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Why Parents Choose Catholic School: A Social Theory Understanding

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WHY PARENTS CHOOSE CATHOLIC SCHOOL:
A SOCIAL THEORY UNDERSTANDING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program for Educational Leaders

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Reverend John M. Schultz

May 2009

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Rev. John M. Schultz

2009

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL PROGRAM FOR
EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

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July 25, 2008

WHY DO PARENTS CHOOSE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS?

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ABSTRACT

WHY PARENTS CHOOSE CATHOLIC SCHOOL: A SOCIAL THEORY UNDERSTANDING

By

Reverend John M. Schultz

May 2009

Dissertation supervised by Helen C. Sobehart

Catholic schools in the United States are at a critical juncture. The Catholic bishops speak as if parents choose a Catholic school mainly because of the spiritual mission of the school. But what are the real reasons that parents choose Catholic school for their children? Current research provides no social or religious understanding of the phenomenon of school choice.

Research Questions and hypotheses

As the title indicates, the purpose of this study is to investigate the real reasons that parents choose Catholic school for their children as understood by using a social theory model and as influenced by many forces in our society that have changed over the past several decades. The study will use survey results gathered from parents who have students enrolled in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Erie, PA, as well as a focus group made up of parents. This study seeks the answers to several questions:

1. What is the relationship between background variables gathered in the demographic section of the survey and the reasons parents give for choosing Catholic schools?
2. In the experience of the parents involved in a focus group, have their reasons for sending their children to Catholic schools evolved and changed as their children have aged and moved up in grade, and if so, how?
3. How do their responses reflect the influence of societal trends vs. religiosity, using the lens of Julian Rotter's Social Theory and the implications of the changing Catholic culture as outlined by Thomas Groome?

There are four hypotheses that this author expects to be the outcome of the on-line survey taken by parents. In the case of each hypothesis, some conclusions will be offered in narrative form.

1. Although the bishops continue to speak of spiritual and faith matters as the primary reason that parents choose Catholic schools today, the survey questions that relate to spiritual matters will be rated by the majority of parents much lower than the other questions listed on the survey.
2. Data will demonstrate that students today have a great share in the decision about schooling and that the majority of students have "exclusive" or "most" input into the decision to enroll in a Catholic school.
3. A correlation will be found between how parents are rated in the Locus of Control portion of the survey and the answers they give to the ten questions asked in the survey. There will be a positive relation between those with a high locus of control score and survey questions on safety, behavior, public

schools, the academic program and extracurricular programs. There will be a positive relation between those with a low locus of control score and survey questions about spirituality, family atmosphere, community and values.

4. There will be no correlation between parents' attendance at Catholic school and their belief that Catholic school attendance is a matter of tradition.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

My mother, Margaret Patricia Preston Schultz, started school at Saint Titus School in Titusville, Pennsylvania, in 1931 (personal communication, October 2, 2004). As she entered the first grade, there were 26 other boys and girls in her class. First grade was taught by a religious sister, a Sister of Mercy, who lived in the motherhouse next door to the school. At that time, tuition was \$100 per school year with no extra fees required. The teaching staff was made up of 11 religious sisters and two lay women. When my mother finished the 8th grade and went on to high school, 26 of the class continued into Saint Joseph Academy, also on the grounds of the motherhouse and staffed almost exclusively by religious sisters. Only one girl did not continue on to the Catholic secondary school, due to the fact that her family had moved out of the area during her 7th grade year.

My mother's story is not unusual or unique. The chain of events throughout the 13 counties of the Diocese of Erie in the 1930's was consistent with my mother's experience. If a parochial or Catholic school was available in the town in which a family lived, the children of Catholics routinely went there for their entire school career. For many families, Catholic school was not an "option" or an "alternative," but a given. Catholic schools assigned very few resources to marketing efforts, since Catholic parents automatically sent their children to the local parish school.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

At a time when Catholic schools continue to decrease in enrollment, many desire to understand the reasons for this decline. This study sought to discover the real reasons why parents choose Catholic schools for their children and relate these reasons to their own background and experience. By using a sociological and theological lens, this study helped to shed light on how parents today come to make this important choice about school. What social forces underlie the reasoning that parents use? It is important to understand how parents understand the changing church and society in which they find themselves to understand what leads them to make the school choices that they make. Since there is no national system in place to track the reasons parents have for choosing to send their children to Catholic school, this study can help to fill in the gap in data. The Catholic bishops of the United States, as is their tradition, continue to promote Catholic schools as the best way the Church has to pass on the faith, but there is no data to ensure that this is indeed the reason parents are sending their children to Catholic schools. In the document, "Renewing our commitment to Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the third millennium," released in 2005, the bishops point out that Catholic schools "afford the fullest and best opportunity to realize the fourfold purpose of Christian education" (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005, p. 36). The bishops point out that 850 Catholic schools in the United States have closed since 1990, in inner-city, urban and rural areas. In one of the most recent major documents to deal with Catholic schools in the United States, the bishops in 1972 predicted the continued decline in Catholic school enrollment:

Today this school system is shrinking visibly. The reasons are many and include complex sociological, demographic and psychological factors. Some believe there has been an excessive effort in formal education and too much concentration on schools at the expense of other educational programs. Some are convinced that other forms of Christian service take unequivocal priority over service rendered in the classroom. Some feel American Catholics no longer have the material resources to support so ambitious an educational enterprise. (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1972, p. 32)

Catholic schools have always played a significant role in our nation's history. The bishops claim that Catholic schools are important to both the Church and the nation, since they are schools for the "whole human person." Catholic school programs are successful when compared to public or other non-public schools.

Research conducted by the United States Department of Education, the National Catholic Educational Association, and other independent agencies shows that Catholic schools make a major impact in closing the achievement gap for poor and minority students in inner-city environments. Catholic schools have a lower dropout rate (3.4) than both public (14.4 percent) and other private schools (11.9 percent). Ninety-nine percent of Catholic high school students graduate, and 97 percent go on to some form of post-secondary education. (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005, p. 6)

According to 2001 statistics compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics, there were 53.9 million students enrolled in the public schools of the United States in the 2000-01 school year (Hussar & Snyder, p. 2). The same year, private school enrollment stood at nearly 5.5 million. According to statistics compiled by the same center, just over 2.5 million of these students were enrolled in Catholic schools, while nearly two million were enrolled in other religious schools and 901,000 students were enrolled in nonsectarian private schools (Broughman & Pugh, p. 9). This study notes that the various affiliated and unaffiliated Christian schools and Jewish schools, as well as the non-sectarian schools, are not organized in a system as delineated as is the case with Catholic schools, whether run by a diocese or a religious order. But all private schools

are affected by the same need for funding, whether they are religious schools or nonsectarian schools:

Most nonpublic schools...require some form of subsidization in order to exist, and it is for that reason that the great majority of them are affiliated with some religious body that can support them with funds, low-paid staff, volunteers, tax-free status, and other aid. (Kirkpatrick, p. 110)

It is no surprise, then, that less than 20% of private schools in operation today are nonsectarian, and the vast majority (over 80%) are affiliated with a religious denomination. It is interesting to note that, although all non-public schools, both religious and non-sectarian, are in the same need for funding, their stakeholders seem to be satisfied with the educational program offered.

Like all American institutions, nonpublic schools could use more money, but the various problems of “education” with which we are all familiar are more properly regarded as a problem of public “schooling.” Numerous surveys and studies have shown that satisfaction in nonpublic schools, on the part of students, parents, teachers (despite their lower pay) and everyone else is much higher than in the public schools. Strikes are virtually unknown. Yet the nonpublic schools, as a group, have less of almost everything and what they have is of a poorer quality – older buildings, textbooks, etc. – in comparison to the public schools. The reason for the satisfaction seems to stem from the condition of choice. (Kirkpatrick, p. 142)

The condition of choice exercised by parents, then, seems to be a major factor in the traditional success of non-public schools and, in particular, Catholic schools. And even though this study focused on the reasons parents choose a Catholic school, the results are applicable to other religious and non-sectarian schools as well.

In general, it must be noted that the numbers of the population who participate in organized religion in the United States on a regular basis has declined. This lessening of involvement in organized religion is seen, not only in school-related matters, but in other areas of life as well. A study done in 2001 showed that fewer people in the United States

identified with organized religion. Using Gallup Polls, Roper surveys and the General Social Survey from 1947 through 2000, the study found that in the 1960s almost everyone in the United States identified themselves as Protestants, Catholics or Jews. That number dropped to under 95% for the first time in 1972, and by the year 2000, 7% to 14% of the population claimed “no religion.”

In 1998, almost 60% of the “no religion” respondents said that they believed that “God watches over me” and nearly 40% reported praying at least weekly. What most distinguished Americans with no religious preference from those who claimed a religion was an aversion to religious services and a general disdain for organized religion. (Hout & Fischer, 2001, p. 12)

This shift in American society affects many areas of life, including the Catholic school choice. Organized religion has a lessening impact on the lives of people in the United States today, and this trend has resulted in a lower enrollment in Catholic schools. The overall influence that the Catholic church had on its members, then, has grown less in the last several decades.

The challenges of school today are much more complex than they were even a generation ago. Albert Bandura points out that teachers today face an enormous task before a classroom session even begins, and the school that is perceived as safer or less detrimental to students’ growth and development is the one that will be chosen. With the changes in our society and in the makeup of students themselves, the task of choosing a school which is perceived as safer or less threatening is enormous.

Many of the adverse conditions with which schools have to cope reflect the broader social and economic ills of the society. These adverse realities affect student educability and impair the school environment. In the 1940s teachers identified as the top disciplinary problems: students making noise, talking, running in the halls, and chewing gum. In the 1980s, the leading problems included drug and alcohol abuse, assault and vandalism, extortion, pregnancy, gang warfare, and rape. (Bandura, 1997, p. 243)

It would seem logical to expect Catholic school enrollment to increase, or at least to stabilize, since the concerns listed above are more prevalent among parents than ever. This fact points again to the need for a study to discover the real reasons that parents choose or do not choose a Catholic school for their children.

These facts emphasize the importance of understanding how societal changes affect parental choice for school. When parents want to help their children deal with the society in which they find themselves, the choice of a school may be made for many different reasons than would traditionally have been the case. To understand the choices that parents make for their children, it is necessary to understand the society in which these decisions are being made.

Societal trends in the last fifty years have shown that people are more independent, with greater choice in almost everything. But non-public schools are dependent on major societal trends, and these trends tend to lead to cyclical behavior, as Peter Braverman and Scott Looney wrote in a 1999 article:

Independent schools are affected by society's trends as are any other institutions. Population growth rates rise and then fall; the economy surges and recedes; "private" schools gain and lose favor; and so forth, *sic transit gloria mundi*. Still, there is an element of unpredictability in each of these factors influencing the potential markets for schools. It is a truism that the marketplace of the future will be determined largely by the intersection of demographic, sociological, and economic cycles. Each of these cycles in itself is formidable; their unpredictable interactions suggest a requisite readiness on the part of administrators and trustees in the near-term.

States track non-public schools each year, and they consistently show a decline over the last decade. In the state of Illinois, for example, between 1992 and 2002, there was a 1.9% decline in the number of students enrolled in all non-public schools in the state (Illinois State Board of Education, p. 2). A similar decline is noted by New York state,

which reports a 15.5 % decline in the number of students enrolled in non-public schools in that state between 1970 and 2005 (New York State Education Department, p. 1). All non-public schools, both religious and non-sectarian, have seen a decline in overall enrollment in the last decade. It is important to understand why enrollment in these non-public schools has dropped. Although unpredictable, the trends in demographic, sociological and economic cycles of which Braverman and Looney wrote will continue to affect non-public school enrollment. As we have seen the lessening connection many people feel to their religion in the last fifty years, there is no doubt that the decision to enroll children in a Catholic school is affected by these trends.

To expect parents to be making decisions on school as they did in the past, based on the expectations of the bishops and clergy, would be to miss the point. Only by understanding the demographic, sociological and economic situations in which these decisions are being made today can we discover the real reasons that parents are choosing Catholic schools. Braverman and Looney go on to talk about how much societal trends affect non-public school enrollment in these times. They address the issues of population, race/ethnicity and affordability/access. With decreasing numbers of students almost everywhere, the traditional concept of “minority” breaking down and the high standard of living enjoyed by most Americans today, more and more parents are able to choose more selectively the schools in which they want to place their children. In a society in which consumers have a lot of choice in nearly everything, the decision for a school for their children is approached in the same way as many other decisions that are made when choosing one product over another. With a decreasing dependence on and involvement in the life of the Church than was evident in the lives of their immigrant

forbears, parents today are making decisions about everything, including schools, based on a wide variety of reasons. Far from the immigrant population of a century ago, many of today's parents have become savvy consumers, with both the material means and interest in making more of a choice of school than was ever possible before.

Julian Rotter's social learning theory model can help to explain how and why parents make the choices for school that they make. By using Rotter's theory and through the use of an instrument called the locus of control survey which he developed, it is possible to make some connections between people's psychological profile and the choices that they make for their children in regard to choice of school. Rotter calls the first component behavior potential, the likelihood of engaging in a particular behavior in any given situation. In other words, what is the probability that an individual will exhibit a particular behavior in any situation? For each situation a person faces, there are multiple possible behaviors, and the person will exhibit whichever behavior has the highest potential. By using this model, one could predict the behavior a parent will exhibit, particularly by knowing more about the parent and their history of learning and life.

The second component of Rotter's social learning theory may be even more helpful in understanding parents and their educational choices. Rotter calls this component "expectancy", and it relates to the subjective probability that a given behavior will lead to a certain outcome.

How likely is it that the behavior will lead to the outcome? Having "high" or "strong" expectancies means the individual is confident the behavior will result in the outcome. Having low expectancies means the individual believes it is unlikely that his or her behavior will result in reinforcement. If the outcomes are equally desirable, we will engage in the behavior that has the greatest likelihood of paying off (i.e., has the highest expectancy). Expectancies are formed based

on past experience. The more often a behavior has led to reinforcement in the past, the stronger the person's expectancy that the behavior will achieve that outcome now. (Rotter, 1982, p. 51)

Rotter points out that one common source of pathology is irrational expectation. There may be no relationship whatever between a person's subjective assessment of expected outcomes and the actual objective probability that this outcome might occur. He notes that people can either over-estimate or under-estimate the likelihood of an outcome, and both are potentially problematic. Parents who decide that their children can attend an ivy league school or play major league sports if they attend a Catholic school may be operating from a false and very subjective assessment of expected outcomes. This component of the social learning theory may explain why parents often make the choice for Catholic school.

One other component of Rotter's social learning theory may explain why parents make the choice for a private school for their children rather than simply sending them to the local public school. If parents see undesirable things occurring in a public school for example, and their perception is that these negative things can be avoided or at least lessened by making a different choice, their decision about school will seem easier.

Rotter calls this "reinforcement value," and it is another name for examining the desired outcomes of our behavior.

Reinforcement value refers to the desirability of these outcomes. Things we want to happen, that we are attracted to, have a high reinforcement value. Things we don't want to happen, that we wish to avoid, have a low reinforcement value. If the likelihood of achieving reinforcement is the same, we will exhibit the behavior with the greatest reinforcement value (i.e., the one directed toward the outcome we prefer most. (Mearns, 1990, p. 3)

As in the case of expectancy, this reinforcement value is subjective, which means that the same experience or event can differ greatly between people, based mostly on their own individual life experience and learning history. To understand why parents make the educational choices that they make, it is necessary to understand the whole background from which they make these decisions. Both expectancy and reinforcement value can help us to understand what motivates parents to make the decisions that they make in regard to their children's schooling. By using Rotter's theory as a lens with which to filter the reasons why parents give for the school choices that they make, the findings of this study enables scholars and practitioners to better understand the social forces that underlie such decisions. The use of a focus group of parents to participate in a deeper discussion of the findings of the survey helps to illuminate the reasons that parents choose in making the decision for a school. These focus groups will help to develop a deeper understanding of the expectancies that motivate parents in making their school decisions. The survey was necessarily brief to encourage participation and completion, and the use of small focus groups from various parts of the diocese allowed some parents to share reaction to the data in an open forum. This information will be very helpful to scholars and practitioners in Catholic schools as they seek to use their limited resources effectively in reaching out to prospective parents and students.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In informal discussions with parents, many reasons for sending children to Catholic schools have been revealed to this writer – safety, security, discipline, smaller class size and curriculum, among others. Catholic parents are often glad to have their children participate in the life of the Church through their Catholic school experience, but

for many parents this does not seem to be the main motivation for them to choose the Catholic school. In many cases, Catholic school principals conduct interviews with parents who do not choose to send their children to the Catholic school. According to Claire Helm, Vice President of Operations at the National Catholic Educational Association, we have a great need to uncover the real reasons that parents choose Catholic schools for their children so that Catholic schools can be aware of how they present themselves to potential parents and students. “There is a dearth of material available to answer the question as to why Catholic parents choose Catholic school for their children today. The NCEA would welcome an approach that sought, in an unbiased way, to answer that question” (Helm, 2004). While at one time choosing a Catholic school was seen as an obligation promoted by the Church, other factors seem to be influencing parents today more than matters of the faith. Issues of race, ethnicity, affordability and access continue to affect Catholic school enrollment. Since America is still a nation in transition, the reasons for choosing or not choosing a Catholic school may be changing. On a larger scale, the globalization of the economy, and stress on the family and changes in cultural identities may all serve to make the reasons for school choice more complicated than ever. It is important to understand the real reasons that parents make the educational choices they do for their children.

