research on organisational culture and management (Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2002). However, within this secular world, there has developed a new appreciation of the phenomenon of spirituality (Schneiders, 2000). It seems that with increasing alienation in society and the pressures of constant change, human beings still seek connectivity and meaning in all facets of life, including the organisations in which they work (Dent, Higgins & Wharff, 2005, p. 630). Consequently, studies show an increased interest in spirituality in the workplace with the emergence of concerns for personal fulfillment, connection to something beyond the self, development of community and opportunities for service (Fry, 2003; Lips-Wiersma, 2004; Nash & McLennan, 2001).

This growing appreciation of spirituality in the contemporary organisation reveals a definitional and conceptual split in understanding between spirituality and religion in contemporary literature (King & Crowther, 2004). In short, religion is defined as "an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals and symbols… Spirituality is the personal quest for understanding answers to

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ultimate questions about life, about meaning, and about relationship to the sacred or transcendent, which may (or may not) lead to, or arise from the development of religious rituals and the formulation of community" (Koenig, McCullough & Larson, 2001, p.18). Moreover, as research by Mitroff and Denton (1999) on spirituality in the workplace has found, religion is generally viewed as inherently negative and described in terms such as "narrow… prescriptive… dogmatic… restrictive… closed… exclusive…" (p. 40). Whilst spirituality is considered to be, "the essence of life, spirit, soul expression… meaning… connection… interconnectedness... creation… creative… cosmic oneness…" (p.41). Thus "religion as a powerful influence in individual or societal life seems to be in serious trouble" whilst "spirituality has rarely enjoyed such a high profile, positive evaluation, and even economic success" (Schneiders, 2000, p.1).

Given this definition and conceptual split between religion and spirituality, Schneiders (2000), posits that religion and spirituality in the organisation could be regarded as "strangers, rivals and partners" (p.1). While she acknowledges that it is possible to proceed as if there is no real connection between religion and spirituality, she strongly argues for a partnership understanding based on religion and spirituality representing "two dimensions of a single enterprise" (p.3). In a similar vein, she argues that, "religion that is uninformed by a lived spirituality is dead and often deadly (while) spirituality that lacks the structural and functional resources of institutionalized religious tradition is rootless and often fruitless for both the individual and society" (p.19). However, this is not the common view as the literature continues to argue against a partnership between religion and spirituality in the workplace. Giacalone, Jurkiewicz & Fry (2005) as one example, warn leaders of the dangers inherent in viewing, "workplace spirituality through the lens of religious traditions and practice" (p. 520). These dangers include the assertion that denominational religious belief can be exclusive, divisive and prone to notions of moral superiority. Moreover, there can be legal issues when religious belief clashes with business activities, "Imbuing religion into workplace spirituality can foster zealotry at the expense of organizational goals, offend constituents and customers, and decrease morale and employee well-being" (p. 521).

This concern regarding the application of religious traditions and practice in the workplace may explain, the challenge facing aspirant faith leaders in Catholic schools. In the first instance, these aspirant leaders are contemporary people and 'products' of their time and place in history. Consequently, they may come to the task of faith leadership somewhat suspicious of religion, as they may have having experienced its "narrow… prescriptive… dogmatic… restrictive…

closed… exclusive…" side (Mitroff & Denton, 1999, p. 40). At the same time, individuals with a strong faith commitment may also worry, as they see religion and spirituality becoming "strangers" and "rivals" rather than as "partners" (Schneiders, 2000, p.1) in their school communities. Thus prior research highlights the definitional and conceptual confusion that surrounds the phenomenon of in respect to faith leadership in Catholic schools and the challenge facing those who seek a partnership between religion and spirituality in a time of growing secularism and marginalisation of religious belief.

The research problem and research questions

In 2009, one small rural diocese recognised that the issue of the faith leadership role of principal remains problematic. It seems that there are more questions than answers in respect to this dimension of the primary principal's role. The concept of the Catholic school as a 'faith community' itself is contested. Such issues point to the fact that there is no clear understanding of *what* faith leadership is or *how* to go about faith leadership in the context of the Catholic primary school or the wider parish community.

Consequently this study was guided by two overarching research questions:

1. How do principals describe the purpose of their faith leadership role in the Catholic primary school?
2. How do principals enact their faith leadership role in the school and the parish community?

This research study was designed to contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding leadership in Catholic education, focussing on the critical area of faith leadership. This study is timely given that we are at a stage in history when secularism and marginalisation of religious belief are impacting upon the institutional Church. It focuses on 10 principals and their self perceptions of their purpose as faith leaders and how they enact their faith leadership role in their school and their parish community. It provides an opportunity for principals to reflect on their role performance and to identify areas of effectiveness and challenge. It also has practical application by informing selection and formation processes for school principals, directing professional development and identifying leadership issues requiring attention.

