

ANNOTATION

Cimino, Carol. "Called and Sent: The Vocation of Catholic School Novice Lay Teachers" EdD dissertation, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, 2004. 181 pp.

The author's intent in this dissertation is to address the question, "Do the lay teachers new to Catholic schools possess a sense of calling similar to that experienced by the religious men and women whose place they have taken?" (2). Such a sense of being "called and sent" would mean that they "identify with the elements that determine the Catholic identity of the school and they understand the special nature of their jobs" (3). As such, the two key determinants are "Catholic identity" and "a sense of vocation".

The means for determining "Catholic identity" in this study come from the three identity characteristics delineated in Gina Shimabukuro's "A Call to Reflection: Teacher's Guide to Catholic Identity" published by the NCEA in 1998: i.e., "the teacher's role as builder of community, the teacher's commitment to both professional and spiritual growth, and the teacher's role as spiritual guide and facilitator of human development" (3). The means for determining a sense of vocation are based on a series of cited studies, whereby "a determination of teachers' level of job satisfaction, coupled with their intention to remain in Catholic education can reveal the existence of a sense of vocation" (5). The teacher sample for this study "was limited to the Catholic school lay teachers in their first to fifth year of teaching in the elementary schools of the Diocese of Rochester, NY" (9).

Learning "how novice teachers identify their jobs as a vocation" is central to the study because if "the very *raison d'être* of the Catholic school is the transmission of Christian values, then, of necessity, Catholic schools must either hire individuals with a sense of vocation, or make the development of the sense of vocation a priority in the formation of new teachers" (39). If "novice Catholic school teachers reflect the attitudes of the larger population of teachers in general," then the results of this study will help inform administrators and Church leaders about the need for the faith formation of teachers (40).

The survey for the study was given in January, 2000, to 183 novice teachers. 119 surveys were completed and returned. The results about the respondents' levels of job satisfaction were analyzed via variables such as attendance at Catholic school, religious preference, longevity of teaching, and the school setting. The results showed an overall satisfaction of novice teachers "with their jobs and with teaching in the Catholic school system of the Diocese of Rochester" (114). At the same time, "both intrinsic and extrinsic factors play a role in the degree of satisfaction" (114).

Teachers as Builders of Community: "All respondents indicated a high degree of identification with this element" (116). Those with no Catholic schooling, and those with more than twelve years of Catholic school, ranked "colleagueship" the highest, yet those with no Catholic

schooling ranked “create Christian community” the lowest in importance as part of their job, while those who indicated that they practiced some religion (however defined) ranked it as most important. “In summary, this section of the survey provided the highest of the indicators with factors of Christian identity” (117). The presence of community “offers solace to young teachers beset by the pressures of fitting into a faculty, as well as adjusting to the rigors of teaching” (117). School leaders can capitalize on this as to the special nature of the community of a Catholic school: “school leaders should emphasize that collegiality must be imbued with faith community” (117).

Teacher Commitment to Spiritual and Professional Growth: Adequate time for planning and control of the classroom curriculum influenced respondents’ decisions about whether to remain in the profession, but “the opportunity to teach Catholic values ranked highest in their overall satisfaction” (118). Therefore, it “cannot be stated strongly enough that for the Catholic school teacher, professional growth, in order to provide excellence in teaching, is a matter of justice. But spiritual growth is a *sine qua non* for the teacher’s realization of the job as a vocation” (118). Those who attended some Catholic schooling ranked this element higher, and practicing Catholic & non-Catholics did so. Fourth and fifth-year teachers ranked the opportunity to teach Catholic/Christian values higher and “deemed it more important in their decision to stay” (119). Generally, all “favored the professional side of the element more than the spiritual side” (120). “Neglect of the spiritual part of this element further negates the importance of spiritual development, and further obviates the message of the special nature of this job” (120).

Teacher’s Role as Spiritual Guide and Facilitator of Human Learning: Except for teachers in urban settings, “the respondents evidenced this element of Catholic identity lowest of the three” (121). It was student motivation and discipline that were ranked most important, many teachers spending less time teaching than engaged in classroom discipline. Urban teachers identified their role more “as a relationship with individual students rather than with the institutional mission” (121). This was based on greater student needs and less parental involvement. “Many teachers hesitate to assume their role as a spiritual mentor to students” (121). Those who had attended some Catholic schooling and those who were practicing Catholics or non-Catholics “were more likely to see their role as spiritual guide as important as their responsibility to foster the human development of their students” (122). Clearly, “Catholic school leaders would do well to point out to novice teachers their dual role” (122).

The author observed that, based on the responses, “diocesan and school leaders would do well to query candidates on their practice of religion. Commitment to some religious philosophy seems, at least in this study, to be an indicator of a realization of the higher call of teaching” (123). This is so because in general, “practicing Catholics and practicing non-Catholics indicated that they were more likely to remain teaching in Catholic schools” (125). Also in terms of teacher retention, “although salary and benefits, and even recognition play a small role in teachers’ deciding to enter the profession, these factors are key in their decision to stay” (124).

Among the conclusions are these:

- “Clearly, there is much room for school and diocesan leaders to assist these teachers in both their decision to stay and their reasons for doing so” (126).
- Catholic urban schools and urban school teachers need special attention, because “none of these teachers indicated that he/she would be willing to stay until retirement” (128-9).
- “Special care should be taken to ensure that the hiring process covers the religious preference and practices of candidates” (129).
- Quoting a 1988 document from the Congregation for Catholic Education, “Unless the vocational aspects of teaching are present, there is little left which can make the school Catholic” (131).