The bishops of the United States continue to write and preach, as recently as 2005, that the reason that parents choose Catholic school for their children is because of their faith and because of the spiritual mission of the Catholic school. While these are often considerations in choosing a school, this study will seek to discover to what extent the bishops’ perception of parental decision making is correct. This study demonstrates

that there are many actors that influences parental decision-making, but none rank higher than spiritual matters or issues of the faith. The purpose of this study, then, was to determine what motivates Catholic school parents in the Diocese of Erie today to make the choice for Catholic school for their children. This information will also prove useful to Catholic schools throughout the Diocese of Erie and beyond as they seek to tailor programs, materials and presentations to potential parents and students.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were several anticipated limitations to this study:

1. The study was limited to parents of Catholic school students in the 13 counties of the Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania and may not be generalizable to Catholic schools in other parts of the country.
2. Only parents of currently-enrolled Catholic school students were surveyed.
3. A password, provided by the school, was necessary for parents to use in order to log in to the web survey. And, while a box had to be checked indicating that the survey taker is an adult parent or guardian of a student enrolled in a Catholic school, there is no way to guarantee that the person taking the survey is, in fact, an adult parent or guardian of a student.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms, found in this study, are defined:

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate: founded in 1964 at Georgetown

University to put social science research tools at the service of the Catholic Church in the United States.

National Catholic Educational Association: founded in 1904 for the promotion of Catholic Schools in the United States, founded as the Catholic Educational Association and referred to in this study as the N.C.E.A.

Parochial school: a school operated generally by one Roman Catholic parish, although it could refer to a school operated jointly by more than one parish.

Religious: refers to brothers, sisters and priests of religious orders who staff Catholic schools. In the Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania, the term refers to the teaching sisters, since brothers and priests from orders do not staff the schools.

School Choice: a movement to allow parents the constitutional right to have a choice in which school their children attend, the overall aim of which movement is to improve the overall quality of education

Second Vatican Council: the ecumenical council called in Rome by Pope John XXIII from 1961-1965 whose purpose it was to bring the Church into modern times.

Spiritual Mission of the Catholic school: the spiritual mission of the Catholic school, as defined by the bishops of the United States as three-fold: to teach doctrine, to build community and to inspire service.

CHAPTER TWO

INTRODUCTION

Parents in the United States are hearing more and more about parental choice in education, particularly in school voucher programs and state programs of tax credit rebate. This discussion is relatively new in the United States, but the concept of greater parental choice in education is much more in evidence in many European nations. Julian Rotter, the social learning theorist, pointed out that personality, and therefore behavior, is always changeable. If the way a person thinks is changed or the environment that a person is responding to is changed or perceived in a different way, the outcome can be predicted. In trying to determine why parents make the choice to send their children to a Catholic school, it was necessary to understand the perception and understanding of parents. Due to the discussions to be held with focus groups, qualitative analysis sheds light on the reasons that parents use for choosing or not choosing Catholic school for their children. Chapter two begins with a brief historical perspective on the Catholic school system in the United States to put the problem in context. Next is included an explanation of Julian Rotter's social learning theory. Rotter claims that behavior refers to likely responses in a given situation. The expectancies one has of parents and the decisions they make regarding school choice can be predicted as the reader examines the forces which influence them. Thomas Groome points out that the post-Vatican II Church is much different, as is the involvement of parents in the life of the Church today, including involvement in Catholic schools. What elements of Catholic identity influence parents today, and how have those elements changed and continue to evolve since the 1960s when the Second Vatican Council changed the life of the Church and since their

own parents made the same decisions? In this world, which is far more complex and offers far more options than in years past, what are the factors that motivate parents in making the important decision about schooling for their children?

The literature review will then turn to the question of greater choice in education for parents in the United States. How does dissatisfaction with the public school system fuel the debate over parental choice? What can be learned from the existing voucher system in Milwaukee? How can this research help to shape questions that will be asked of parents in the Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania, about why they chose Catholic school for their son or daughter?

Next, the literature review will examine the question of parents as consumers today. Are parents armed with enough appropriate information to enable them to make an informed decision about school for their children? How do parents in the Diocese of Erie obtain enough relevant information to make a good decision?

Finally, the question of the choice of Catholic schools in particular will be examined. Why do parents entrust their son or daughter to a Catholic school? Why is enrollment in Catholic schools dropping in most areas of the United States today? For parents in the Diocese of Erie, why do they continue to enroll their children in Catholic schools?

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

By examining briefly the history of Catholic education in the United States, it is apparent that parents are no longer sending their children to Catholic schools in the numbers that they once did. Catholic schools have closed in record numbers in the last decade and a half. Routine or automatic enrollment of students in their local Catholic

school, which was once the case, is part of a landscape that has changed dramatically in just over a century.

As the Catholic Church was being founded in America, the original plan of the bishops included a school in every parish so that every child in a Catholic family could attend a Catholic school.

While the goal of erecting a school within every parish, mandated by the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore (1884) was never realized, the growth of Catholic education was steady and extraordinary. Before the Civil War, there were approximately 200 Catholic schools in the United States, and that number increased to more than 1,300 within a decade and to 5,000 by the turn of the century. (McDonald, 2002, p. 1)

There is no doubt that at one time in the United States Catholic parents generally sent their children to the local parochial school without giving it much thought.

“Ultimately, the Second Baltimore Council directly attacked the Protestantism of the common school and the Catholic bishops committed the Church to the establishment of a separate school system and required parents to send their children” (McDonald, 2002, p. 1). The parents’ decision to send their children to a Catholic school was viewed by the bishops as an obligation rather than an alternative to the public school system. The National Catholic Educational Association (N.C.E.A.), founded in 1904 for the promotion of Catholic schools in this country, stated in a 1917 resolution:

In these days of materialistic tendencies and weakening of faith, the need of keeping before us the idea – “Every Catholic child in a Catholic School” – cannot be stated too strongly. As far as human wisdom can foresee, the preservation and spread of the Catholic Church in this country depend upon the adoption by priests and people of a vigorous policy in support of the parish school. (National Catholic Educational Association *Proceedings*, 1917, p. 52)

The concept of tying the spread of the Catholic Church in the United States to a strong and “vigorous” Catholic school system was promoted by bishops as well as by priests in

the pulpit. For many Catholic parents, it was not really a considered option to bypass the Catholic school system for their children. It was simply expected that the Catholic faithful would avail themselves of a Catholic school education for their children. This concept was noted in a 1921 resolution of the National Catholic Educational Association:

The authority of the parent over the education of his child is a natural and fundamental right. Catholic parents have the obligation of providing for the proper education of their children through the medium of Catholic schools. (National Catholic Educational Association *Proceedings*, 1921, p. 51)

This very strong support of the Catholic school system by the bishops of the United States helped to reinforce in the minds of many Catholic parents that it was important for them to choose Catholic schools for their children. In 1921, the N.C.E.A. took some bishops in the United States to task for not enforcing penalties on parents who did not send their children to the local parochial school. The N.C.E.A. even bragged about this on page 39 of the 1923 version of its own annual document, *Proceedings*: “Even before the establishment of our Republic Catholics had already built schools and laid the foundations of the existing widespread system of parish schools. The parish school system thus antedates the State-supported public school system.” In statements released in the 1920’s, the association continued to extol the virtue of the Catholic school system to Catholic parents, stating that the Sunday School proposed by some religious leaders could not be considered a satisfactory replacement for five days per week spent in a Catholic school.

This kind of strong statement did nothing but encourage pastors to be adamant about their parochial schools and parents to accept the obligation to send their children to Catholic schools. Even as late as 1958, the N.C.E.A. continued to promote the same

view. At the annual convention of the N.C.E.A. in Philadelphia in 1958, the theme was “The Right to Educate – The Role of Parents, Church, State.” As states debate parental choice legislation today, the N.C.E.A. remains active in its promotion of voucher programs and other educational choice reforms. “The association’s position on parental rights continues today in the voucher and choice legislation debate. Just as parental rights have always been affirmed, so enrolling their children in Catholic schools is also stressed” (Augenstein, 2003, p. 15).

For the children of newly-arrived immigrants, the neighborhood parochial school was often the bridge for their assimilation into the culture of their new country. Catholic schools could be different than the public schools and could cater to the ethnic population that they served. It is important to note that in the social history of this nation the Church provided a means for immigrants to immerse themselves in the American educational system while still maintaining cultural ties to their ethnic identity. “The Catholic Church, therefore, provided the cultural space for immigrant groups to create their own schools to preserve their culture in America...the Church provided the opportunity for a ‘significant alternative’ to the public school” (Meagher, 2003, p. 285). For these immigrant parents, there was no other logical choice for their children but the local parish school, which provided free or nearly-free education and assimilation into the culture of America.

Immigrants valued the ethnic parish school because of its connection to their European past. The school staff shared their ethnicity and religion, with an empathetic understanding of old world ways. Although to some the ethnic schools represented a fortress designed to protect a separate Catholic culture, they actually served more as bridging institutions between two different cultures. The use of English grew rapidly, even in schools originally established with a different language of instruction. While Catholic schools consciously sought to preserve Catholic values and ethnic identities, they also facilitated the assimilation of immigrants into American public life. They served both a preserving and a transforming function. (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993, p. 27)

In fact, Catholic schools, made up in many places of primarily an immigrant population, flourished in direct response to the lack of acceptance by the society around them. Immigrant and ethnic groups banded together for protection and this led to a loyalty that was very strong. The Catholic school became the center and focus of life for the children who attended, and the bonds of connection they felt with the school were made even stronger because of the persecution which they perceived as coming from outside groups.

The immigrant Catholic character at the foundation of parish schools in the nineteenth-century was perceived by the leaders of the host society as inherently “papist,” opposed to republicanism and the bible. For nativists, American public education, symbolized by the “little red school-house” icon of Americanism, was considered to be the pillar of patriotism...The anti-Catholic animus achieved almost hysterical proportions in the 1920s. During the decade of “the tribal twenties” the KKK joined forces with other groups in attempts to prohibit students from attending Catholic schools by adopting laws mandating students to attend public schools. (Meagher, 2003, p. 284)

The assimilation of the immigrant population into American society led to a decrease in the necessity for the very schools which had helped to shape this population. In a way, the success of the Catholic schools which helped immigrant populations to become part of the fabric of American society led to their downfall. Thus we can see that over the last half century, a dramatic shift has occurred as the Catholic schools were no longer needed to help immigrant Catholics assimilate into American society and culture.

As American Catholics had moved in great numbers into the middle class, the last vestiges of the ghetto Church had crumbled in the early 1960s. With this, questions naturally arose about maintaining a separate Catholic school system, given that its traditional mission – protecting and nurturing immigrant Catholics in a hostile new world – was apparently accomplished. (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993, p. 50)

Catholic parents no longer needed the Catholic school system to help their children become assimilated into a new culture, since this mission had been accomplished, in a large measure due to the success of the Catholic school system.

According to Fr. Gerald Fogarty, a Jesuit historian, the burden of operating Catholic schools began to become overwhelming with the influx of federal money into the states' public school system in the 1950s. The dramatic shift away from Catholic parents automatically choosing Catholic school for their children had begun and the controversy over any public aid to private schools intensified. Fogarty (2003) points out that the candidacy of John F. Kennedy, America's first Catholic president, brought this controversy to light:

In an interview with *Look* magazine in 1959, Kennedy said that, in regard to aid to parochial schools, as a citizen, he was bound to uphold the Constitution as interpreted by the Supreme Court. In his 1960 speech to the Houston Ministerial Association, he took the same position. But he added that, if ever there was a conflict between his "conscience," not the Church, and his office, he would resign. This seemed to imply that religion was strictly private. (Fogarty, 2003, p. 150)

The impact that the Church had on its members and their lives in general had begun to lessen, and many Catholics did not place the same importance on the obligation to send their children to Catholic schools as had been the experience of their own parents. For many Catholics, free public education was seen as an increasingly attractive alternative to the Catholic school system.

Catholic schools in the United States reached their peak enrollment in the late 1960s. In the years that followed, Catholic school enrollment began to slide, and statistics show that the numbers have never recovered since then. The N.C.E.A.

describes the late 1960s and early 1970s as a period when Catholic school student numbers began to decline and schools were closing and consolidating rapidly.

In American Catholic schools, central symbols such as statues and sisters dressed in religious garb largely disappeared; the student population changed; teaching staff became increasingly lay; and the religion curriculum was transformed. But perhaps the most dramatic of all were the numbers: Catholic schools in the United States lost over half their enrollment between 1965 and 1990. From a high of 5.5 million students in 1965, the Catholic school enrollment dropped to 2.5 million students in 1990. From enrolling 12 percent of the school-age population in 1965, Catholic schools enrolled only 5.4 percent in 1990. The number of schools declined accordingly, from 13,000 in 1965 to about 9,000 in 1990. (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993, p. 33)

The decline in enrollment is evident at Venango Catholic High School in Oil City, Pennsylvania. In 1963, when the regional school was opened, 517 students attended, taught by 12 Benedictine sisters. By 1974, the number of students had dropped to 299 and the number of sisters to five. By 2000, the number of students was 112, with no sisters present at the school.

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF CATHOLICISM

Thomas Groome serves as Director of the Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry at Fordham University. He has written much on what distinguishes the Catholic Church in this post-Vatican II era. The issue of Catholic identity may be at the heart of what motivates parents to make decisions about whether or not to enroll their children in Catholic schools. An understanding of Groome's theory will shed light on the importance and influence that the Church has on parents as they make these decisions.

The life of the Church has changed over the years, and the influence of the Church on the life of the laity is much different than in years past. It is important to note how membership and participation in the Church changes with societal changes, and as a 1999 study pointed out, understanding the dynamics of church involvement is important:

Understanding the dynamics of church membership fluctuations is broadly important because denominational oscillations are not insulated from wider society...because membership in churches is related to stands taken on many divisive contemporary issues. So too membership fluctuations have ramifications for threats to the established order and way of life. The enduring and pervasive nature of authoritarian and non-authoritarian churches ensures their capacity to be strong forces in the chronic struggle to democratically produce viable and equitable policy and legislation. Winds of threat fan the flames of authoritarian sentiment, and the strength of the storm can determine the course of the nation. (McCann, 1999, p. 335)

The Catholic school, as part of the institutional Church, has also experienced this change.

Dr. James Davidson (2005) points out that today in the United States, there are 13,677 McDonald's restaurants and only 19,000 Catholic parishes open. The dramatic change in the involvement of the Church in the daily life of the typical Catholic affects Catholic schools in particular. Consider the following comparisons for the Catholic Church in the United States:

1960	9,800 Catholic elementary schools
2004	6,300 Catholic elementary schools
1960	1,500 Catholic high schools
2004	722 Catholic high schools
1960	522 Catholic seminaries
2004	196 Catholic seminaries
1960	265 Catholic colleges and universities
2004	226 Catholic colleges and universities
1960	116,000 sisters and religious women
2004	71,000 sisters and religious women
1960	75% of Catholics attended Mass weekly
2004	33% of Catholics attended Mass weekly
1960	80% of Catholics made Easter duty (annual confession)
2004	40% of Catholics made Easter duty (annual confession)
1960	80% of Catholics married other Catholics, 96% in a parish church
2004	60% of Catholics married other Catholics, 70% in a parish church

(Davidson, 2005)

Even in the last thirty years, societal trends continue to influence school choice. One study shows that American society today is still in transition, becoming what it will be in the future. Things may have changed a lot since the days of our immigrant forbears, but the melting pot that is the society of the United States continues to shift and change. It is always a system that brings success and turmoil, but it is ever changing.

In the United States, the era from 1960 to 1990 was marked both by remarkable achievements and by extraordinary setbacks. We landed on the moon but we lost our individual preeminence. We emancipated minorities but we created the most deprived underclass in the Western world. We were badly defeated in Vietnam but we won the cold war. We expanded the welfare state but we aggravated the problems of poverty, health care, crime, and education. We enacted political reforms and we got an unbroken string of political scandals. We enjoyed the longest economic boom in history but we incurred a mountain of debt. These past three decades have been a era of mixed blessings. (Caplow, 1991, p. 33)

In a recent study done for the N.C.E.A. in the spring of 2006 by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, particular attention was paid to “Mideast Region” and the “Midwest Region” of the United States. This information included statistics from Delaware, Washington, D.C., Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin. These two major regions encompass a geographic area that includes a majority of the Catholic elementary schools currently in operation (3,367 schools or 55 percent). In addition to the obvious loss of population in general in these two regions, the study noted a dramatic drop in the overall involvement in Catholics in the life of their Church:

Compounding the problem of long-term population loss in these regions is a weakening of attachments to parish life among Catholics as measured by their frequency in attending Mass. In 1955, 74 percent of self-identified Catholics told Gallup survey researchers that they had attended Mass

at least once in the last seven days. In 2004, only 45 percent of self-identified Catholics responded similarly in Gallup surveys. (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2006, p. 1)

Catholic schools, at least in the region of the country in which the Diocese of Erie is located, then, face not only changing demographics but a laity far less involved in the life of the Church, as demonstrated by Mass attendance. Since Catholic schools are connected to the life and mission of the Church, the lesser involvement in the life of the Church in general will affect the number of parents who are involved in sending their children to Catholic schools.

In this ever-changing landscape, some parents continue to choose Catholic schools for their children. But is it possible to discover the real reasons for this choice today? As this author will point out, parents are now faced with a host of alternatives to the public school system that did not formerly exist. At one time, the only alternative to the local public school system in many towns was the parochial grade school, but options now exist in most places for a wide variety of other options, including home-schooling, charter schools, magnet schools, the possibility of attending local schools out of their geographical area, cyber schools and other private schools. We have already seen that the option to exercise choice in school is favored by many parents, and the startling number of these new and innovative programs can be seen as one reason that the traditional Catholic school enrollment has suffered. Never before have parents had so many options other than the local public school system.