The design of the study

This study is situated within the theoretical framework of "symbolic interactionism" (Charon, 2001). As a consequence it involved two stages of research: an "exploration stage" and an "inspection" (p.208) stage. In short, the exploration stage aims to allow the researchers "…to become acquainted with an area of social life and to develop some focus of interest" (p.208). The inspection step involves isolating important elements within the situation and probing in depth to find meaning and understanding of the social phenomenon being studied (p. 208). This paper reports on the first stage, exploration.

Data was collected in stage one by means of a four part online questionnaire (LimeSurvey, n.d.). The four parts allowed for the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. The first part collected demographic information, including gender, age, years of teaching experience, years of experience as a principal, location, years in their current school, previous positions held and qualifications. The second part comprised 15 items on how the principal's enact their faith leadership roles. Initially the questionnaire items were developed using the Diocesan role statement for primary principals. Once the items were constructed they were further refined in consultation with Diocesan authorities. The third part of the questionnaire provided a guided reflection on the five models of Catholic schooling (Treston, 1992). The fourth part of the questionnaire provided the primary principal with an opportunity to comment on any other issues relating to the primary school principal's faith leadership role.

Development and validation of the questionnaire

The Faith Leadership Role of the Primary Principal Questionnaire was designed to develop a more informed and sophisticated understanding of principals' perceptions of how they enact their faith leadership in the primary school. The development of the items on the questionnaire followed the intuitive-rational model for instrument development where theoretical constructs are identified in the literature and then items written to support each construct (Hase & Goldberg, 1967). In addition, the items on the questionnaire employed a forced choice, six point Likert scale with options of strongly disagree, firmly disagree, disagree, agree, firmly agree and strongly agree. Typically, a Likert scale has a five-point response format with anchors ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. It is acknowledged that a six point scale does have limitations and therefore may yield less reliable results for the vast majority of psychometric instruments (Preston & Colman, 2000). However, it was decided that the neutral response category of unsure did not respect the principals' contextual knowledge of faith leadership and that they would have an opinion on the items on the questionnaire (Clark & Watson, 1995;

Comrey, 1988). Consequently, a six point Likert response format was used consistent with other quantitative research within education (Dorman & Knightley, 2006). Once developed, five principals from another diocese were asked to scrutinise the questionnaire for appropriate use of context-based terms, readability of items and ease of interpretation. Minor changes were made as recommended to ensure face validity.

The questionnaire was then administered to the principals participating in this project via an online format (LimeSurvey, n.d.). The survey returned a 40% response rate which is within the acceptable response return rate for this population (Creswell, 2002). This questionnaire targets two theoretical constructs, consequently two scales were developed. The first scale, Principals' faith leadership roles in the school, considers the extent to which the principal identifies with their enactment of their role in faith leadership within the school. The second scale, Principals' faith leadership roles in the parish and wider community, considers the extent to which the principal identifies with their enactment of their role in faith leadership within their wider parish community. Cronbach's coefficient alphas were calculated to assess internal consistency reliability for the items making up each of the 2 constructs. The first scale has a Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.75 and the second .76. These high coefficient alphas indicate internal consistency reliability. In order to establish satisfactory internal consistency reliability for each of the two scales only those items that aligned with one of the two theoretical constructs and that also enhanced the internal consistency reliability of the construct were retained for further statistical analysis. Consequently, one item developed for this questionnaire was left unassigned. This item was "*I am very committed to deepen my faith through spiritual reading and reflection.*"

One wonders whether it could be the strong wording, 'very committed' and the particular activities 'spiritual reading' and 'reflection' that account for the different responses given by the principals for this item. These activities are probably luxuries in the daily life of the busy principal and, while valued, are possibly not prioritised, except on rare occasions such as retreat opportunities or sabbaticals.

Findings

There are several observations from the data collected that bear on the research questions of this study. These observations will be discussed with reference to the qualitative data collected on the questionnaire, as well as using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics

provides an understanding of the frequency distribution of the principals' responses to individual items, while inferential statistics report comparisons of scale scores according to eight principal characteristics. These inferential statistics aim to make inferences from the data in order to draw conclusions that go beyond the data.

<u>Descriptive Statistics</u>

Descriptive analysis of items is discussed with respect to the four parts of the questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire focused on demographic detail. These responses represent a gender split of 50/50. Seventy percent of respondents had at least 3 years of principal experience in addition, 70% of the respondents had a masters degree as their highest qualification. Seventy percent were over 40 years of age with 40% of the total being at least 50 years of age. Only one principal was in the 20-29 years age group. These demographics represent an unusual principal profile for a small rural diocese and this begs the question 'What hope is there for the younger, less well educated and less experienced principals?