The legal system in the United States continued to be called upon to define the limits of public support for non-public schools. By the 1950s, decisions of the higher

courts supported completely the separation of Church and state and made it clear that non-public schools were not entitled to public funding. Fogarty points out that the tide had turned, and parents began to see the Catholic school more as an alternative to the public system rather than a choice to be made out of a sense of obligation or duty:

Despite their arguments that Catholics as citizens had the right to determine the nature of their children's education and that parochial schools fulfilled a secular purpose, the tide had turned toward the assertion that the "wholly" secular atmosphere of the public schools was a "constitutional necessity" and that Catholics could not claim any "discrimination when they freely chose not to use those schools. (Fogarty, 2003, p. 150)

As the number of religious sisters declined, the financial pressure on Catholic schools grew, but the commitment of the Catholic school system to serve the disadvantaged remained strong. In a 1979 document, the Catholic bishops of the United States repeated their promise to serve the poor:

We urgently recommend the continuation and expansion of Catholic schools in the inner cities and other disadvantaged areas. No other form of Christian ministry has been more widely acclaimed or desperately sought by leaders of various racial communities. For a century and a half the Church in the United States has been distinguished by its efforts to educate the poor and disadvantaged, many of whom are not of the Catholic faith. (United States Catholic Conference, 1979, p. 17)

It is not that Catholic schools have abandoned their mission of catechizing students, but allowing non-Catholic students, especially marginalized and economically disadvantaged students the opportunity of a better education than the local public school offers, no matter their faith. While in many Catholic schools, non-Catholic students are required to take religion classes as part of the curriculum, the focus is on educational programs rather than a system designed to proselytize non-Catholic students. The bishops' promise to support the inner city schools which served many students who were not Catholic repeated what the U.S. bishops had said in the 1977 document, *The Catholic*

School: “The Church’s commitment to pluralism implies that all teaching should be sensitive to the diverse culture that students bring. As such, schools ought to be welcoming places for such groups as blacks, who are often non-Catholic (United States Catholic Conference, 1977, p. 11).” In fact, the annual statistical report published by the N.C.E.A. in 2002 shows that non-Catholic students made up 2.7% of the schools’ population in 1970, but grew to 11.2% in 1980 and 13.6% in 2000-01 (McDonald, 2002, p. 18).

The Catholic bishops of the United States continue to claim that Catholic schools are often the most effective institutions which advocate and provide for minority and economically challenged populations.

Catholic schools are often the Church’s most effective contribution to those families who are poor and disadvantaged, especially in poor inner city neighborhoods and rural areas. Catholic schools cultivate healthy interaction among the increasingly diverse populations of our society. In cities and rural areas, Catholic schools are often the only opportunity for economically disadvantaged young people to receive an education of quality that speaks to the development of the whole person. (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005, p. 4)

Catholic schools, particularly in urban areas, have always enjoyed the perception that children from families which are challenged economically can succeed. Albert Bandura points out that the obstacles in the way of success for children from these families are many.

Low-income families experience considerable economic hardships. The needs of family members exceed scarce resources and often require severe reductions or trade-offs of basic necessities. Not only do the families have to cope with problems of subsistence, but the impoverished communities in which they live provide meager positive resources for their children’s development and heavy exposure to dangerous activities that can set a negative developmental course during the early years of life. (Bandura, 1997, p. 193)

In reading the documents of the United States bishops, it is clear that they see the mission of the Catholic school in urban areas to provide the extra help that children need in overcoming these obstacles.

In cities such as Philadelphia, Boston or Chicago, Catholic schools continue to remain open, providing parents with an alternative to the public school system. In cities such as Cleveland or Minneapolis, experiments have been conducted using voucher systems to allow students to use public funds to attend private schools, including Catholic schools. Today, parents face many choices and alternatives in the educational arena as they choose schools for their children. In addition to Catholic schools which remain open, parents choose from a wide variety of school experiences, including charter schools, home schooling and other alternative schools.

Finances have begun to play an increasingly important role in the selection of schools. Sacred Heart School in Erie, Pennsylvania charged a per-pupil tuition rate of less than \$20 per year in 1945 and books were included in that cost. Today the school's tuition stands at over \$2,000 per student per year in addition to fees and book costs. The decision to send a child to Catholic school is taken very seriously by many parents, and has long-ranging implications for the family and its financial situation.

A study was published in 1999 by James Mulligan, which points out that several factors contribute to the difficulty that parents have in choosing or not choosing a Catholic school for their children. This study was based on five conversations done in the fall of 1997 in Edmonton, Regina, Missisasauga, Niagara and Saint John's. A group of 52 committed Catholic educators were involved in a conversation about education and the cultural context in which they worked. Together, these educators represented

collectively more than a thousand years' experience in Catholic education. Mulligan cites three factors in particular that make this decision more complicated than ever, namely the globalization of the economy, the impact of neoconservative ideology on education and the multi-faceted erosion and stress in our cultural landscape. As Mulligan points out, today's world is far more complex than in former days, and these concerns are all brought to bear on parents as they begin to think about what school to choose for their children.

Non-public schools have traditionally served students from poor families and those with a minority background.

The present nonpublic schools are not elitist, despite the undocumented claims of some in the public-school establishment. They include students of virtually every type, and often educate them more effectively than the public schools (Kirkpatrick, p. 109).

Mulligan suggests, however, in looking at the globalization of the economy, that the gap between rich and poor continues to grow at an alarming rate, and this puts a Catholic education out of reach of more and more families, especially families with larger numbers of children, who would traditionally have attended Catholic schools. Mulligan notes that this trend, coupled with increased operational costs, threatens for the first time to put a Catholic education out of reach of many families purely from a financial standpoint. Combined with a difficult worldwide economic situation, then, financial concerns become one of the chief factors parents must face when considering a Catholic school. Mulligan also notes, in regard to neoconservative ideology, that governance in education seems to be solely market-driven, with decisions about education being made by those who do not truly understand education. He also states that, in regard to the

cultural stress in our society, in particular, the family does not have the influence that it once had in decisions, especially with regard to where children attend school:

Unfortunately the home is the fragile link in the process and content of Catholic education today. This fragility is seen clearly in the astonishing absence of parental involvement, parental values and parental guidance in the lives of too many of our students...and too many of the children in our schools are unchurched. (Mulligan, 1999, p. 42)

This lack of involvement in the faith in general is another contributing factor in the decline of Catholic schools. Parents are not as involved in Church as they once were, and the connection between parish life and school has been severed for many. This is a larger problem than school enrollment, but the lack of connection with a formal faith community or parish is, in many ways, detrimental to getting children enrolled in our Catholic schools. The bishops of the United States, in a 2005 document, urged all Catholics to embrace the responsibility of supporting educational programs, particularly parish schools. It can no longer be the sole responsibility of a single parish – or the parents in that parish whose children attend the local school – to shoulder the financial burdens of keeping a school open.

We call on the entire Catholic community – clergy, religious, and laity – to assist in addressing the critical financial questions that continue to face our Catholic schools. This will require the Catholic community to make both personal and financial sacrifices to overcome these financial challenges. The burden of supporting our Catholic schools can no longer be placed exclusively on the individual parishes that have schools and on parents who pay tuition. This will require all Catholics, including those in parishes without schools, to focus on the spirituality of stewardship. The future of Catholic school education depends on the entire Catholic community embracing wholeheartedly the concept of stewardship of time, talent, and treasure, and translating stewardship into concrete action. (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005, p. 10)

In the last several years of his papacy, Pope John Paul II wrote of the obligation of Catholic parents to send their children to Catholic schools, but this sense of duty does

not seem to resonate with many Catholic parents. Bishops, including the bishop of Erie, Pennsylvania, continue to talk about Catholic schools as the best and most effective means we have of passing on the faith to another generation.

We are well aware of the problems which now face the Catholic school system in the United States. We also wish our position to be clear. For our part, as bishops, we reaffirm our conviction that Catholic schools which realize the three-fold purpose of Christian education – to teach doctrine, to build community and to serve – are the most effective means available to the Church for the education of children and young people. (National Conference of Catholic bishops, 1973, p. 33)

But is this the priority for parents today? Do the bishops understand the real reasons that parents continue to seek out Catholic schools for their children? Is the reason that Catholic schools are still open that parents are looking for a way to promote the three-fold purpose of Christian education, as the bishops claim? Are there other sociological reasons that push parents to make decisions to enroll their children in other alternative educational settings? Or are parents looking for schools that will guarantee academic excellence and enrichment opportunities so that their children can attend a good college and be successful in life? For many Catholic schools, the future revolves around attracting students to enroll. Principals, pastors, parents and others speculate about the reasons parents choose or do not choose to send their children to Catholic schools. It is important to explore, in a non-threatening and anonymous fashion, why parents do choose to send their children to Catholic schools.

It is clear that at one time in the Church's history in the United States, parents generally chose Catholic schools for their children, often out of a sense of duty or obligation. It was often a case, quite simply, of no other alternatives being considered by Catholics. But in a society accustomed to having available many options for every

decision, and in a society where the Church's role in the life of the average member is diminished, the reasons to choose or not to choose a Catholic school have become many and varied. Catholic schools must seek an understanding of the reasons that parents use in making this important decision, so that they can use their limited resources most effectively to guarantee a future.

Since Catholic education is a work in progress, there will always be the imperative to reinvent it if we are to be faithful to its mission. It will also be necessary to keep reinventing ourselves if we are to be true to our vocation as Catholic educators. The coming months and years will bring critical turning points for Catholic education (Mulligan, p. 194).

ROTTER'S SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

Regardless of other factors that influence parents' choice of schools today, the dream of academic achievement and success for their children drive most parental decisions about school. What the parents think of any school program and how successful it can make their children, however they define that success, will affect school choice decisions. Increasingly, children are taking upon themselves the role of making these decisions, too, and their decisions may not be made on the same basis of academic achievement that their parents might use.

With few exceptions, the most demanding cognitive and motivational challenge that growing children face concerns their development of academic competencies. This formidable task, which begins for most youngsters even before they enter school, occupies most of their waking hours until adulthood. It is public, competitive, and self-defining in the sense that academic records predetermine public reactions and occupational paths. Within this educational crucible, children acquire their self-conceptions of academic agency. It is their growing sense of self-efficacy and purpose that serve as major personal influences in their ultimate level of accomplishment. (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 202)

Julian Rotter, the social psychologist, pointed out that many stimuli affect one's behavior and decisions that are made. We cannot focus on behavior as being an automatic response to an objective set of environmental stimuli.

Rather, to understand behavior, one must take both the individual (i.e., his or her life history of learning and experiences) and the environment (i.e., those stimuli that the person is aware of and responding to) into account. Personality is a relatively stable set of potentials for responding to situations in a particular way. (Rotter, 1954, p. 77)

To truly understand, then, why parents choose a school for their own children, one must look beyond the environmental stimuli to the local, national and global environment in which parents find themselves today. The life experience of parents, the history of their learning and their own school experience, whether in Catholic school or not, all help to shape the decision that they make for their children.

SUMMARY OF ROTTER'S SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

Applying Rotter's social learning theory to the comments parents make about what motivated them to make the decisions that they made in regard to school choice may be very helpful to the reader. Rotter's theory can be summed up as it relates to the decisions that parents make. Behavior potential basically refers to a hierarchy of likely responses given a particular situation. His expectancy value theory discusses the subjective probability of how likely one thinks a goal will be obtained. There are specific expectancies, which relate to specific situations and generalized expectancies, which relate to a general belief concerning whether anything one does will make a difference. In Rotter's discussion of generalized expectancy, he notes that in an external

locus of control, goal outcomes are determined by powerful environmental forces, while in an internal locus of control, goal outcomes are largely influenced by one's skills and abilities.

Although he published *Social Learning and Clinical Psychology* in 1954, Rotter's influence in the field of psychology remains strong today. A recent article has cited Julian B. Rotter as one of the 100 most eminent psychologists of the 20th century (Haggblom, 2002). In this same study, he was 18th in frequency of citations in journal articles and 64th in overall eminence. As recently as 1989, Rotter was in the public, accepting the American Psychological Association's Distinguished Scientific Contribution award. Two professors, Salvatore Catanzaro of Illinois State University and Jack Mearns of California State University at Fullerton, are using Rotter's work as the basis for their study focusing on people's generalized expectancies for negative mood regulation (Catanzaro & Mearns, 2005). Since Rotter's work helps to explain the hierarchy of likely responses given a particular situation, this theory can help to provide a framework to understand why parents make the decision to choose Catholic school for their children.

Successful parents, according to Bandura, are involved and active. He finds that socio-economic barriers make it more difficult, but not impossible, for parents to be successful.

Successful parents place a high value on academic development, become involved in the school systems to ensure that their children are well taught, enroll them in community programs, cultivate peer relationships that are likely to be beneficial for their children, and encourage development of leisure time skills. (Bandura, 1997, p. 193)

These successful parents also limit where their children go, keep track of what their children are doing outside the home, and discourage their children from drug use, alcohol use and premature sexual activity. These successful parents, according to Bandura, make connections in community organizations that will link their children to positive role models and network their children with people who hold dear the same values that they find important. All of these factors influence the decision that parents make in regard to school choice, and what could be considered successful parenting rests on the premise that parents are involved and active in linking their children to what they perceive to be helpful links in their child's development and achievement. The work of Julian Rotter helps to shed light on the motivations that parents have for making choices about which school their children will attend by allowing scholars and practitioners to understand all of the things that motivate the parents.

GROOME: WHAT MAKES US CATHOLIC?

Statistics quoted above show that the 1960s – the decade of the Second Vatican Council – was the decade in which enrollment in Catholic schools saw its steepest decline, the number of religious men and women teaching in schools began its precipitous drop, and the almost automatic sending of Catholic children on to the parish school ceased to be the norm. Because change was so dramatic in the Church – or perhaps because it was not handled as well as it might have been – Catholics began to search for alternatives to their previously high level of involvement in the life of the Church, including the Catholic school. Groome notes that one of the things that changed was the requirement that Catholics abstain from eating meat on Friday. While this seems to be a rather insignificant ruling, he believes it is a sign of what was happening in the

Church. It was explained in documents to the faithful that although the *obligation* was dropped except on the Fridays of Lent, abstaining from meat every week could still be a fine spiritual practice.

A better catechesis could have invited Catholics beyond the letter of the law – like well-heeled Bostonians feeling obliged to eat lobster on Fridays – to embrace its spirit of self-denial and solidarity with the hungry of our planet. Alas, the church simply announced that Friday abstinence was set aside. And though it became only one of a growing swell of discarded symbols – scuttling the statue population of churches, downplaying old pieties like...family rosary, replacing Latin at Mass with the vernacular, nuns “kicking the habit” for modern clothing – the before and after of fish on Friday marked a watershed for Catholic identity. (Groome, 2002, p. xx)

Using the change in the regulations on abstaining from meat on Friday, Groome points out that Catholic identity began to change in the 1960s. But both postmodern thought and the ecumenical movement also served to “muddy the waters” of Catholic identity:

If Catholic identity became less distinct after fish on Friday and less different from that of other Christians with the rising spirit of ecumenism, postmodern thinkers offer an added challenge. These social commentators claim that nothing is “essential” to any human identity, that our cultural context shapes the sense we have of ourselves. (Groome, 1992, p. 32)

As this author examined the reasons that parents give for choosing Catholic school for their children, it must be realized that today’s parents are all post-Vatican II parents. Most of the bishops, who continue to claim that matters of faith are the primary reason that parents choose Catholic schools, were ordained in the days before Vatican II. While this study has pointed out that parents historically chose a Catholic school out of a sense of duty or because it was the norm, parents today live in a very different climate. In fact, the sense of what it means to be Catholic today is informed by a society and a culture which is very different from the one in which their own parents lived and made decisions.

With Vatican II, the Catholic church became aware that its evangelization often imposed a foreign culture on people – invariably a Western one – in the name of the gospel. The church also realized that there is never a cultureless Christianity. In other words, Christian faith is always expressed through a particular culture, the customs of life and patterns of meaning that distinguish a people. By the same token, there is never a God-less culture. In other words, every culture has the seeds of faith within it and is capable of bringing its own unique expression to Christianity. In fact, Christian faith is far more authentic when realized through people’s native culture. A new term has emerged to describe this give-and-take between Christianity and culture – inculturation. (Groome, 1992, p. 258)

With this understanding as background, then, this author sought to discover the real reasons that parents choose Catholic schools today. While there are many influences on parents as they make the decision about school for their children, this author will demonstrate that issues of faith, communal Christian living and spiritual matters are the primary motivating factors for parents as they make choices for their children about school. Having an understanding of the many forces that influence parents in their decisions will help the reader to understand why parents make the decisions that they make. Father Andrew Greeley, the Catholic sociologist, notes that “there is a distinctively Catholic imagination...which enables Catholics to see the world through a different set of lenses” (Greeley, 2000, p. 5).” It will be helpful to the reader to understand that the issues of faith and spirituality are still important, but not the prime motivators, for parents in making decisions about Catholic schools. In his doctoral dissertation, Father Daniel Blount quotes Thomas Groome, who builds on the work of American Baptist theologian Langdon Gilkey in claiming that there are still distinguishing features of Catholicism that exist today. He calls them theological characteristics – namely positive anthropology, the sacramentality of life,

an emphasis on community, a commitment to tradition and an appreciation of learning (Blount, 2004, p. 17). Parents today making decisions about Catholic school for their children, like their parents, take the issues of faith and spirituality very seriously. But they exist in a Church today which is radically different than the Church of their parents, and many other factors influence their decision. While their parents relied on the authority and tradition of the Church and saw Catholic school enrollment as the norm, today's parents take into account many other factors, not the least of which is a growing movement for school choice initiatives throughout the country.

MODELS OF SCHOOL CHOICE IN THE UNITED STATES

The last several decades have seen the growth of many alternatives to the public school system, some funded publicly and some privately. Many states have debated the creation of voucher programs, both public vouchers and private ones. Many states have created tax credit incentive programs, which provide some monies to non-public schools. Charter schools and magnet schools, created with public monies, exist in many places in the United States today, as well as alternative schools sponsored by public school districts that serve particular populations. In many places, students can attend public schools which are outside their district of residence. School assessment programs have been created in many parts of the country, many as a response to the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, which will be used to determine which school districts are failing in their service to students. In extreme cases, entire school districts which have failed in these assessment programs have been turned over to private enterprise for governance and administration. Parents today also have the option of home-schooling their children by working under guidelines established in their state and in cooperation with their local

school districts. In addition to all of these models of school choice, the non-public schools, whether religious or non-sectarian, are still open in many parts of the country.

These models demonstrate the great variety of approaches now in place. If we include families who send their children to private schools, home-school or make a school choice by moving their residence to a new school district, then more than half of American children today attend a school of their family's choice. Yet, at the same time, the amount of choice that now exists should not be exaggerated. In many communities, none of these options is practically available to most children from low-income families who continue to be assigned to a public school from which there may be no escape. (Sugarman, 2004, p. 3)

The concept of creating voucher programs is under discussion in many states. The expenditure of public monies for non-public schools continues to be a controversial idea, but proponents of vouchers see it as growing in popularity.

Voucher programs, growing in number and popularity across the United States, are demonstrating three facts about education. First, many lower-income families rejoice at the opportunity vouchers give them to move their children into better schools. Second, students who use vouchers learn more than they would have if they had stayed in government schools. Third, government schools respond to vouchers by improving the quality and variety of programs they offer to the majority of children who remain. (Hepburn, 1999, p. 2)

In Pennsylvania, school choice proponents argued for a voucher program over the course of several legislative terms, with no success. In 2002, Pennsylvania adopted a program through which both public and non-public schools could use tax credit monies to fund children's scholarship organizations. Other states have similar programs, and proponents of tax credit programs expect further growth in popularity for this model.

Tax credits for educational spending developed from the premise that taxpayers and parents should have some power to direct their school taxes to their preferred system of education. Tax incentives can be designed either to reduce the barrier to independent schooling for middle-income and lower-income students or to provide the families at the very bottom of the socio-economic ladder with the option of independent schooling for their children. Growing numbers of politicians and groups supporting citizens' rights are

advocating tax credits as an alternative to public vouchers. (McCahon & Martin, 1999, p. 12)

Another model that has gained popularity in many places in the nation is that of the charter school. Even teachers' unions, which once opposed the concept of charter schools, have begun to embrace them. Many charter schools have been successful because they are focused on a specific student population or a special program or theme.

Charter schools have been dubbed America's research and development centers for education and they have won the approval of many teachers who had once resisted them. Students at charter schools are making greater academic progress than their peers because charter schools are more innovative, focused, energetic, and responsive to their students' needs. (Hepburn, 1999, p. 2)

All of the models listed seek to allow more parental choice in education. Even the publicly-funded programs seek to allow parents a much greater voice in making decisions about which school their children will attend. "The nation's 10 publicly funded school choice programs – including newly enacted but not yet implemented programs in Utah and Florida – enroll some 80,000 children in private schools and extend approximately \$24 million annually in public funds" (DeVaney, 2005, p. 1). This expenditure of public monies for non-public education will continue to thrust school choice models into the spotlight, creating much heated debate in legislatures and schoolrooms across the nation. This points out again how important it is to understand the reasons that parents have for exercising choice in making decisions about which school their children will attend.

DOMESTIC STUDIES ON SCHOOL CHOICE

A recent study concerning the changing context of education in the United States today (Nir, 2003) claims that the two elements of educational reform that are about to sweep this country today are decentralization and parental choice. This study notes that

the introduction of competition between schools means that schools must find ways to become more attractive to parents and students.

It is often difficult to determine the real reasons that parents choose schools, when they have that option. Academic standing is not necessarily the most important factor to parents as they choose a non-public school for their children. Many other factors, whether real or merely perceived as real contribute to the decision to enroll.

Even when private schools are not more beneficial academically in terms of mathematics and science achievement, they appear to offer other advantages (e.g., perceived peer-group benefits, religious education, opportunities for extracurricular participation and increased discipline and security) that are also important to many parents. Thus, it is not surprising that parents may still choose to send their children to private school, even if there is no advantage to their particular children in terms of standard academic achievement. (Figlio& Stone, 1997, p. 46)

Unhappiness with the local public school system, particularly in urban areas, is one of the reasons that voucher program legislation has at least been introduced in many states. In the case of the vouchers given to students in Milwaukee, dissatisfaction with the public school system was often cited as the primary reason for parents wanting to choose a private school for their children (Fuller, 2000). Certainly in many parts of our country, the public school system mirrors the experience of parents in Milwaukee. One research report (Bolick, 1991) noted that this trend of searching for an alternative to the public school system will continue to gain popularity:

The prognosis for choice in education is good precisely because the monopoly public school system is so bad. Americans increasingly recognize that it is impossible to progress and prosper as a nation as long as children are consigned to a defective public school monopoly. This understanding is gaining adherents where it counts the most – in the statehouses, the business community and especially among parents. (p. 67)

The question of the quality of a local public school district seems, in large part, to have much to do with parent choice. In areas where the public schools are not noted for quality academic programs, parents are much more likely to opt for an alternative school.

Dissatisfaction with the present system is growing from within the educational establishment, as well as from without. The question, perhaps, is not so much whether you would prefer to have educational choice for yourself, as a student or a parent – a question to which most people would probably reply yes – but whether you are prepared to grant that choice to others. So far, despite the on-going plurality or majority of support in public opinion polls, our collective answer has generally been no. But that may be changing. (Kirkpatrick, 1990, p. 179)

One study (Parsons, Chalkley & Jones, 2000) noted that dissatisfaction with a local public school causes many more parents to desire an alternative:

The greater use made of parental choice by parents in the less-affluent neighborhoods may reflect a greater dissatisfaction with the local school than a positive choice of an alternative. Parents in higher-status areas are utilizing choice less than parents elsewhere, but this does not mean that middle-class parents are not better able to navigate the choice process when this is necessary. (p. 41)

In a 2005 study conducted for the bishops of the United States, the Catholic schools of the nation scored remarkably well when compared to public schools and other non-public schools. “Catholic school students continue to score well on standardized tests (such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress) in subjects such as reading, mathematics, social studies, and science, often surpassing standards established by federal and/or state agencies” (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005, p. 6). Even studies which are not commissioned by the Catholic Church find results that are consistent with the claims of the U.S. bishops. A Harvard University study issued in 2000 reported that “Catholic schools students performed better than other students on the three basic objectives of civil education – the capacity for civic engagement (e.g.,

voluntary community service), political knowledge (e.g., learning and using civic skills) and political tolerance (e.g., respect for opinions different than their own)” (Campbell, 2000, p. 22).

Paul Manna, while on the faculty at the University of Wisconsin from 2000-2003, advocated for the development of a national instrument to track parental reasons for choosing a non-public school. Likewise, according to Claire Helm, Vice President of the National Catholic Educational Association, no formal research instrument is in place through their organization which would help to discover the reason that parents choose to enroll their children in Catholic Schools (Helm, 2004). In research presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in Philadelphia in 2003, Manna pointed out that, while the charter school movement was growing rapidly in the United States, research needed to be done to determine why parents were choosing to enroll their children in these alternative schools. He noted in 2002 that parents do not always send clear signals about their levels of satisfaction with schools from which they take their children, nor do they provide accurate reasons for choosing a particular school. Manna points out that no national instrument exists to track parental reasons for school choice, so data are inconsistent and incomplete.

There are few places in the United States today in which parents have a choice in which school their children will attend. “Government essentially coerces parents to send their children to a government mandated, funded, owned, operated and regulated institution. It is not name-calling to describe this practice as socialism. It is true that those who can afford an alternative can escape this coercion” (Kirkpatrick, 1990, p. 18).

In a 2005 statement, the bishops of the United States have called for more options in regard to parental choice in education.

Parents have the constitutional right to direct the upbringing and education of their children (*Pierce vs. Society of Sisters*), and we call upon the entire Catholic community to join in advocating for the opportunities and resources to implement this right through constitutionally permissible programs and legislation (e.g., *Zobrest v. Catalina Foothills School District*, *Mitchell v. Helms*, and *Zelman v. Simons-Harris*). In some states, so-called “Blaine” amendments, which ban or severely limit assistance to private and/or religious schools, make the attainment of this goal very difficult, if not impossible. These amendments are part of an anti-religious, and more specifically, anti-Catholic legacy in our nation’s history. We need to advocate for the repeal of these relics of unfortunate bigotry. (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005, p. 13)

In cities where educational vouchers have been provided, such as Milwaukee or Cleveland, more research has been conducted on the reasons parents choose private schools over public schools. In a study of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (Rouse, 1998), the relation of student achievement to the choice of a private school was a major focus. Rouse points to the fact that the perception that private schools are more efficient and effective than public schools may not be totally accurate, but parents tend to make decisions based on that perception. She notes that one of the limitations of her study is that it was based on a program that is too small to provide insight into the benefits of large-scale “school choice.” The Milwaukee program is limited to low-income families who are given a chance to enroll at a private non-sectarian school in a nearby neighborhood. The Milwaukee voucher program excludes all religious schools from participating in the program, since the constitutionality of the program was untested when it was begun. It is important to note that Catholic schools were not included in the Milwaukee voucher system’s research.

However, even though Catholic schools were not part of the Milwaukee voucher program, many perceive that private schools do a better job and promote higher achievement. Private and religious schools have always played a part in the life of those who have led our country.

Private and religious schools have existed in this country from the earliest times. For generations all Americans – including those who fought for liberty and independence in the eighteenth century, and who drafted the Declaration of independence, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, and the Constitution of the United States – were educated in private or religious schools, and mostly the latter. (Guthrie, 1980, p. 514)

The public perception that private and religious schools do a better job than their public school counterparts may be one reason why parents choose Catholic schools over local public school districts.

Alumni of parochial schools, despite their fewer resources seem to be as successful in life, are a bit better educated, and have somewhat better jobs than their co-religionists who attended public schools. This is not to say that parochial schools are necessarily better than public schools. It is sufficient to know that they are certainly no worse. (Kirkpatrick, 1990, p. 59)

Is the perception that their children will have better jobs and be better educated at a non-public school influencing parents in their decision in the Diocese of Erie to choose Catholic school?

The findings about Catholic schools in the United States quoted above demonstrate that many motivational forces are at work in parents who are making choices about schools for their children. Using Julian Rotter's work on the reasons that people are motivated to make the choices they make, this author will discover the real reasons for the choices that are made. The study will compare and contrast cultural differences in choice as seen through the lens of Rotter's framework.

PARENTS AS CONSUMERS

But what reasons do parents give for choosing the schools they choose for their children? How much information do they have prior to making this decision? And how informed are they as consumers? A recent report (Robenstine, 2001) studied the various types of consumers that comprise today's parents:

Gerwitz et. al (1995) have argued that, among parents-as-consumers, there are actually at least three types of choosers: the privileged/skilled chooser, the semi-skilled chooser, and the disconnected chooser. This typology is strongly class-related. Though the semi-skilled are a mixed-class group, the privileged/skilled choosers are overwhelmingly middle and upper-middle class; the disconnected choosers are overwhelmingly working-class. Though the three categories are ideal types, the central point is that, contrary to the political rhetoric of parental choice, differences in the process of choosing a school are not exclusively a matter of individual deficiency in which certain parents are less motivated and responsible. (p. 239)

From a study conducted in six nations, research indicates that parents are becoming increasingly wise consumers. "The advance of universal education as a result of government efforts has resulted, in nation after nation, in a generation of educational consumers who are more sophisticated about what they want for their children (Glenn, 1991, p. 19)." But other studies do not present such a positive view. In the same year as the six-nation study, another research project (Evans, 1991) denies the idea that parents will make wise consumer decisions:

What evidence supports this politically attractive myth? Are these the same parents so lacking in discrimination in other areas of the marketplace? On what basis do they decide about cars, television sets and political candidates? Do we really believe most parents are prepared to make substantive decisions matching the "learning style" of their child with the broad array of choice options the concept's advocates foresee? (p. 28)

Are parents making informed choices as consumers or are they suffering from a lack of relevant information? Dennis Evans, in a study commissioned by the National

Association of Secondary School Principals suggested that there are two myths about parental choice of school that are pervasive, “one being the notion that competition will increase quality and the other the notion that parents will make wise choices” (Evans, 1992, p. 112).

In trying to discover the real reasons that parents choose a school for their children, other difficulties present themselves. A study (McGroarty, 1994) conducted in cities which had proposed vouchers for school choice found that “choice families” have become overwhelmingly single parent families. Since that is the case, “the putative advantage in parental oversight vanishes. It is more than offset by the multiple demands made on a single parent raising two to three children” (McGroarty, 1994, p. 102). It is also difficult for the parents involved in these voucher programs to have enough relevant information to make an informed decision. In another study (Frick, 1994), it was noted that parents in the cities with a voucher program had a difficult time in making school choice decisions. “Inner city parents lack the knowledge, resources and assertiveness necessary to select a different school for their children” (Frick, 1999, p. 195). As Julian Rotter would frame it, in terms of the reasons that people make the choices that they make, the locus of control for these important decisions rests with the parents. In the external sense, Rotter would say that the decisions made are often made primarily to avoid the negative. This could be seen in parents choosing private schools to avoid higher drug abuse among students, to avoid higher disciplinary incidents or to avoid a higher dropout rate in the public system, particularly in urban areas. In the internal sense, Rotter’s theory would say that goal outcomes are largely influenced by one’s skills and

abilities, and the people targeted for the voucher programs, particularly in urban areas, simply do not have the skill or ability to make good decisions regarding school choice.

THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL CHOICE

Perhaps it is enough for disadvantaged parents to search for a Catholic school in which their son or daughter can succeed without needing to be totally informed about the entire program of the school. The foundation of the relationship between parents and their Catholic schools is often one of trust. The parents make sacrifices to send their children to Catholic schools, and these children of often disadvantaged parents are then entrusted for their studies and general well-being to the faculty and staff of the Catholic school.

Many low-income parents make a considerable financial sacrifice to send their children to a Catholic school. Often these parents may not be particularly well educated or have a clearly articulated conception of the education that they desire for their children. In choosing a Catholic school, they trust that its staff will provide their sons and daughters with an education that will help them to become good people, to get a decent job eventually, and to be happy and productive adults. (Byrk, Lee & Holland, 1993, p. 307)

However, it may not be only inner city or disadvantaged parents who have difficulty gathering enough relevant information in order to make the right decision. A more recent study (Ball & Vincent, 1998) pointed out that it is difficult for all parents to have enough relevant information in order to make the right decision about school choice. They described the typical American parent as one facing an important decision without being armed with enough appropriate information:

These are almost all middle-class parents who go to considerable lengths to maximize their market information. They do this either by seeking out sources of 'cold' knowledge – examination results, research findings and/or written information such as prospectuses – or by trying to widen the number of people they speak to, systematically seeking out other 'knowledgeable parents.' (p. 383)

Other factors need further examination as well. One recent study (Reay & Ball, 1998) suggested that in today's school choice climate, children's opinions are being taken into account much more by parents as they make their school decisions. "Working class families frequently mentioned the importance of children's concerns about their friends in their decision-making" (Reay & Ball, 1998, p. 433).

Since parents of Catholic school students tend to be more involved in the life of the school, it could be that parents are more effective recruiters among their peers. A study conducted by the National Catholic Educational Association (N.C.E.A., 1990, p.8) showed that parental involvement at Catholic schools in the United States today is much higher in many areas than in public schools. The percent of parents who annually attend parent-teacher conferences is 56% in Catholic high schools compared with 39% in public high schools. The percent of parents who attend parents' association meetings is 35% in Catholic high schools compared with 20% in public high schools. And the percent of parents who do volunteer work in the school is 46% in Catholic high schools compared with 27% in public high schools, according to the 1990 N.C.E.A. study. Byrk, Lee and Holland propose that Catholic school students, because of the greater involvement of their parents that in public schools, tend to do more homework and participate in extra-curricular activities more, and the influence of being involved at school often is seen at home and in the community as well. The opinion of these authors is that involved parents naturally influence children to become involved as well:

Parents who are active tend to promote volunteerism among their own children. From a difference perspective, these same results may be interpreted as indicating that when students become actively involved in the school, this involvement tends to draw their parents along into the school life as a consequence. It seems likely that both processes are occurring. (1993, p. 222)

It is difficult to determine the real reasons that parents use in choosing schools. A study (Van Dunk, 2002) conducted a few years ago suggested that even though parents are empowered to make more choices, they lack adequate information and send inconsistent signals as to why they make the choices that they do:

One important consequence of school choice policies is the shift away from governmental accountability and toward parent accountability. Parents are empowered to gather information about schools and select the schools that meet their needs. Schools that fulfill parent's needs succeed; others fail. Using data on several types of several choices in a large urban school district, the authors examine the amount of information parents have and whether they select schools based on the facts they believe are important. The evidence suggests that many parents neither possess adequate information nor send consistent signals, and there are systematic differences across types of choice programs. (p. 849)

The tradition of Catholic education in the United States mirrors the story of society in general. Where once the Catholic population came mainly from immigrants seeking a comfortable place to worship and a familiar school for their children, the Church in the United States is now a diverse and changing institution. Where once Catholic schools provided a way out of poverty and up to success, especially in the inner city, for many Catholics in the suburbs the Catholic school represents something else. Where Catholic parents once sent their children to Catholic schools through sheer obedience to the bishops and hierarchy of the Church, they have now become educated consumers, making decisions based on a host of factors.

The Catholic school at its core is not simply another option or an alternative to public education, but a place in which students, teachers and administrators make up a community in the broad sense of that word. This fact, which has been called a bias toward community, sets the Catholic school apart from the other choices that are available:

In the Catholic school, there is a bias *toward community*. To live in community, to worship in community, to journey in community are all essential characteristics of Catholicism. “Community” should also mark every Catholic school. In the Catholic school, we share a vision of life and the human journey. We also underscore in the education we offer a strong sense of caring for one another and being responsible in solidarity for the larger community – neighbourhood, nation, world. (Mulligan, 1999, p. 95)

In this changing milieu, parents still make the choice to send their children to Catholic schools, although in far fewer numbers than in previous days. What are the real reasons that Catholic parents choose Catholic schools for their children? Is it out of a desire for the faith, as the bishops would have us believe? Is it done as another consumer choice in a society familiar with marketing, as the economists might have us believe? What are the reasons that parents in the 13 counties of the Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania, choose to send their children to Catholic schools?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This study examined the reasons that parents give for choosing Catholic school for their children. Both quantitative and qualitative material are presented as a result of the survey that was taken. The rated reasons why parents chose to send their children to Catholic schools is the basis for the quantitative study. The comments made by educators in Mulligan's Canadian study were important to his overall understanding of Catholic schooling today, which points out how important it is to go deeper than the numbers. The focus group convened for this study explored from a different perspective the implications of the results of the survey, providing a brief qualitative look at the same information. The focus group helped this author to analyze the content and meaning of written explanations from parents for school choices made. The focus group helped the study to go further than the mere presentation of data taken from the brief on-line survey. As researcher Robert Stake has said it, the focus group helps to humanize problems and data, to make the people, problems and situations of the study "come alive" and portrays phenomena in context (Stake, 1995, p. 43).