The second part of the questionnaire contained the 15 items that were presented on a six point Likert scale. All principal responses were in positive range for each item: 'strongly agree', 'firmly agree' and 'agree'. In general the principals have recorded responses that reflect either 'strongly agree' or 'firmly agree'. Worthy of note in the first scale (see Table 1), School, is the different response rate for item 4, *I actively participate in the planning and organising of school liturgies and staff prayer,* where the principals returned a response rate of 40% for 'agree'.

Table 1 Response proportions for items in the School scale (N=10)

Number	Item	Response %					
		Strongly Agree	Firmly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Firmly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	I can confidently speak of my faith to others.	50.0	30.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
4	I actively participate in the planning and organising of school liturgies and staff prayer.	20.0	40.0	40.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
5	Others would say that I	50.0	40.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

	treat all people with respect and dignity.						
7	I regularly remind others of the importance of developing a distinctive Catholic culture within the school.	40.0	30.0	30.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
8	I constantly try to integrate faith and culture at school.	50.0	40.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
9	I make sure that religious symbols are on display throughout the school.	50.0	30.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

The second scale, Parish, has consistently high response rates in the 'strongly agree' and 'firmly agree' response categories (see Table 2).

Table 2 Response proportions for items in the Parish scale (N=10)

Number	Item	Response %					
		Strongly Agree	Firmly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Firmly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I am very committed to deepening my faith through the sacraments.	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
6	I am actively involved in my parish.	30.0	50.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
10	I actively promote the celebration of religious/significant events as a community.	70.0	20.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
11	I regularly communicate parish/diocesan structures and roles to staff.	30.0	60.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
12	I constantly promote the active role of the school within parish life.	20.0	70.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
13	I regularly remind the school community of the vision for Catholic education within the Diocese.	30.0	60.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
14	I regularly participate in diocesan education activities.	60.0	30.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
15	I develop, share and promote a clear	20.0	50.0	30.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

educational philosophy which connects faith in the Catholic tradition and promotes a sound educational philosophy.

The third part of the paper focused on the principals' perceptions of the purpose of their faith leadership within the school and wider community. These data suggested identification of several themes which occurred in the responses:

a) **Growth/deepening of faith**. As might be expected 'students' were seen as the priority target of their leadership endeavours. Ninety percent of respondents specifically mentioned 'students', while 10% implied 'students'; (two even mentioning 'student', 'staff' and 'parents', "regardless of their religious affiliation". 'Staff 'and 'parents' were mentioned by 60% and 50% respectively.

b) **Faith and culture**. This theme occurred in 60% of responses with comments such as the following "… to lead by example not only in the traditional practice of my faith… but to be faith-filled in the way I treat people" and "…my leadership highlights the relevance of our faith to life and contemporary culture".

c) **Building community**. Most principals mentioned the theological imperative of 'communio'. Seventy percent made implicit mention of community building as a dimension of the principal's role as faith leader, while 20% mentioned it specifically: "… many families see the Catholic school as their faith, especially as part of the community".

d) **Modeling faith in action**. Another common theme identified by 80% was the importance of faith inspiring action: not just words but deeds. Scriptural ref "by their fruits you will know them" (Matt. 7:16). Thirty percent specifically mentioned this link, while 50% implied a strong connection; "being faith-filled in the way I treat people".

In addition to these themes, the third part of the questionnaire also focused on the enactment of the faith leadership role. Participants were asked to comment on actions that they perceived

best represented faith leadership in their school. Responses to question three recognized the power of example and the importance, especially in a principal, of modeling faith leadership as a dimension of the Catholic primary principal's leadership role. Leading by example, modeling Catholic ethos, acting justly and with compassion, were all recognised as key aspects. The importance of providing encouragement was frequently mentioned in relation to the principal's role: encouragement for students, staff and parents. The question remains as to the principal's need also to receive encouragement. Principals are not unaware of the practical difficulties of this challenging role and tensions such as the following were raised: Lack of time, isolation, distance and lack of support from parents or parish, not to mention a lack of clarity about the role itself.

The fourth part of the questionnaire invited the respondents to make additional comments. Less than one third of respondents took this opportunity. Little new material was offered as respondents tended to repeat comments regarding their perception that the role of faith leadership is challenging. However, some respondents' comments are particularly worthy of note:

> "having Christ as the foundation of the whole Christian enterprise" and … "living the Good News in our time and in our place, so that others may be led to know that God loves them".

Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics considers comparisons of mean scale scores according to eight principal characteristics: principal gender, principal age, years of teaching experience, years of experience as a principal, years at present school, location, position held before becoming a principal and academic qualifications.