The study examined the responses of parents who had students enrolled in Catholic schools of the thirteen counties of the Diocese of Erie during the 2006-07 school year. The parents of both elementary (grades 1-8) and secondary (grades 9-12) school have been studied. Catholic schools of the Diocese of Erie were selected because the author is Vicar for Education for the Diocese of Erie and had access through the normal communication channels to the parents of the 14,000 students enrolled in Catholic schools throughout the diocese. The parents who had enrolled students in the Catholic

schools of the Diocese of Erie were representative of a population that is urban, suburban and rural.

INSTRUMENT REVIEW

Six parents reviewed the survey to assess its quality, comprehensiveness and clarity. They recorded any problem areas or concerns that arose during this evaluative process. These parents then met individually with the author to discuss their recommendations for changes regarding any of the items or questions in the survey that posed a potential problem for other parents or that could be misunderstood. The parents who participated in this review discussed in detail their suggestions for modifying and improving the quality of the survey used for data collection. They also helped to establish the length of time parents could expect to spend taking the on-line survey. Before the survey was made available to parents in the schools, the suggestions of the parents who participated in this phase of the study were taken into account.

POPULATION SAMPLE

Parents of Catholic school students (approximately 10,000) from the 13 counties of the Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania were invited to take an on-line survey. Principals at each school were asked to distribute a letter to their parents, and that letter directed the parents to the website where the survey was available for a period of two weeks. For parents who did not have access to the internet or desire to see a printed copy of the survey, principals had those available. There are seven secondary schools (five operated by the diocese and two operated by religious orders) in the diocese. Three of the secondary schools are located in Erie county. The other four secondary schools are regional schools located in rural areas of the diocese, namely in Venango, Mercer, Elk

and Jefferson counties. There are 33 elementary schools located throughout the diocese and 19 of these are in Erie County. There are seven high schools, three in Erie county and the remaining four in Elk, Mercer, Venango and Jefferson counties. There are two distinct middle school programs operating in the diocese (grades 6-8), one in St. Marys (Elk County) and one in DuBois (Jefferson County). A total of approximately 10,000 students were currently enrolled in the elementary and secondary schools of the diocese at the time of the survey, representing approximately 6,000 families.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of survey research is to describe the characteristics of a population, and this survey was designed to relate demographics of the selected population to the reasons they chose Catholic school for their children. It is possible to rate the reasons given by parents for choosing Catholic schools in the Diocese of Erie. The target population in this study consisted of parents who had students currently enrolled in grades 1-12 of the schools of the Diocese of Erie.

Survey data was collected by asking participants to take an on-line survey (see Appendix A). Parents completed the on-line questionnaire and the responses were electronically submitted to a database. A survey to be returned by mail was made available at each school for those parents who wished to participate but who did not have access to the internet. The brief survey had the advantage of being a low-cost and consumer-friendly instrument, and was designed so that participants were able to complete the survey in approximately twenty minutes. Principals at each school were asked to distribute a letter to twenty parents (see Appendix E), giving full instructions about how the survey would work and concerning the dates the website would be active.

Two principals chosen at random in each of the five deaneries were also be asked to contribute the name of a parent to serve on the focus group, creating one focus group for the diocese. The total number of parents invited to participate in the focus group was ten, two from each deanery of the diocese.

The survey was not intended to involve minors, only adults over eighteen who were parents of students currently enrolled in one of the Catholic schools in the diocese. One disadvantage of an on-line survey is the possibility of a relatively low response rate, but enough samples were gathered to make the research meaningful. Another disadvantage of an on-line survey is that there can be no follow-up with parents and no way to explain anything that is confusing since it is an anonymous survey.

Survey data was analyzed to describe the representative population of parents of children enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in the Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania. The survey was separated into three sections, the first consisting of a brief demographic section. In this section, parents identified in which of the thirteen counties of the diocese they resided. Data analysis showed that inner-city parents claim the same motivation that parents exhibit in rural areas. A question discovered whether either parent or guardian attended Catholic school. Data analysis showed that there is not a higher rate of choice for Catholic school if one or both parents or guardians have attended Catholic school themselves. A question followed to determine the racial makeup of the family taking the survey. Based on enrollment information, data analysis showed that most parents who choose Catholic schools in the Diocese of Erie are Caucasian. The majority of non-Caucasian families who enrolled their children in Catholic schools in the diocese were concentrated in the Erie metropolitan area. The next question about

religious affiliation demonstrated that the majority of families who enrolled their children in Catholic schools in the diocese consider themselves members of the Roman Catholic Church. Data analysis also shows that the majority of those families who are not Roman Catholic but who enroll their children in Catholic schools are concentrated in the Erie metropolitan area. Finally, there was a question in the demographic section of the survey to determine the distance of Catholic schools from the respondent's home. This data shows that families of students enrolled in Catholic schools outside of the Erie metropolitan area are willing to and, in fact, do travel greater distances to their local Catholic schools than families who live in the metropolitan area.

The second section of the survey asked parents to use a four-point Likert scale to rate the reasons they chose a Catholic school for their child, and the third section will use Julian Rotter's 1966 locus of control (LOC) scale. According to researcher Herbert Lefcourt, there is a "plenitude of research attesting to the value of the locus of control construct as a conceptual tool" (Lefcourt, 1991, p. 414). He goes on to state that maximal predictions are best obtained if the "researcher tailors his or her measures to particular populations and their concerns rather than relying upon more global and less targeted measures, which may be irrelevant to the cares of the particular people being assessed for their locus of control beliefs" (Lefcourt, 1991, p. 415). The particular and very targeted audience made up of parents from the Catholic schools of the thirteen counties of northwestern Pennsylvania assures that the LOC scale assists this researcher in determining some of the background of the population answering the survey. The questions on the LOC scale will allow this author to classify people as operating with an

internal or external focus of understanding, and this focus can be used to make predictions about which items on the parental survey they will give the highest rating.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were studied:

1. What is the relationship between background variables gathered in the demographic section of the survey and the reasons parents give for choosing Catholic schools?
2. In the experience of the parents involved in a focus group, how have their reasons for sending their children to Catholic schools evolved and changed as their children have aged and moved up in grade?
3. How do the responses of the focus group members reflect the influence of societal trends vs. religiosity, using the lenses of Rotter's Social Theory and the implications of the changing Catholic culture as outlined by Groome?

INSTRUMENTATION

On their website (www.ncea.org), the National Catholic Educational Association lists the characteristics of a Catholic school – namely a school that provides a faith-based education, service to the larger community, a sense of safety for the students and a healthy environment. This author developed the questions by using that list from the N.C.E.A. as background, from personal lists kept as a high school principal and by asking a small group of Catholic school parents to list all of the reasons that they had for choosing a Catholic school. In addition, the review of literature about Catholic schools today, particularly Mulligan's study in Canada, pointed out the strengths of the Catholic school when it is operating as it should be. The answers were then condensed and merged

to create the ten reasons suggested on the survey form. The survey was designed to collect basic demographic information on parents and their children and then to rate the reasons that the parents chose Catholic schools for their children.

PROCEDURES

Prior to the survey being introduced, the proposal needed approval from the Institutional Review Board of Duquesne University. Parents were contacted through the principals and administrators of all diocesan elementary and secondary schools. Parents were provided a letter explaining the purpose of the study and the way the on-line survey would work. A window of two weeks was announced so that parents knew when the on-line survey was available. Completion of the on-line survey indicated that the parents gave their consent for their answers to be used for research (See Appendix B, Consent to Participate). The survey participants also had to use the password “research” as provided in the parent letter distributed by the school (see Appendix C), and will also had to check a box that confirmed that they were the parents of a student currently enrolled in a Catholic school in the Diocese of Erie. They also were asked to check a box that stated whether they were the father of a student, the mother of a student, the legal guardian of a student or some other response. At no time was their name requested so that the survey can remain anonymous. Since the survey given was one designed only for parents, minors did not participate in the survey so that no permission from parent or guardian is necessary. A two-week window was provided during which parents were able to access the survey. Before the start date and after the ending date, the survey was not available on-line (see Sample letter to parents, Appendix C). For those parents requesting a printed copy of the survey because they did not have access to the internet or did not wish to take

the survey on-line, an additional week of time was provided in which to return the survey to the office in Erie; after that date, no printed copies were accepted for inclusion in the survey results.

Principals were provided with a letter of instructions from this author as to how to choose a random sample of their parents to invite to take the survey. The “high tech” method involved using an EXCEL spreadsheet. Instructions were given to copy and paste the parent list in to a column and then in the column next to it paste the function =RAND(). When both columns were sorted by the random numbers that EXCEL would insert, the list would be arranged in random order from the lowest to the highest random number. The principals were instructed to take the first twenty names from the list to invite them to take the survey and the twenty-first name (if the school was in Erie County) to invite to participate in the focus group. The “low tech” method proposed that the principal cut a parent list apart, put the names in a bowl or box and draw twenty names out to invite to take the survey and a twenty-first name (if the school was in Erie County) to invite to participate in the focus group. If a principal used any method other than one of these two, they were asked to contact this author, but none did. The letter of instructions to principals can be found as Appendix H.

The focus group of parents participated in a meeting, and they needed to fill out a different consent form (see Appendix F, Consent to Participate – Focus Group). The focus group was asked to comment on the results of the study (see Appendix G, Focus Group Questions), and parents were allowed to make open-ended comments. These comments were recorded anonymously and coded. The results of the focus group discussion

have been summarized in narrative form and comments from parents have been grouped according to similar response so that any general trends or frequent comments can be listed. The responses of the focus group were recorded and transcribed and the author assigned a numerical code for these answers, in order to group them into similar response categories in order to provide a way to summarize them.

Focus groups members were asked how their own attendance or non-attendance at a Catholic school influenced the decision they made for their own child. Using Groome's theological characteristics, parents in the focus group were asked to reflect on whether they saw these attributes present in the Catholic school in which they enrolled their children, and if so, how influential these things were in their decision making process. Focus group members also were given the opportunity to relate their reaction to the survey results and to add comments of their own before the end of the meeting. Additional comments are featured in a narrative section, with notation made if the same comment was made by more than one parent. This information has been used by the author to make additional comments about the results of the survey.

DATA ANALYSIS

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) will be used to process the data. Descriptive, correlational, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) has been used to analyze the survey data. The qualitative data has been triangulated with the descriptive, quantitative data obtained to give a true portrait of the population being surveyed. The scores for Rotter's locus of control (LOC) scale has been correlated with ratings for each of the sections which analyzes the quantitative data such as numbers and statistics.

Parents who have chosen Catholic schools for different reasons have been compared using t-tests and an ANOVA to make a comparison between the variables.

The qualitative data gathered has been coded into underlying concepts to facilitate comparison and easy retrieval. Interpretation will be kept separate from purely descriptive data listing. This qualitative data and its interpretation are useful as this researcher draws conclusions from the study which will be of use both to the community of scholars and practitioners in Catholic education. The themes identified in the surveys of parents have been filtered through the lens of comments made by Rotter and Groome to see what impact the changing Catholic culture has on parents and the decisions they are making today for their children regarding school choice.

Through analysis of the data, both the quantitative ranking of the reasons parents say they choose Catholic schools and the qualitative data gathered from the focus group, it can be demonstrated that the bishops' continued assertion that parents choose Catholic schools primarily because of spiritual concerns can be corroborated. Both the community of scholars and those involved directly in Catholic education will, by using the results of this study, be able to understand more fully than ever the real reasons that parents choose Catholic schools.

Parents were asked to rate the following reasons for choosing Catholic school for their children: the safety of the children, the family tradition of Catholic education, the spiritual mission of the school, good student behavior, dissatisfaction with local public schools, quality academic program, a "family" atmosphere, a strong extracurricular or sports program, students who have a sense of belonging in the school community and the teaching of morals and values. Blank space was provided in which respondents could

list other reasons that they have for choosing a Catholic school, and a numeric scale was assigned to track these additional responses.

All of this information will be very useful as this study seeks to find the real reasons that motivate parents to enroll their children in Catholic schools.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 presents the results of this study. The purpose of the study was to invite parents to rank the reasons for sending their children to Catholic school. Further, the study asked parents to take Julian Rotter's Locus of Control survey to find out if any connection existed between their stance on this survey (internal or external locus of control) and the reasons that they cited for sending their children to Catholic school.

This study sought to find the real reasons for the school choice that parents make and sought to gain information on other related topics, such as how much input the student vs. the parent had in making the decision for a school or how much influence was brought to bear on this decision depending on whether or not the parents had attended Catholic school.

The Catholic bishops of the United States continue to speak today as if matters of faith and spiritual development are the primary reasons that parents choose Catholic school for their children. There has not been much done to study the reasons parents choose Catholic schools, so this study helped explore the real reasons that parents cite as they make this decision. This study will help to explore the connection between whether parents operate under an internal or external focus according to Julian Rotter's Locus of Control survey and how this finding relates to the reasons they used for choosing Catholic school. This survey will also help to explain how parents make the choice for Catholic school today when involvement with organized religion is on the wane compared to the rather automatic selection of Catholic school in years past, relating to the

work done by theologian and sociologist Thomas Groome. The findings in this research study will also provide information to assist Catholic school personnel in using their limited resources for marketing and promotion effectively.

Finally, a focus group was convened with parents from schools around the northern part of the Diocese of Erie. These parents were invited to react to the results of the survey taken and offer additional qualitative comments on the reasons that parents choose Catholic schools. While often anecdotal in nature, these comments have been very helpful in “fleshing out” the quantitative information contained in this research study.

The following research questions guided the collection of the data:

What is the relationship between background variables gathered in the demographic section of the survey and the reasons parents give for choosing Catholic schools?

In the experience of the parents involved in a focus group, have their reasons for sending their children to Catholic schools evolved and changed as their children have aged and moved up in grade, and if so, how?

How do the responses of the focus group members reflect the influence of societal trends vs. religiosity, using the lenses of Rotter’s Social Theory and the implications of the changing Catholic culture as outlined by Thomas Groome?

The Diocese of Erie, at the time of this research study, had 7 secondary schools, 31 elementary schools and two middle schools in operation. Principals were asked to invite twenty (20) parents to participate in the on-line survey, which set the total number of parents invited to take the survey at 800. 224 parents took the on-line survey which was

located at www.surveymonkey.com during the three weeks that the survey was active. Parents were also invited to submit a hard copy if they did not have access to a computer or did not want to complete the on-line survey. An additional 14 parents submitted a hard copy of the survey and the author entered their survey information on line. The response rate, then, for the number of parents who took the on-line survey (224) is 28%. The 14 additional parents who submitted a hard copy of the survey represents just under an additional 2%. So the response rate overall is just under 30% of the total number of parents invited by their principal to take the survey. It is also interesting to note that nearly half of the parents who took the survey (111) chose to use the blank to fill in more information on their own. This is a good indicator that the parents were truly interested in this topic and they consider this survey and their choice of a school to be very important.

Principals of the three secondary schools and the 14 elementary schools located in Erie County were also asked to invite one parent to participate in a focus group. Eight parents came together for the focus group on November 7, 2007.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Of the 238 surveys taken by parents, 221 listed their county of residence as noted in Table 1 below.

Table 1

COUNTY	List of parents by county NUMBER OF PARENTS RESPONDING
Cameron	0
Clarion	14
Clearfield	7

Crawford	2
Elk	47
Erie	112
Forest	0
Jefferson	1
McKean	5
Mercer	10
Potter	0
Trumbull (Ohio)	3
Venango	12
Warren	9

Since the majority of both the general population and number of Catholic schools is greatest, by far, in Erie County, the number of parents responding from Erie County is highest. The second highest population of Catholics is to be found in Elk County, where there are two elementary schools, one middle school and one high school in the Catholic system. In three counties – Forest, Potter and Cameron – there are no Catholic schools and very small population numbers, thus resulting in no surveys coming in from those three counties. Both Crawford and Warren Counties have only one Catholic elementary school each. Trumbull County is in eastern Ohio, with a small number of students coming to the high school in Mercer County. Three parents responded from Trumbull County in Ohio.

All 238 respondents answered the survey question regarding parents/guardians at home. The number of two-parent families responding to the survey was very high, as noted in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Parents, guardians and caretakers at home

HOME SITUATION	RESPONSE PERCENT	RESPONSE COUNT
----------------	------------------	----------------

Both mother and father at home	93.3%	222
Mother only at home	5.5%	13
Father only at home	0.8%	2
Guardian/caretaker at home other than parents	0.4%	1
Prefer not to say	0	0

An even higher statistic was found when surveying the primary ethnic background of the family. The vast majority of the respondents were Caucasian. Table 3 below demonstrates this statistic.

Table 3

Primary ethnic background of the family

ETHNIC BACKGROUND	RESPONSE PERCENT	RESPONSE COUNT
Caucasian	96.2%	227
African-American	1.7%	4
Native American	0.4%	1
Asian	0.4%	1
Hispanic	0	0
Other	0.4%	1
Prefer not to say	0.8%	2

It is interesting to note that the one family who claimed an Asian background was from Warren County. All other answers that were from families who were not of a primary background listed as Caucasian came from the largest population center in the study, Erie County – four African-American families, one Native American family, one “other” and two families who preferred not to say.

All 238 parents who responded to the survey answered the question about their own Catholic school experience. They were asked to list the total number of years of Catholic schooling that they had as parents/guardians. Only 21 of the 238 respondents listed any Catholic school experience in their own background, which came as a surprise to the researcher.

The researcher expected most of the parents responding to the survey to list themselves as Roman Catholic in their background, and that was the case, with 92.7% responding that the primary religious background of their family was Roman Catholic. Table 4 breaks down the religious background of the families that responded to the survey.

Table 4

Primary religious background of the family

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND	RESPONSE PERCENT	RESPONSE COUNT
Roman Catholic	92.7%	217
Protestant Christian	4.7%	11
Jewish	0.4%	1
Muslim	0	0
Buddhist	0	0
Other	2.1%	5
Prefer not to say	0	0

Four parents who took the survey did not list any answer for the question about the primary religious background of their family. This number represents 1.6% of the 238 parents who responded to the survey.

The annual combined family income of the parents who responded to the survey gave a more varied picture. The majority of families (44.7%) were in the \$50,000-100,000 range for income, which was the middle of the five categories in the survey. Only one parent (0.4%) skipped this question. The results of this question are shown below in Table 5.

Table 5

Annual combined family income

ANNUAL FAMILY INCOME	RESPONSE PERCENT	RESPONSE COUNT
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Under \$25,000	3.0%	7
\$25,000-50,000	17.7%	42
\$50,000-100,000	44.7%	106
Over \$100,000	29.5%	70
Prefer not to say	5.1%	12

The parents were then asked to rate the reasons that they chose Catholic school for their children. Ten questions were listed and parents were asked to rate them, with 4 being the strongest and 1 being the weakest reasons as they made their choices. Only one respondent (0.4%) skipped this section of the survey. Table 6 lists the responses of the parents. The percentage choosing each rating number is listed, followed by the raw number represented by that percentage in parentheses. The number one reason for each question is printed in bold print.

Table 6

Reasons for choosing Catholic school				
REASON	4	3	2	1
I feel the children at school will be safe	66.7% (158)	24.5% (58)	5.5% (13)	3.4% (8)
There is a tradition of Catholic school in our family	55.7% (132)	18.6% (44)	8.4% (20)	17.3% (41)
I have a good feeling about the spiritual mission of the school	75.1% (178)	21.1% (50)	3.0% (7)	0.8% (2)
The school has a strong code of student behavior	70.9% (168)	26.2% (62)	2.5% (6)	0.4% (1)
I am dissatisfied with our local public schools	29.2% (69)	17.8% (42)	29.2% (69)	23.7% (56)

The school offers a quality academic program	57.2% (135)	38.1% (90)	3.8% (9)	0.8% (2)
The school has an atmosphere that “feels like family”	73.3% (173)	18.6% (44)	5.9% (14)	2.1% (5)
There is a strong extracurricular or sports program	29.2% (69)	33.9% (80)	22.0% (52)	14.8% (35)
Students exhibit a strong sense of belonging in the community	55.1% (130)	35.2% (83)	7.2% (17)	2.5% (6)
The school teaches values and morals	86.9% (206)	12.7% (30)	0.4% (1)	0.0% (0)

By way of summarizing the response of the parents to the reasons that they chose Catholic school for their children, it is interesting to put these answers into the order that the parents chose them as their strongest reasons. Table 7 lists the top rated (4) reasons in order of the selection by the parents.

Table 7
Ranked order of the Number 4 reasons that parents chose

86.9% (206)	The school teaches values and morals
75.1% (178)	I have a good feeling about the spiritual mission of the school
73.3% (173)	The school has an atmosphere that “feels like family”
70.9% (168)	The school has a strong code of student behavior
66.7% (158)	I feel that children at school will be safe
57.2% (135)	The school offers a quality academic program
55.7% (132)	There is a tradition of Catholic school in our family
55.1% (130)	Students exhibit a sense of belonging in the community
29.2% (69)	I am dissatisfied with our local public schools
29.2% (69)	There is a strong extracurricular or sports program

It is clear, then, that the values systems in place at Catholic schools, the spiritual mission of the school and a family-like atmosphere are most important to the parents who responded to this survey. Conversely, the condition of the extracurricular program or dissatisfaction with local public schools were not nearly as important to the parents who took this survey. This researcher will return to the rating of the reasons that parents chose later in this section of research results.

In addition, parents were given a blank space in the survey in which they were free to list other reasons that they chose Catholic school for their children. Surprisingly to this researcher, nearly half (111) of the respondents chose to write additional comments. It should be noted that 127 respondents did not choose to make any additional comments. Grouping the comments made into categories of major emphasis, it can be seen that the results parallel the results found in the rating survey results above.

Table 8

Grouping of additional comments made by parents in the blank space

NUMBER OF PARENTS THAT WROTE PRIMARILY ABOUT...

Spirituality, moral values, religion	41
Smaller class size, individual attention	23
Poor public schools in their area	16
Better discipline and behavior of students	8
Excellent teachers and caring staff	5
Family tradition	4
Excellent academic program/curriculum	2
Proximity of Catholic school to home	2

Good communications from school 2

Personal experience with Catholic education 2

Six respondents chose to make other comments not relevant to why they chose Catholic schools for their children. A comparison can be drawn between these results and the ranked order of the reason parents gave for choosing Catholic schools (see Table 7). The two highest answers given in the ranked order showed that teaching values and morals and the spiritual mission of the school were the highest ranked reasons parents checked. In the open space, comments about the spirituality and morals and values education of the Catholic school also ranked first. The third place answer in the parent ranking checklist was the atmosphere that “feels like family,” which could be related to the blank-space second place answer about small school and class size and its relation to individual attention received by students. Dissatisfaction with local public schools (i.e. – large class size, poor teachers and the presence of drugs and gang activity) ranked as the third most common response in the fill-in question but scored second from the bottom in the checked ranked order given by parents. In the ranked checklist, the fourth highest answer was the strong code of student behavior and in the fill-in section it was also ranked fourth most common. There is a lot of similarity between the checklist answers seen in Table 7 and the fill-in answers given above in Table 8.

Parents who responded to the survey were asked to describe the input their children had on the decision to enroll in Catholic school. Table 8 shows the answers of the parents to this section of the survey.

Table 9

Input of children on the decision to enroll in Catholic school

INPUT OF CHILDREN	RESPONSE PERCENT	RESPONSE COUNT
Decision made exclusively by the student	0.8%	2
Decision made mostly by student with parent input	6.3%	15
Decision made equally by student and parent	9.7%	23
Decision made mostly by parent with student input	43.0%	102
Decision made exclusively by parent	40.1%	95

Only one parent (0.4%) responding to the survey skipped this question about student input into the decision to enroll in Catholic school. Since the majority of parents responding to this survey had students in elementary school, further study needs to be done to see if there is a difference when considering the input that high school students have in this decision-making process. This author assumes that the student involvement would be greater with older students than with elementary level students.

The last section, consisting of 29 pairs of statements, asked parents to make a choice between two conflicting views. These questions can be used to determine if the respondents operate with a mindset that could be termed as using an internal or an external locus of control. This researcher will then correlate the findings of this locus of control survey with the answers given by the parents in the first section of the survey.

Julian Rotter originally developed the concept of locus of control in the 1960s. His view was that behavior was largely guided by “reinforcements,” (rewards and punishment). Through these rewards and punishments individuals come to hold beliefs

about what causes their actions. These beliefs, in turn, guide what kinds of attitudes and behaviors people adopt.

Locus of control is understood as a bipolar construct, ranging from external to internal. Locus of control refers to how individuals attribute their outcomes to internal or external forces, according to Rotter. Individuals with a high internal locus of control believe that events result primarily from their own behavior and resources. Those with a high external locus of control believe that forces out of their control, such as others, fate, or chance, primarily determine events.

According to biologist and researcher Lisa Tasha at the University of Calgary, an internal locus of control is healthier, characterized by better overall psychological adjustment and greater success. An internal locus of control is positively correlated with self-esteem. Those with a high internal locus of control have better control of their behavior and tend to exhibit more political behaviors than “externals,” and are more likely to attempt to influence other people. They do not just tend to assume that their efforts will be more successful, but also generally achieve more than externals. Because “internals” consider themselves responsible for their outcomes, they are more active in seeking information concerning their situation than do “externals.” On average, “internals” are more physically healthy, as they will seek more information about health measures and they are less likely to become substance abusers. In other words, if you believe that you control your circumstances, you may feel less need to escape them and will more likely actually cope with them.

In a study completed in 2001 (Mamlin, Haris & Case), research has noted three trends. First, males tend to be more internal than females. Secondly, as people get older

then tend to operate more with an internal locus of control. And finally, people higher up in organizational structures tend to be more internal.

In this researcher's survey, Rotter's Locus of Control inventory was found in questions 19-47. The Locus of Control inventory consists of 29 pairs of statements, six of which are "filler" questions and are not scored. Parents had to choose which statement of each pair was the closest to the way that they felt. According to Rotter's scoring scale, one point was assigned whenever a parent chose a particular response. In Table 10, which follows, this researcher noted the assignment of points according to the scoring scale of Rotter's locus of control inventory.

Table 10

Scoring of Locus of Control

# POINTS	# RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS
0	1	.4%
1	2	.8%
2	9	3.8%
3	9	3.8%
4	17	7.1%
5	16	6.7%
6	26	10.9%
7	20	8.4%
8	24	10.0%
9	23	9.7%
10	22	9.2%
11	22	9.2%
12	15	6.3%
13	14	5.9%
14	8	3.4%
15	5	2.1%
16	2	.8%
17	1	.4%
18	1	.4%
19	0	
20	0	

21	0
22	0
23	0

According to the scoring scale developed by Julian Rotter, those who scored between 0 and 3 points on the locus of control inventory scored in the “extreme internal” category. Those who scored in the range from 4 to 11 points were considered to be in the “healthy internal” category. And those who scored from 12-23 points scored in the “external” category regarding locus of control. Table 11 breaks down the percentage of respondents into these categories according to Rotter’s scoring scale.

Table 11
Breakdown of respondents into category

ROTTER’S CATEGORIES	NUMBER	PERCENT
Extreme internal	21	8.9%
Healthy internal	170	71.2%
External	46	19.3%

Thus nearly 80% of the parents responding were rated with an internal locus of control. These parent in general feel that they have a great deal of control over their circumstances and, as we have seen above, tend to try to influence others as well. Table 12 below shows how the response differs from those with an internal versus an external locus of control.

Table 12
Top choices of respondents according to their locus of control

Values & morals	Spiritual mission
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Those with an extreme internal locus of control (21)	17 (80.9%)	18 (85.7%)
Those with a healthy internal locus of control (170)	164 (96.4%)	161 (94.7%)
Those with an external locus of control (46)	22 (47.7%)	20 (43.4%)

The number one ranked choice for those with an extreme internal locus of control was the spiritual mission of the school (85.7%), followed closely by the school's teaching of values and morals (80.9%). For those with a healthy internal locus of control the result was very similar – the number one ranked choice was the school's teaching of values and morals (96.4%) and the second ranked reason was the school's spiritual mission (94.7%). Thus for both groups with an internal locus of control, the top two ranked choices remained consistent – the spiritual mission of the school and its teaching of morals and values.

The result was different for those who had an external score on Rotter's Locus of Control scale. For this group, safety of the children was the top ranked answer (62.9%). The second and third choice answers mirror the group with the internal locus of control, however – the school's teaching of values and morals was second (47.7%) and the spiritual mission of the school ranked third (43.4%). After the concern for the safety of children, the same result follows as the other group, and even though the percentages are more varied, the second and third choices remain the same as the other group's first and second choices – the spiritual mission of the school and the school's teaching of morals and values.

Chapter 5 contains the interpretation, explanation and conclusions regarding the results of this study. In addition, the results of the focus group meeting that was held are discussed in some detail.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTON

Chapter 5 of the study provides an analysis and interpretation of the results presented in chapter 4. In analyzing and interpreting the results, data was gathered, sorted and coded. This chapter is organized by research question. Following the discussion of the research questions, a discussion of the comments made during the focus group session are discussed. The remaining section of the chapter focuses on the implications of this study as well as suggestions and recommendations for further research.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

This study was prompted by concerns within the Catholic school system that centered on the lack of understanding of why parents choose Catholic school for their children, including a ranked listing of the reasons that they gave. By using Julian Rotter's Locus of control inventory, this researcher related how these choices were different depending on the parents' scoring as having an internal or an external locus of control. The discussion of these results is organized below by research question.

Research question 1

What is the relationship between background variables gathered in the demographic section of the survey and the reasons parents give for choosing Catholic schools?

The parents who participated in the survey came from 10 of the 13 counties of Pennsylvania that make up the Diocese of Erie plus some from Trumbull County in Ohio,

as listed in Table 1 above. Only one county, Erie, is considered to have an urban population; the other counties in the diocese are considered to be rural. In doing a comparison between parents residing in Erie County and the 12 other, more rural counties, it was interesting how similar the answers were in the rating of reasons that parents gave for choosing Catholic schools, particularly with the choice of the top five rated answers. With slight variation, the same reasons ranked in top five slots, regardless of whether parents lived in an urban or rural setting. Table 13 shows how parents from Erie County differed in the reasons selected from the parents in the other counties.

Table 13

Difference in ranked answers from parents in Erie County versus other counties

SURVEY ANSWERS IN RANKED ORDER FROM PARENTS IN ERIE COUNTY	SURVEY ANSWERS IN RANKED ORDER FROM PARENTS IN COUNTIES OTHER THAN ERIE
1. (#10) The school teaches values and morals.	1. (#10) The school teaches values And morals.
2. (#7) The school has an atmosphere that “feels like family.”	2. (#3) I have a good feeling about the spiritual mission of the school.
3. (#3) I have a good feeling about the spiritual mission of the school.	3. (#4) The school has a strong code of student behavior.
4. (#4) The school has a strong code of student behavior.	4. (#7) The school has an atmosphere that “feels like family.”
5. (#1) I feel the children at school will be safe.	5. (#1) I feel the children at school will be safe.
6. (#2) There is a tradition of Catholic school in our family.	6. (#6) The school offers a quality academic program.
7. (#6) The school offers a quality	7. (#2) There is a tradition of Catholic

academic program.

school in our family.

8. (#9) Students exhibit a strong sense of belonging in the community.

8. (#9) Students exhibit a strong sense of belonging in the community.

9. (#5) I am dissatisfied with our local public schools.

9. (#5) I am dissatisfied with our local public schools.

10. (#8) There is a strong extracurricular or sports program.

10. (#8) There is a strong extracurricular or sports program.

The similarity in the rankings of parental choice between those who live in the more urban environment of Erie County and those who live in the other, more rural counties is striking. The number one answer for both groups was the question about the school teaching morals and values. Both sets of parents, both in Erie County and in the other counties, counted the same questions in the number two, three, four and five spots – the questions about the spiritual mission of the school, a strong student code of behavior, a family atmosphere and the safety of the children (number five for both sets of parents). The number six and seven spot varied only by one for both sets of parents – the questions concerning the tradition of Catholic education in the family and the school’s offering of a quality academic program. For both sets of parents, those in Erie County and those in all other counties, the bottom three answers were identical choices – the concerns about students belonging in the community, dissatisfaction with local public schools and – in last place for both groups of parents – the question of extracurricular and sports in the school. For both sets of parents – those in Erie County and those in all other counties – the spiritual and moral foundation of the school is critical and – contrary to anecdotal stories – the concern over sports and other activities is at the bottom of the list.

A question was asked about the home situation of the parents who responded. Since over 222 of the 238 respondents (93%) of the parents surveyed are in homes in which both mother and father are present, no further breakdown of this data was performed.

A question was also asked about the ethnic makeup of the family. Again, 227 of the 238 respondents (96%) listed themselves as Caucasian, so no further breakdown of this data was performed.

There were 11 respondents who listed themselves as Protestant Christian (nearly 5%), compared with 217 parents (nearly 93%) who listed themselves as Roman Catholic. Table 14 demonstrates the difference in ranking of the reasons parents chose Catholic school for their children depending on their religious affiliation.

Table 14
Difference in ranked answers between Catholic parents and Protestant parents

SURVEY ANSWERS IN RANKED ORDER FROM CATHOLIC PARENTS	SURVEY ANSWERS IN RANKED FROM PROTESTANT PARENTS
1. (#10) The school teaches values and morals.	1. (#10) The school teaches values and morals.
2. (#3) I have a good feeling about the spiritual mission of the school.	2. (#1) I feel the children at school will be safe.
3. (#7) The school has an atmosphere that “feels like family.”	TIED WITH 2. (#4) The school has a strong code of student behavior.
4. (#4) The school has a strong code of student behavior.	TIED WITH 2. (#7) The school has an atmosphere that “feels like family.”
5. (#1) I feel the children at school will be safe.	3. (#3) I have a good feeling about the spiritual mission of the school.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 6. (#9) Students exhibit a strong sense of belonging in the community. | 4. (#9) Students exhibit a strong sense of belonging in the community. |
| 7. (#6) The school offers a quality academic program. | 5. (#5) I am dissatisfied with our local public schools. |
| 8. (#2) There is a tradition of Catholic school in our family. | 6. (#6) The school offers a quality academic program. |
| 9. (#5) I am dissatisfied with our local public schools. | TIED WITH
6. (#8) There is a strong extracurricular or sports program. |
| 10. (#8) There is a strong extracurricular or sports program. | 7. (#2) There is a tradition of Catholic school in our family. |

Both groups – Catholic and Protestant – share the same top four reasons, although they are in a slightly different order. The questions on the teaching of values and morals, the spiritual mission of the school, a family atmosphere and a strong code of student behavior made the top 4 list from each group. Both groups ranked the questions about dissatisfaction with their local public schools and a strong extracurricular or sports program toward the bottom of the list. And it should not be a surprise that the Catholic parents put question # 2 concerning the tradition of Catholic school in their family in the 8th place out of 10, while the Protestant parents ranked it as last out of 10. There was only one parent who listed their religion as “Jewish” and four who listed their religion as “other.” The Jewish parent did not select the teaching of values or morals in the top half of their ranking, but they did select the question about a strong code of student behavior as one of the top four answers, sharing that in common with the Catholic and Protestant parents. The majority of those five parents who chose “other” as their religious affiliation did list the question about the teaching of values and morals in their top

answers, in common with the other parents. They also listed the question about family atmosphere as their second most popular answer.