Gender was used to compare mean scale scores. For each or the two scales Mann-Whitney tests were performed. Of these tests none was statistically significant. Figure 1 shows the mean scale scores according to gender. A noteworthy feature of this figure is that both genders responded in a similar way, indicating that each group holds similar perceptions (i.e., the choice of strongly agree or firmly agree) with regard to their active involvement as faith leaders in the parish. Also worthy of note is the small gap between male and female scores for each of the two scales. The male mean scale scores were lower than the females for 'school' but higher for 'parish' with effect sizes of .17 and .13. These effect sizes have been interpreted as small for both. Despite the lack of statistical significance here, the effect sizes suggest something

important and worth investigating further to see if women are, in fact, more inclined to assume the role of faith leadership in the school, while men appear more disposed toward assuming it in the public domain of the parish. It may also be that women's apparent reluctance to assume the role in the wider community is due to a lower acceptance of women here.
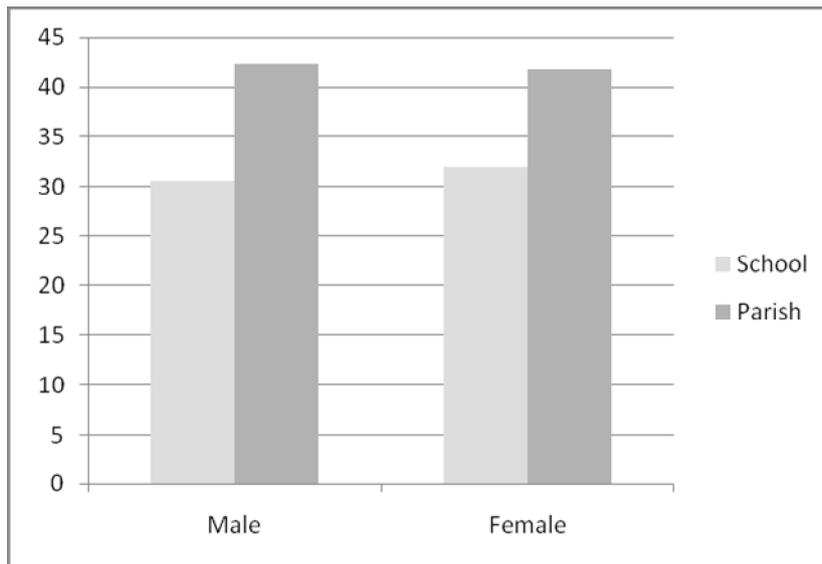

Figure 1 Means scale scores according to gender

To compare mean scale scores according to age, the principals were assigned to four groups. The first group consisted of principals 20-29 years (1), the second group 30-39 years (2), the third group 40-49 years (3), the fourth group 50-59 years (4). A fifth grouping was provided, 60 or older but no principals were in this grouping. Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted for this grouping arrangement for each scale. None of these tests was statistically significant. Figure 2 shows the mean scale scores according to age. As a grouping variable, age had no substantive influence on the scale scores. However this is a vey important finding as it indicates a consistency of principal perception that is not influenced by age.
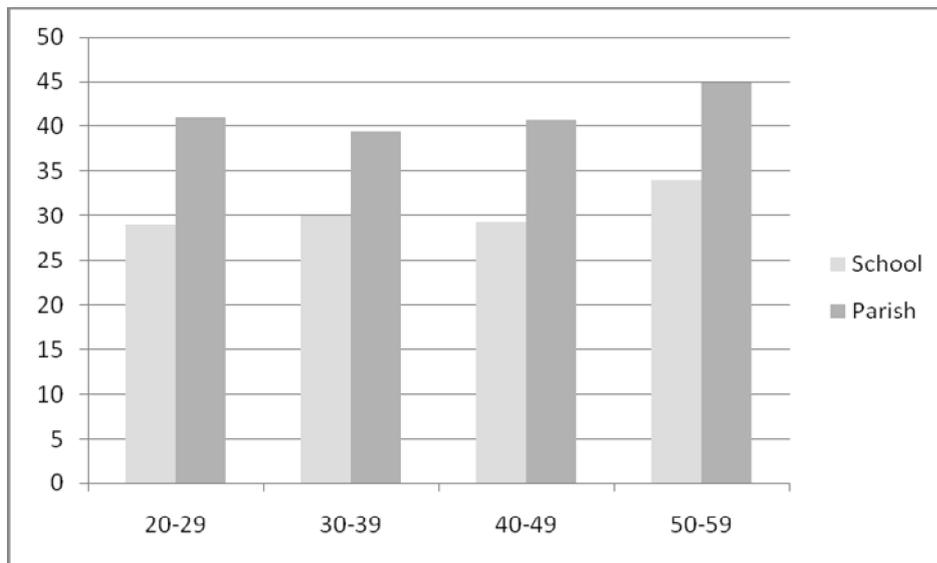
Figure 2 Means scale scores according to age