When it comes to family income, there is more variety in the answers. Parents put themselves into one of five categories: annual combined income of 0-\$25,000, annual combined income of \$25,000-50,000, annual combined income of \$50,000-100,000, annual combined income of over \$100,000, and “prefer not to say.” Tables 15-19 list the ranked order of choices made by the parents who fell into these income categories.

Table 15

Ranked choices for parents who have a combined annual income of 0-\$25,000

1. (#10) The school teaches values and morals.
2. (#6) The school offers a quality academic program.
3. (#3) I have a good feeling about the spiritual mission of the school.
TIED WITH
 (#7) The school has an atmosphere that “feels like family.”
4. (#2) There is a tradition of Catholic school in our family.
TIED WITH
 (#4) The school has a strong code of student behavior.
ALSO TIED WITH
 (#8) There is a strong extracurricular or sports program.
5. (#1) I feel the children at school will be safe.
TIED WITH
 (#5) I am dissatisfied with our local public schools.
6. (#9) Students exhibit a strong sense of belonging in the community.

Table 16

Ranked choices for parents who have a combined annual income of \$25,000-50,000

1. (#10) The school teaches values and morals.
2. (#1) I feel the children at school will be safe.
TIED WITH
 (#7) The school has an atmosphere that “feels like family.”
3. (#4) The school has a strong code of student behavior.
TIED WITH
 (#9) Students exhibit a strong sense of belonging in the community.

4. (#3) I have a good feeling about the spiritual mission of the school.
5. (#2) There is a tradition of Catholic school in our family.
6. (#6) The school offers a quality academic program.
7. (#8) There is a strong extracurricular or sports program.
8. (#5) I am dissatisfied with our local public schools.

Table 17

Ranked choices for parents who have a combined annual income of \$50,000-100,000

1. (#10) The school teaches values and morals.
2. (#3) I have a good feeling about the spiritual mission of the school.
3. (#7) The school has an atmosphere that “feels like family.”
4. (#2) There is a tradition of Catholic school in our family.

TIED WITH

- (#4) The school has a strong code of student behavior.
5. (#1) I feel the children at school will be safe.
6. (#6) The school offers a strong academic program.
7. (#9) Students exhibit a strong sense of belonging in the community.
8. (#8) There is a strong extracurricular or sports program.
9. (#5) I am dissatisfied with our local public schools.

Table 18

Ranked choices for parents who have a combined annual income of over \$100,000

1. (#10) The school teaches values and morals.
2. (#4) The school has a strong code of student behavior.
3. (#3) I have a good feeling about the spiritual mission of the school.
4. (#1) I feel the children at school will be safe.
5. (#7) The school has an atmosphere that “feels like family.”
6. (#9) Students exhibit a strong sense of belonging in the community.
7. (#2) There is a tradition of Catholic school in our family.
8. (#6) The school offers a strong academic program.
9. (#5) I am dissatisfied with our local public schools.

TIED WITH

- (#8) There is a strong extracurricular or sports program.

Table 19

Ranked choices for parents who preferred not to reveal their annual combined income

1. (#7) The school has an atmosphere that “feels like family.”

TIED WITH

- (#10) The school teaches values and morals.
- 2. (#6) The school offers a strong academic program
- 3. (#4) The school has a strong code of student behavior.
- 4. (#1) I feel the children at school will be safe.

TIED WITH

- (#3) I have a good feeling about the spiritual mission of the school.
- 5. (#9) Students exhibit a strong sense of belonging in the community
- 6. (#2) There is a tradition of Catholic school in our family.

TIED WITH

- (#5) I am dissatisfied with our local public schools.
- 7. (#8) There is a strong extracurricular or sports program.

No matter what the income level – across all five categories surveyed – parents chose as their number one answer the fact that school teaches values and morals. Although safety and discipline code ranked consistently in the top half, it is also interesting to note that the identification of the spiritual mission of the school scored either 2nd, 3rd or 4th across all five categories of income. No matter what the income level of the parent, and even for those who chose not to reveal their annual combined income, spiritual matters and the teaching of morals and values are key reasons for choosing Catholic school.

At the other end of the scale, dissatisfaction with local public schools came in 9th or 10th across the economic spectrum. And extracurricular and sports program availability was listed as either 9th or 10th place out of 10 in four of the five income categories. Only in the lowest category, a combined annual income of 0-\$25,000 was the availability of extracurricular and sports not listed in 9th or 10th place, and then it was tied in the 8th place spot. It would seem that neither dissatisfaction with local public schools nor the availability of extracurricular programs and sports is considered to be very important by any of the parents who responded to the survey.

Another piece of information requested of the parents taking the survey was how the decision to send their student to Catholic school was made: exclusively by the student,

mostly by the student with parent input, equally between the student and parent, mostly by the parent with student input or exclusively by the parent. In the first of these categories, only two parents responded that the student makes the choice exclusively. Tables 20-23 show the ranked answers of those respondents listed by how the decision is reached to enroll students in Catholic school.

Table 20

Ranked answers for those who said the decision to enroll in Catholic school was made mostly by the student with parent input

1. (#10) The school teaches values and morals.
2. (#3) I have a good feeling about the spiritual mission of the school.
3. (#6) The school offers a quality academic program.
TIED WITH
(#9) Students exhibit a strong sense of belonging in the community.
4. (#2) There is a tradition of Catholic school in our family.
TIED WITH
(#4) The school has a strong code of student behavior.
TIED WITH
(#7) The school has an atmosphere that “feels like family.”
5. (#1) I feel the children at school will be safe.
6. (#8) There is a strong extracurricular or sports program.
7. (#5) I am dissatisfied with our local public schools.

Table 21

Ranked answers for those who said the decision to enroll in Catholic school was made equally by students and parents.

1. (#10) The school teaches values and morals.
2. (#1) I feel the children at school will be safe.
3. (#2) There is a tradition of Catholic school in our family.
TIED WITH
(#4) The school has a strong code of student behavior.
4. (#7) The school has an atmosphere that “feels like family.”
TIED WITH
(#9) Students exhibit a strong sense of belonging in the community.
5. (#3) I have a good feeling about the mission of the school.
6. (#6) The school offers a quality academic program.
7. (#8) There is a strong extracurricular or sports program.
8. (#5) I am dissatisfied with our local public schools.

Table 22

Ranked answers for those who said the decision to enroll in Catholic school was made mostly by the parent with student input.

1. (#10) The school teaches values and morals.
 2. (#3) I have a good feeling about the spiritual mission of the school.
- TIED WITH
- (#7) The school has an atmosphere that “feels like family.”
 3. (#4) The school has a strong code of student discipline.
 4. (#1) I feel the children at school will be safe.
 5. (#2) There is a tradition of Catholic school in our family.
 6. (#6) The school offers a quality academic program.
 7. (#9) Students exhibit a strong sense of belonging in the community.
 8. (#5) I am dissatisfied with our local public schools.
 9. (#8) There is a strong extracurricular or sports program.

Table 23

Ranked answers for those who said the decision to enroll in Catholic school was made exclusively by parents.

1. (#10) The school teaches values and morals.
 2. (#7) The school has an atmosphere that “feels like family.”
 3. (#3) I have a good feeling about the spiritual mission of the school.
 4. (#1) I feel the children at school will be safe.
- TIED WITH
- (#4) The school has a strong code of student discipline.
 5. (#6) The school offers a quality academic program.
- TIED WITH
- (#9) Students exhibit a strong sense of belonging in the community.
 6. (#5) I am dissatisfied with our local public schools.
 7. (#8) There is a strong extracurricular or sports program.

There were only two parents who responded that the student exclusively makes the choice of which school to attend. But the other four categories chose the fact that the teaching of morals and values as the most important reason that they chose Catholic school. For three of the four categories, identification with the spiritual mission of the school ranked either 2nd or 3rd in importance. This result was only different for the category of parents who said that the decision to enroll in Catholic school was

made equally between parent and student – in that case, identification with the spiritual mission of the school was ranked 6th out of 10.

For all four categories listed above in tables 20-23, dissatisfaction with the local public schools as well as the availability of extracurricular programs and sports alternated between 9th and 10th place in the ranking across the four categories of parents who responded to the survey. Neither of these items ranked as very important in the list of reasons to choose Catholic school, no matter who made the decision to enroll.

The Catholic bishops of the United States, in their 2005 report, “Renewing our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium,” repeated their feelings about the importance of continuing to build and operate Catholic schools:

Catholic schools provide young people with sound Church teaching through a broad-based curriculum, where faith and culture are intertwined in all areas of a school’s life. By equipping our young people with a sound education, rooted in the Gospel message, the Person of Jesus Christ, and rich in the cherished traditions and liturgical practices of our faith, we ensure that they have the foundation to live morally and uprightly in our complex modern world.

The parents who responded to this survey seem to identify with the bishops’ view and have chosen the teaching of morals and values, of which the bishops speak, as their primary reason for choosing Catholic school. Likewise, identification with the spiritual mission of the school, espoused in the bishops’ statement, also is in line with the parents’ choice. These things are true across the board, regardless of income, religious background or in which county of the diocese the parents reside, urban or rural. The research questions developed during this study sought to understand why

parents made the school choice that they did for their children. This survey demonstrates that identification of the spiritual mission of the Catholic school and appreciation of the values-based education offered in these schools is the most important motivation for parents.

On a practical level, Catholic schools should be assured that their efforts to promote a gospel-based curriculum which stresses morals and values is key to attracting parents who are considering Catholic school for their children. The spiritual mission of the school is very important to prospective parents and the available limited resources for marketing, publicity and promotion should be allocated for the marketing of the schools in light of the parents' search. Conversely, money spent on improving or marketing extensive extracurricular programs or sports is not as important, since parents do not seem to consider these elements crucial in their list of reasons for choosing Catholic schools. It should also be obvious from this research that Catholic schools cannot rely on the public perception that the Catholic schools are inherently better than the local public school, since dissatisfaction with the public sector ranked so low on parents' surveys, regardless of their income level or geographic location.

Research question 2

In the experience of the parents involved in a focus group, have their reasons for sending their children to Catholic schools evolved and changed as their children have aged and moved up in grade, and if so, how?

Eight parents came together in a focus group session to react to the parental survey taken and to offer additional comments on the study. The meeting was held at Saint Boniface School in Erie on November 7, 2007.

They were surprised that the survey question on the tradition of Catholic education in a family ranked 7th out of 10 overall on the parents surveys. Six of the eight participants in the focus group selected that as either the 2nd or 3rd answer for their own family. The tradition of Catholic school in their family had provided one of the main reasons for them to have considered Catholic school for their children. They admit, however, now that their children are enrolled in Catholic school this reason is not very important to them. They consider other factors much more important to them.

The focus group identified with the high scoring of the question concerning the spiritual mission of the school. They also felt that the first place score regarding the Catholic school teaching values and morals resonated with their own experience. Regarding both of these survey results, they unanimously stated that these reasons are now more important to them now than at the time of enrollment for their continuing involvement of their children in Catholic school. Their support of the spiritual mission of the school and their expectation of the school's teaching of morals and values has evolved since they sent their children to Catholic school initially. One mother said, "We understood the Catholic mission of the school was behind everything, but that wasn't our main reason for choosing the school originally. Now, after four years, we can see that both of our children have been so blessed by that.

Any feeling we had that maybe the public school could have done just as well is gone now.”

Half of the parents (four of eight) expressed surprise that the question about a quality academic program ranked so low on the ratings of parents (#6 of 10 overall). But they all agreed that their thinking on this has changed dramatically since enrolling their children in Catholic school. As their children have moved up in age and grade in Catholic school, they would rank a quality academic program in a lower spot than they would have when first enrolling their children. The spiritual life of the school and the values-based education has taken the spot of the quality academic program that attracted them in the first place. As one mother said, “don’t get us wrong. We want a good strong academic program. But that is not what will make the difference in life – we want our daughter to understand life fully and have a good sense of morality. That is more important in the long haul than just the classes.”

As their children have aged and moved up in grade in the Catholic school system, the focus group parents felt that their own personal involvement has increased. Seven of the eight parents felt that one of the major changes in their reason for sending their children to Catholic school was the growing realization that parents are much more involved in the life of the children at school in the Catholic school system. They all spoke of how this understanding has evolved and how involved they were – to a far greater degree than they expected when they initially enrolled their children. All but one spoke of this as a positive change, though, and stated that they are far more involved in the school and its program than they ever expected to be when they began. Only two parents in the focus group spoke of dissatisfaction with their local

public school as a motivation for sending their children to Catholic school. This seems to echo the generally low rank that this question received on the parent survey since this item was in 9th or 10th place out of 10 no matter what table was viewed. Both of these parents said that this understanding, too, has changed now that their students are enrolled in Catholic school and they do not even think about dissatisfaction with their local public schools in making the decision to continue their students in the Catholic school as they age and move up in grade.

When given the chance to make their own comments about their experience in Catholic school, seven of the eight focus group parents commented positively about the importance of religious practice and theological study for their children in school. Also six of the eight focus group parents mentioned the individual attention that their students receive from teachers in small classes. “To tell you the truth,” said one mother, “my husband and I disagreed about sending our two children to Catholic school at first. But they have both blossomed as individuals and now we know we made the right decision.” This is consistent with the survey given to parents, as these two items were also the two most frequent comments (by 41 parents and 23 parents respectively) in the survey section with open space for parent comment.

Research question 3

How do the responses of the focus group members reflect the influence of societal trends vs. religiosity, using the lenses of Rotter’s Social Theory and the implications of the changing Catholic culture as outlined by Groome?

Locus of control refers to the way some people deal with circumstances actively and willingly while others succumb to negative emotions and the feeling that things that

happen are out of their control. Julian Rotter's locus of control survey makes the connection between personal characteristics and outcomes. Rotter's work helps to explain likely responses in a particular situation, and the majority of parents who took this survey scored with an internal locus of control. These parents Rotter would term as the more successful parents, limiting where their children go, what they are doing outside of the home and watching over a host of other behaviors which could be termed moral issues. This study helped to explain the correlation between these parents who scored so high with an internal locus of control and the reasons they gave for choosing Catholic school for their children, particularly since the spiritual mission of the school and its teaching of values and morals ranked highest among these parents.

The results of the section of the survey that dealt with the Locus of Control information, as developed by Julian Rotter, is, in itself, a useful tool. It is interesting to note that the majority of parents who took the survey scored high on the internal locus of control. This helps to explain the type of parent who is actively seeking out private school and, in particular, Catholic school for their children. It is helpful to note the degree with which Rotter would see these people having a feeling of exercising control over their own lives and destinies and that of their children. We might use a more modern term – such as empowerment – rather than Rotter's traditional terminology of the locus of control. But further research should be undertaken to understand how Rotter's locus of control survey represents the changing demographic of parents today.

Thomas H. Groome, noted Catholic sociologist and faculty member at Boston College, has done much research concerning what it means for Catholics to be members of the church today, particularly in light of everything that has changed since Vatican II

in the 1960s. He is not surprised that parents continue to rank items of faith and spirituality highest on their reasons for choosing Catholic school for their children. Even though much has changed in the Catholic culture in which we find ourselves, their faith is important. In his book, Horizons and Hope: the future of religious education, Groome notes that faith should not even be listed as a separate item, but the defining piece of all else that we do as Catholics, including whatever occurs in Catholic schools:

Faith should not be one among many aspects of identity for Christians but the defining sentiment that permeates all else. Christian faith should be a whole way of life reflected in everything that Christians do. This requires education to be powerfully formative, nurturing people in their outlook and commitment, disposing them to live as disciples of Jesus.

It would seem, according to Groome's research and outlook, that items of faith should not even have been listed separately on the survey list of reasons that parents had to rank. Matters of faith should permeate all that is done in Catholic schools and parents today, no matter how their personal relationship and involvement with the institutional church has changed over the last few decades, are still seeking those spiritual values.

The ratings don't change when looking at non-Catholic parents, either. While most of the respondents to the survey identified themselves as Catholic, those who did not still ranked moral and spiritual values as the top motivating force. Remembering that Catholic parents no longer automatically select Catholic school for their children as was at one time the norm but rather choose much more selectively, so non-Catholic parents are also interested in the same moral and spiritual values as their Catholic counterparts. This highlights the fact that involvement in the life of the institutional church has less bearing on the question of where to send students to school than it ever has, and non-Catholic parents are choosing Catholic schools for the same reasons as Catholic parents.

Even if parents are no longer “active” Catholics, participating in the regular worship or outreach of the institutional church, Groome would say that their whole being has been shaped and molded by their own Catholic background. In his 2003 study, What Makes us Catholic, Groome discusses how strong the Catholic identity is for those who were raised in the church, even if they no longer practice the faith actively.

Leaving a local church is easy compared to erasing the traces of Catholic socialization. It has likely shaped their personhood and ways in the world, their defining images and stories, their values, virtues, and vices, their hopes and fears, even their sense of humor.

Groome is not surprised that parents, no matter their official relationship with the institutional church, seek spiritual values and a life of faith for their children. He told the author in an extensive phone interview on March 5th, 2008, that parents still want to be seen as the primary spiritual educators of their children, but in modern society this does not necessarily mean attending or church regularly. Parents’ selection of matters of faith and spirituality as their primary reasons for choosing Catholic school should come as no surprise in this author’s study, then. Groome said this on the phone: “Parents may hang in there with a Catholic school but at the same time not hang in there with their parish, because they are far better served by their school than their parish. But don’t be disappointed in that – it is not their fault and it is not a lack of faith. It just looks differently than it did in days gone by.” He pointed out that Wall Street declared “spiritual growth” an industry

During the period 1998-2003, the Google search engine on line listed 9,940 topics that dealt with spirituality. But from the period 2003-2008, Google now lists 306,000 topics dealing with spirituality. Wall Street is reflecting the new interest in matters

spiritual, and Groome understands that this corroborates his position that people today, more than ever, are seeking out spiritual and moral values. It is no wonder, then, that parents list that as their first priority when ranking reasons for choosing Catholic school for their children.