To compare mean scale scores according to years of teaching experience, Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted. The principals were again assigned to four groups. The first group consisted of principals with less than 5 years teaching experience (1), the second group 6-8 years experience (1), the third group 9-11 years (0), and the fourth group greater than 10 years of teaching experience (8). None of these tests was statistically significant. Figure 3 shows the mean scale scores according to teaching experience. As a grouping variable, teaching experience had no substantive influence on the scale scores. None the less this finding is important as it indicates a consistency of perception that is not influenced by teaching experience. Also note worthy is that in this small diocese there were no principals who had been teaching between 9-11 years.
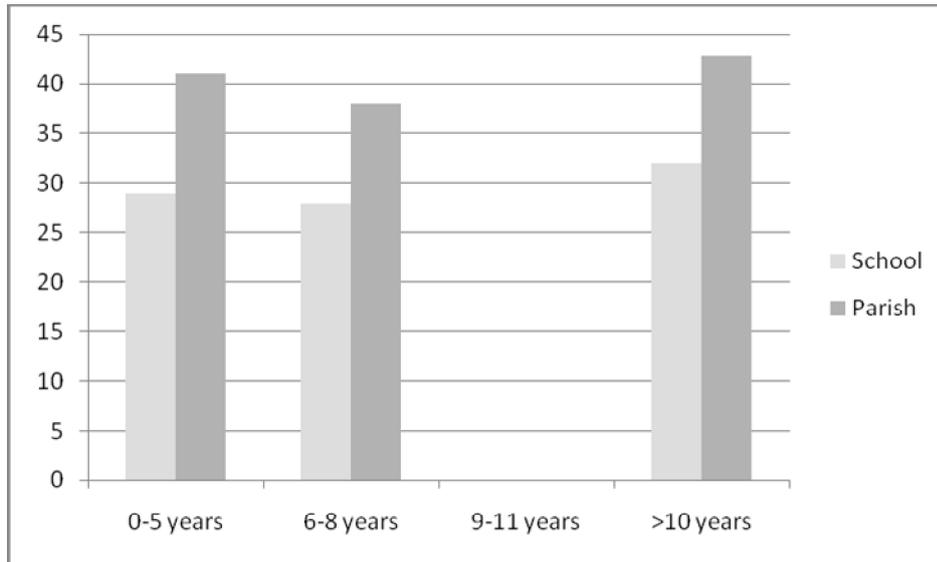
Figure 3 Means scale scores according to years of teaching experience

To compare mean scale scores according to years of experience as a principal, Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted. The principals were assigned to six groups. The first group consisted of principals with less than 1 years teaching experience (1), the second group 1-2 years experience (2), the third group 3-4 years (1), the fourth group 5-6 years (1) the fifth group 7-10 years (2), and the sixth group more than 10 years (3). None of these tests was statistically significant. Figure 4 shows the mean scale scores according to years of experience as a principal. As a grouping variable, experience as a principal had no substantive influence on the scale scores. This finding confirms that experience as a principal does not alter their perceptions of faith leadership in the school as compared to the parish.
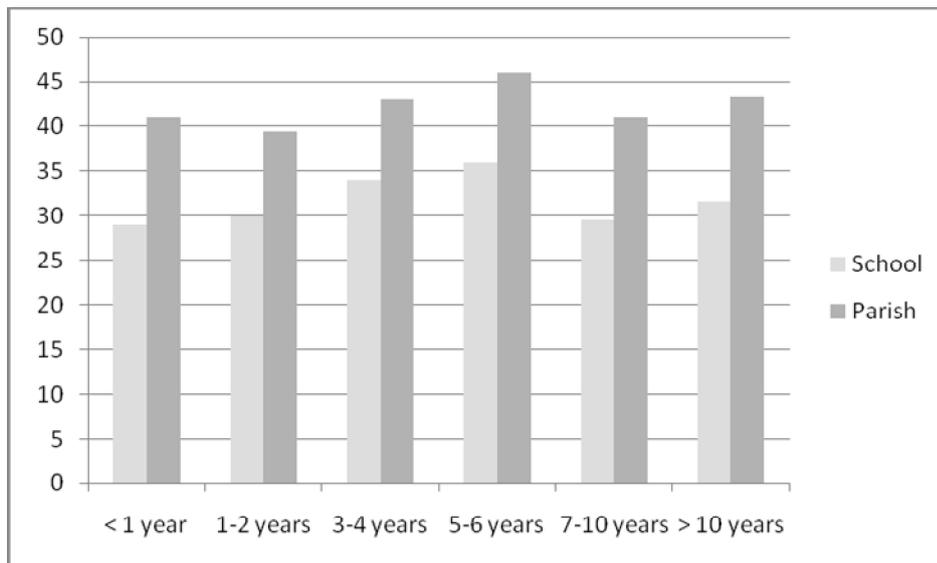
Figure 4 Means scale scores according to years of experience as a principal

Location was used to compare mean scale scores. For each of the two scales Mann-Whitney tests were performed. The principals were assigned to two groups. The first group consisted of principals where they classified their school as city (3), the second group classified their school as rural (7). None of these tests were statistically significant. Figure 5 shows the mean scale scores according to location. A noteworthy feature of this figure is that overall; the rural principals perceive a lower level of active involvement in the faith leadership role than did the city principals, as indicated by the lower mean scale scores. This result is derived from rural principals selecting "firmly agree" or "agree" in comparison to the city principals selecting "strongly agree" or "firmly agree" for the items on the questionnaire. Of particular interest is the gap between city and rural principals' scores for parish faith leadership roles. The city principals' mean scale scores were higher for parish than rural principals and, although the difference is not statistically significant, it does reflect an effect size of .26. This effect size has been interpreted as small. Despite the lack of statistical significance here, the effect sizes suggest something important and worth investigating further to see if rural principals believe it is expected of them to actively participate in the parish community and therefore they hold different perception from their city colleagues.
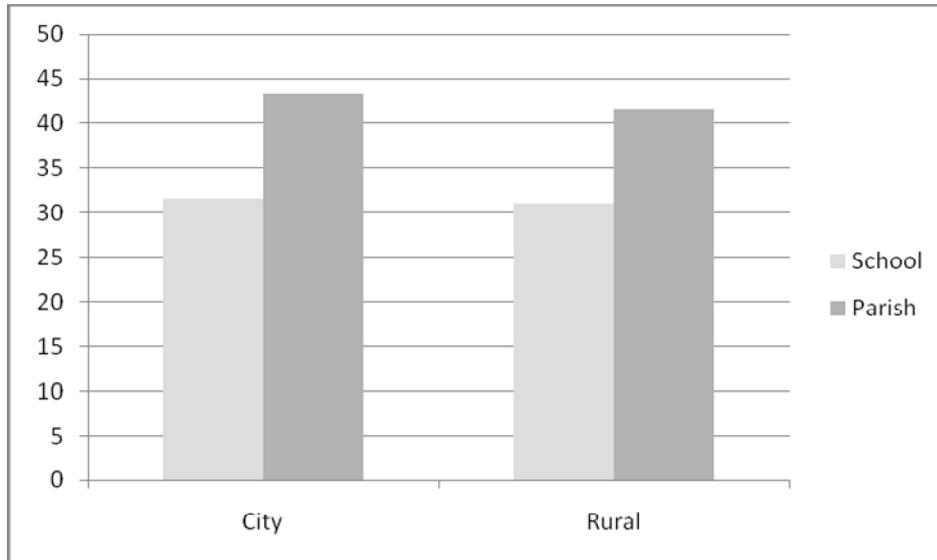
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Figure 5 Means scale scores according to location

To compare mean scale scores according to years at current school Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted. The principals were assigned to four groups. The first group consisted of principals with up to five years at the current school (6), the second group 6-8 years (2), the third group 9-11 years (0) and the fourth group 12 or more years (2). None of these tests was statistically significant. Figure 6 shows the mean scale scores according to years at current school. As a grouping variable, years at current school had no substantive influence on scale scores. This indicates a consistency of perception that is not influenced by years in the school. Also worthy of note is that there are no principals who have been at there current school for 9-11 years.
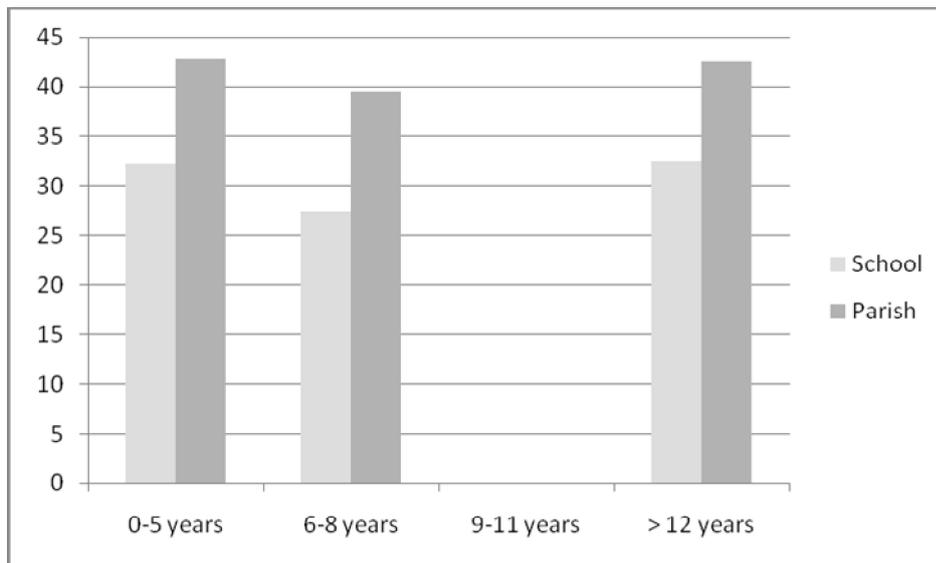
Figure 6 Means scale scores according to years at current school

To compare mean scale scores according to previous position held Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted. The principals were assigned to three groups. The first group consisted of principals who had prior to becoming principal has been the APA/Deputy (4), the second group APRE (4), and the third group classroom teachers (2). One of these tests was statistically significant, the scale for school (K-W H =5.79, $df = 3$, $p < .05$). This result indicates that the principals' different perceptions of their faith leadership roles in schools are dependent on previous positions held. To ascertain whether significant differences existed between pairs of groups, three pairwise Mann-Whitney tests were performed for this scale. Results indicate a statistically significant difference between principals who had previously held the position as APA/Deputy compared to those who held the position as APRE (M-W $U = 1.00$, $Z = -2.07$, $p < .05$) and a statistically significant difference between principals who had previously held the position as APA/Deputy compared to those who held the position as classroom teacher (M-W $U = .00$, $Z = -1.88$, $p < .05$).

This result suggests that principals who had been APREs felt less pressure than did APAs/Deputies or classroom teachers, when taking on principalship, as they had previous faith leadership experience at a senior level.
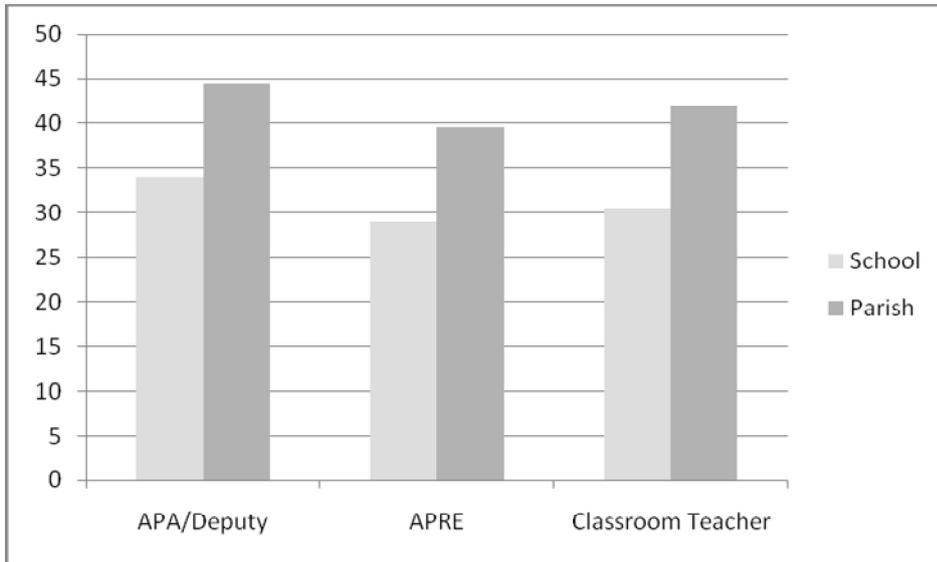
Figure 7 Means scale scores according to previous position held

To compare mean scale scores according to qualifications Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted. None of these tests was statistically significant. As a grouping variable, qualifications had no substantive influence on the scale scores. Figure 8 shows the mean scale scores according to qualifications. This indicates a consistency of perception that is not influenced by qualification.
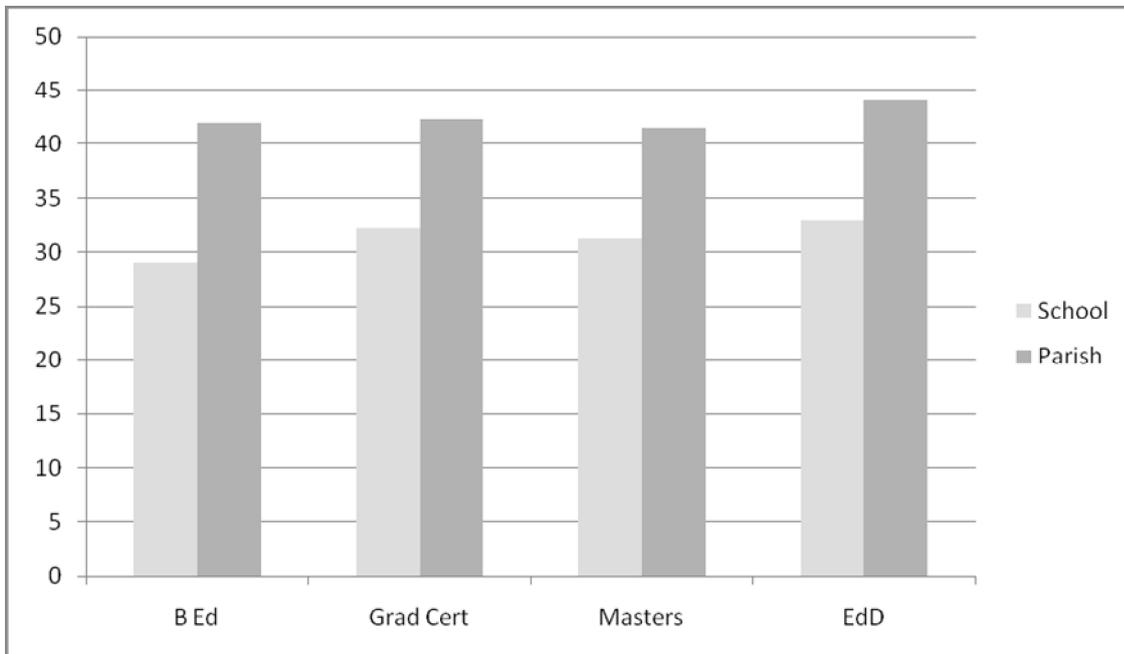

Figure 8 Means scale scores according to qualifications

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Discussion

This research was designed to contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding leadership in Catholic education, focusing on the critical area of faith leadership of the primary school principal. The results of this 'exploration' stage of the study provide practical application by informing selection and formation processes for school principals, directing professional development and identifying leadership issues requiring attention.   In particular this study confirmed the findings in the literature that, as faith leadership is a relatively new phenomenon in organizational theory and lay leadership in church is also relatively new (Ranson; Lennan; in NCEC report, 2005), the faith leadership dimension of the principal's leadership role is still evolving. Furthermore, at times, even the notion of the Catholic school as faith community, remains contested.

The findings of this study confirm previous research which suggests an understanding of faith leadership that has resonance with the work of Schneiders (2000). Writing to distinguish between religion (faith) and spirituality, and the relationship between them, she uses the metaphor of 'strangers', 'rivals' and 'partners'. A number of principals in this study responded in a way that supports the 'partnership' understanding of the relationship. One principal described her faith leadership role as being '… actively involved in proclaiming the gospel today, to today's people; to continue to develop my own spirituality and to explore understandings and approaches which nurture people to know God.'

As mentioned already, the demographic data of the principals in this diocese represent an unusual principal profile, especially for a rural diocese, with the majority of principals being older, more highly educated and more theologically literate than in many other dioceses. However, what of the more 'typical' diocese, where such factors are absent or, at least, not present to the same degree? What of future generations of Catholic school leaders? How will they cope with an increasingly demanding and challenging role? Ranson (2006) argues that:

> … the new generation of Australian Catholic School leaders is recognizing that (leadership) is exercised in a liminal period where the past is known, but is no longer instrumental and where the future is intuited but has yet to be realized with effective agency. (p.41)

Developing this thought, he further argues that "leadership in liminality is a painful experience" due to the paradox of having to live with increasing ambiguity. Such a context calls for "a particular leadership …that breathes the spirit of paradox" (p. 421). One wonders whether the next generation of leaders is ready for this challenge.

Lennan (in NCEC, 2005) reminds us that the Catholic church and school are part of the one reality and that both are "connected to something bigger than ourselves" (p6). The research data points to the need for specific ongoing formation. Future school leadership, according to Ranson, will increasingly need to be seen as religious leadership and

> ...'will demand persons who are 'deeply conscious not only of their own vocation to leadership but also highly aware of the vocation of the Catholic school community, and

yet, at the same time of the relative and participative place of the school community in the wider evangelical mission' (p 8f).

The challenge of formation has already been taken up in earnest, both by church and systems authorities. The NCEC (2005) report documents that progress is being made at the level of State and National Commissions, and individual dioceses are also actively involved. The findings of the current research indicate that there is a cause for concern for the increasing expectations placed on primary school principals to undertake faith leadership roles in the parish and wider community. This study finds that the urgency as expressed in documents prepared by the National Catholic Education Commission is certainly justified.

Further investigation of these unresolved issues is warranted and will be reported following the completion of the second stage of this study, the inspection stage.

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