In the same phone interview with the author, Groome admitted that the rationale parents have for sending their children to Catholic schools today is not the same as it was fifty years ago. The rationale at that time was sound – the perceived sense of belonging and community, a sense of “home” and a sense of inclusion. But Groome claims that we can bring parents to a new understanding of what the Catholic school has to offer – grounded in ancient life-giving spirituality with a strong academic program and good leadership (the two prerequisites that Groome sees as essential) – after all, he says, what parent would not want that for their children?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

This survey sought to find out the real reasons that parents enroll their children in Catholic schools. Finding data on parents’ reasoning in this matter is difficult. Using Julian Rotter’s Locus of Control survey as well as the sociological work of Thomas Groome regarding the changing face of church involvement today on the part of many Catholics, this author has tried to understand how things have changed over the last five decades. At one time, Catholic parents sent their children to Catholic school almost automatically, but that is not the case today.

Since Julian Rotter presented his locus of control survey some years ago, the language may have changed, and today we might describe those individuals with a sense of control over their destiny – which Rotter would term as having an internal locus of

control – as empowered people. In a 2008 meta-analysis called “The Future is Now: Today’s Realities,” the authors noted that “in this day of frequent career change, power has shifted from the company to the talented, creative, responsible employee who loves challenge.” The synthesis, developed by Total Leader Associates, goes on to say that “empowering qualified people to have more control over their work is both morally right and financially profitable.” There is a relationship between the survey results that show that most Catholic school parents today have an internal locus of control and the fact that spirituality has experienced such a resurgence of interest in the last few years. Using Rotter’s locus of control survey which shows that the majority of Catholic school parents have operate from an internal locus of control as well as Groome’s research that shows that parents desire a spiritual base for their children, it is no surprise that the highest ranked reasons that parents cite for sending students to Catholic school today are spiritual and moral values. Current societal trends are causing a re-emergence of moral and spiritual values as the driving force behind parents’ choice to send students to Catholic schools.

Catholic educators must understand what is truly important to parents today. The results of this survey show that values-based education and strong moral codes were rated as the top reasons that parents make the choice to send their children to Catholic school. This does not vary between different income groups nor does it vary between parents who live in urban areas to those who live in rural areas. The identification with the spiritual mission of the school, the strong family atmosphere of a Catholic school and the strong code of student behavior expected at Catholic school all rank in the top few

reasons that parents gave for choosing Catholic school. It is important to note that not even a strong academic program out-ranked those top reasons.

Likewise, Catholic educators must realize that some of the things commonly assumed to be more important actually scored low on the parents' reasons, again regardless of the parents' income level or whether they lived in an urban or rural area. Across the categories of the survey, extra-curricular activities and sports, dissatisfaction with the local public school system and the tradition of Catholic schooling in their family scored consistently in the lowest ranking of the reasons parents chose.

Finally, Catholic schools have limited resources for marketing, promotion and development. The results of this survey would speak to those involved in Catholic education to say that we should never be ashamed to promote our spiritual mission, promote our family atmosphere or let others know of our strong moral and values-based education. This survey demonstrates that those values are the most important to parents, regardless of their own background. It is clear that these survey results should inform the way in which Catholic schools use their limited resources in attracting new parents.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

While this survey demonstrated certain facts about the real reasons that parents chose Catholic schools, more study needs to be done, particularly in two areas.

While Thomas Groome speaks to the changing nature of church involvement and the way that parents remain loyal to the school but not to the parish, more studies need to explore this connection between the practice of the faith. How does one understand his/her own involvement as Catholic if he/she enrolls children in Catholic school but otherwise does not participate in the life of the church?

This survey demonstrated that there is a strong connection of Catholic school parents with a healthy internal locus of control score as demonstrated by Julian Rotter's locus of control survey. Rotter's work showed that people with a healthy internal locus of control score tend to be the kind of people who influence others. Additional study should be done regarding if this group of people is able to use this influence in regard to other parents.

This author believes that further study needs to be done more broadly. The group of parents surveyed in this study were all located in northwestern Pennsylvania in the Diocese of Erie. Further, they have already made the choice to enroll their children in Catholic school, since they got the invitation from their principal. Further study with varied populations may discover differences in culture, socio-economic scale and other factors that could make a difference in the results of the survey. This topic should be studied more broadly to determine how the results of this particular study can be used with other populations.

REFLECTION OF THE RESEARCHER

When the researcher began this study, it was expected that even though the bishops of the United States continue to speak and write that matters of faith and spirituality are the most important characteristics of Catholic schools today, the parent survey might show something different. But it is good to note that values, morals, faith, the spiritual mission of the school and the family atmosphere of Catholic schools all ranked in the top of parent responses. In fact, these results were consistent, regardless of the parents' economic situation or where they lived. It is true that over 93% of the parents who responded lived in two-parent families, over 96% were Caucasian and over

92% identified themselves as Roman Catholic. This is certainly not a typical “slice” of the population in the United States today, and it may have helped to shape the strongest reasons that the parents gave. But the results were consistent across many different categories, and the bishops appear to be correct in their comments. It also surprised the researcher that there is not even a strong connection between the parents’ personal history of Catholic schools and enrolling their own children in Catholic school. Only 21 of the 238 parents who responded to the survey who have enrolled their own children in Catholic school themselves attended a Catholic school.

The difference between those who scored as people with an internal locus of control and those who scored with an external locus of control is striking. For those with an internal locus of control, the spiritual mission of the school and its teaching of morals and values remain the top two factors in consideration. For those with an external locus of control, the results were quite different. While the spiritual mission of the school and its teaching of values and morals remains high (in second and third place), this group placed the first ranked answer – the safety of students – ahead of the other two. This variation is interesting and further study could amplify why this difference exists or how the parents that placed the safety of students in first place came to perceive safety as such an important consideration. It could also be used effectively by Catholic school personnel in realizing that not all parents seek out Catholic schools for the same reasons and although the spiritual mission of the school and its teaching of values and morals is key, other factors – like the safety of students – are very important to certain groups of parents.

Thomas Groome told me a story on the phone about a bank president he knows in Chicago. When this man has to hire, he always goes first to Catholic school graduates. He calls Catholic schools a “service to society,” because of the very reason that the parents chose values and moral education as their first reason for choosing Catholic schools. This gives an anecdotal face to the statistic that the parents chose across all categories in the survey.

SUMMARY

One of the things the focus group pointed out was that they are much more involved in the Catholic school that they have enrolled their children in than they ever assumed would be the case. Furthermore, they have been more and more involved as their children have advanced in grade level, again beyond what they expected when they enrolled their children. As Thomas Groome said, parents today hunger to be the primary spiritual educators of their children, and perhaps that is reflected in their involvement in the life of the school. This study points out that parents today are searching for a focus of core values and spiritual identity. Catholic schools would be well served to ignore the “bells and whistles” of the public system without trying to match them and concentrate on the core mission of the Catholic system – with an emphasis on morality and spirituality.

Groome points out that the reasons for and consistency in enrolling children in Catholic schools may have both changed in the last fifty years, but the premise is the same. Parents want their children in Catholic schools because these are places grounded

in an ancient life-giving spirituality. As Groome says, what parent would not want that for their children?

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APPENDIX A

CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARENT SURVEY

County of residence: _____

Our home has: _____ both mother and father present at home
 _____ mother at home only
 _____ father at home only
 _____ caretakers/guardians at home other than parents
 _____ prefer not to say

There are currently _____ dependent children living at home.

Total number of years that parents/guardians/caretakers attended any level of Catholic school: _____

Primary Ethnic background of family: _____ Caucasian
 _____ African-American
 _____ Native American
 _____ Asian
 _____ Hispanic
 _____ Other: _____
 _____ Prefer not to say

Primary Religious background of family: _____ Roman Catholic
 _____ Protestant Christian
 _____ Jewish
 _____ Muslim
 _____ Buddhist
 _____ Other: _____
 _____ Prefer not to say

Annual combined family income: _____ Over \$100,000
 _____ \$50,000-\$100,000
 _____ \$25,000-\$50,000
 _____ Under \$25,000
 _____ Prefer not to say

Approximately how many miles is it from your home to the nearest Catholic elementary school? _____

Approximately how many miles is it from your home to the nearest public elementary school? _____

Approximately how many miles is it from your home to the nearest Catholic high school? _____

Approximately how many miles is it from your home to the nearest public High school? _____

For each child currently enrolled in grades 1-12, public or Catholic school, please enter the following information.

	Check if currently in Catholic school	Current age	Current Grade	# of years of prior public school attendance
CHILD #1	_____	_____	_____	_____
CHILD #2	_____	_____	_____	_____
CHILD #3	_____	_____	_____	_____
CHILD #4	_____	_____	_____	_____
CHILD #5	_____	_____	_____	_____
CHILD #6	_____	_____	_____	_____

On a scale of 1-4 (4 being strongest and 1 being weakest), rate the following reasons for choosing a Catholic school for your children:

	Strongest			Weakest
1. I feel that children at the school will be safe.	4	3	2	1
2. There is a tradition of Catholic school				

in our family.	4	3	2	1
3. I have a good feeling about the spiritual mission of the school.	4	3	2	1
4. The school has a strong expectation of good student behavior.	4	3	2	1
5. I am dissatisfied with our local public schools.	4	3	2	1
6. The school offers a quality academic program.	4	3	2	1
7. The school has an atmosphere that feels like “family.”	4	3	2	1
8. There is a strong extracurricular and/or sports program.	4	3	2	1
9. Students exhibit a sense of belonging in the school community.	4	3	2	1
10. The school teaches values and morals.	4	3	2	1

OTHER: Please feel free to list other reasons why you chose a Catholic school:

Which statement best describes the input your children have on the decision to enroll in Catholic schools?

- The decision is made exclusively by the student.
- The decision is made mostly by the student with parental input.
- The decision is made equally by the student and parent.
- The decision is made mostly by the parent with student input.
- The decision is made exclusively by the parent.

APPENDIX B

LOCUS OF CONTROL SURVEY

Please read each pair of statements and circle the letter of the statements that most accurately reflects your beliefs. There are no right or wrong answers, so please answer honestly.

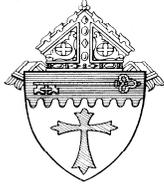
1. A – Children get into trouble because their parents punish them too much.
B – The trouble with most children nowadays is that their parents are too easy with them.
2. A – Many of the unhappy things in people's lives are partly due to bad luck.
B – People's misfortunes result from the mistakes they make.
3. A – One of the major reasons why we have wars is because people don't take enough interest in politics.
B – There will always be wars, no matter how hard people try to prevent them.
4. A – In the long run people get the respect they deserve in this world.
B – Unfortunately, an individual's worth often passes unrecognized no matter how hard he tries.
5. A – The idea that teachers are unfair to students is nonsense.
B – Most students don't realize the extent to which their grades are influenced by accidental happenings.
6. A – Without the right breaks one cannot be an effective leader.
B – Capable people who fail to become leaders have not taken advantage of their opportunities.
7. A – No matter how hard you try, some people just don't like you.
B – People who can't get others to like them don't understand how to get along with others.
8. A – Heredity plays the major role in determining one's personality.
B – It is one's experiences in life which determine what one is like.
9. A – I have often found that what is going to happen is going to happen.
B – Trusting to fate has never turned out as well for me as making a decision to take a definite course of action.
10. A – In the case of the well-prepared student, there is rarely, if ever, such a thing as an unfair test.
B – Many times exam questions tend to be so unrelated to course work that studying is really useless.
11. A – Becoming a success is a matter of hard work; luck has little or nothing to do with it.
B – Getting a good job depends mainly on being in the right place at the right time.
12. A – The average citizen can have an influence in government decisions.
B – The world is run by the few people in power, and there's not much the little guy can

do about it.

13. A – When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work.
B – It is not always wise to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune anyway.
14. A – There are certain people who are just no good.
B – There is some good in everybody.
15. A – In my case, getting what I want has little or nothing to do with luck.
B – Many times we might just as well decide what to do by flipping a coin.
16. A – Who gets to be the boss depends on who was lucky enough to be in the right place first.
B – Getting people to do the right thing depends on ability, luck has little to do with it.
17. A – As far as world affairs are concerned, most of us are the victims of force we can neither understand nor control.
B – By taking an active part in political and social affairs, the people can control world events.
18. A – Most people don't realize the extent to which their lives are controlled by accidental happenings.
B – There really is no such thing as "luck."
19. A – One should always be willing to admit mistakes.
B – It is usually best to cover up one's mistakes.
20. A – It is hard to know whether a person really likes you.
B – How many friends you have depends on how nice a person you are.
21. A – In the long run, the bad things that happen to us are balanced by the good ones.
B – Most misfortunes are the result of lack of ability, ignorance, laziness, or all three.
22. A – With enough effort, we can wipe out political corruption.
B – It is difficult for people to have much control over the things politicians do in office.
23. A – Sometimes I can't understand how teachers arrive at the grades they give.
B – There is a direct connection between how hard I study and the grades I get.
24. A – A good leader expects people to decide for themselves what they should do.
B – A good leader makes it clear to everyone what their jobs are.
25. A – Many times I feel that I have little influence over the things that happen to me.
B – It is impossible for me to believe that chance or luck plays an important role in my life.
26. A – People are lonely because they don't try to be friendly.
B – There's not much use in trying too hard to please people, if they like you, they like you.

27. A – There is too much emphasis on athletics in high school.
B – Team sports are an excellent way to build character.
28. A – What happens to me is my own doing.
B – Sometimes I feel that I don't have enough control over the direction my life is taking.
29. A – Most of the time I can't understand why politicians behave the way they do.
B – In the long run, the people are responsible for bad government on a national level as well as on a local level.

APPENDIX C PARENT COVER LETTER



Diocese of Erie

429 East Grandview Boulevard
Post Office Box 10397
Erie, Pennsylvania 16514-0397

Dear Parents,

I am writing to ask your help by participating in a research study that examines the reasons why parents choose to enroll their children in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Erie. I am conducting this research as part of my doctoral studies for an Ed.D. degree at Duquesne University. This research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Duquesne University.

I have asked your principal to invite you by way of this letter to participate in an online survey since you have children enrolled in a Catholic school. I hope you will be willing to complete this survey. The survey should take about twenty minutes to complete.

- To access the survey, please visit:
<http://www.eriercd.org/research/parentsurvey>
- The survey will be available online **between September 10 and September 24, 2007**
- Enter the password “**research**” in order to take the survey
- The survey will not be available before September 10 or after September 24

If you would rather take this survey on paper, please contact your principal for a copy of the survey which will be available from **September 10 to September 24, 2007**. Thank you very much for helping with this research on a topic which is of vital importance to all of our Catholic schools. God bless you for your efforts and your time!

Sincerely,

Rev. John M. Schultz

APPENDIX D



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

- TITLE:** Why do parents choose Catholic schools?
- INVESTIGATOR:** Rev. John M. Schultz
Saint Boniface Parish
9367 Wattsburg Road
Erie, PA 16509
(814) 825-4439
jayserie@yahoo.com
- SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Duquesne University.
- PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in taking a survey that seeks to investigate the reasons that parents choose to send their children to Catholic schools.
- These are the only requests that will be made of you.
- RISKS AND BENEFITS:** No risks are expected to participants. This study will help to advance scholarly knowledge about why parents choose Catholic school for their children. The benefit to participants is knowing that their answers on the survey may be of help to Catholic schools in formulating plans and policies for attracting students and using resources

efficiently. The surveys will remain anonymous and names will not be recorded. All personally identifiable information will be deleted. The survey will be housed on the website of the Diocese of Erie and all information recorded electronically will be secure. When the survey is finished, responses given electronically will be taken off the computer, transcribed onto paper and kept in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home.

COMPENSATION:

Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you. No monetary compensation is provided for your participation in this survey project.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

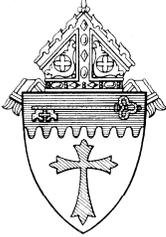
Your name will never appear on any survey or research instruments. No identity will be made in the data analysis. All written materials will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's home. Your response(s) will only appear in statistical data summaries. All materials will be destroyed at the completion of the research.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

By taking the survey on line or returning the survey by mail, you are indicating your consent to participate. Further, by participating in the survey you attest that you are the parent of a student currently enrolled in a Catholic school of the Diocese of Erie. You further attest that you have read the above statements and understand what is being requested. You also understand that your participation is voluntary. On these terms, you certify that you are willing to participate in this research project.

You understand that should you have any further questions about your participation in this study, you may call Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board (412-396-6326).

APPENDIX E
COVER LETTER FOR FOCUS GROUP



Diocese of Erie

429 East Grandview Boulevard
Post Office Box 10397
Erie, Pennsylvania 16514-0397

Dear Parents,

I am grateful to your principal for passing along an invitation for you to participate in a focus group of parents who have students enrolled in Catholic schools of the Diocese of Erie. This focus group will provide additional information to follow up a survey I have taken with the parents of the diocese who have students in Catholic schools. This research is being done as part of my doctoral study for an Ed.D. degree at Duquesne University. This research project has received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Duquesne University.

The focus group will meet one time only on Friday, October 19th, 2007, from 7:00-8:30 p.m. at Saint Mark Catholic Center, 429 East Grandview Blvd. in Erie. Please let Gail Mayer know if you are able to attend by calling her at (814) 824-1220 or emailing her at gemayer@eriercd.org. no later than October 15, 2007.

Please sign and return to me a copy of CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE form, which is attached. This form will be kept separate from any other record kept on the evening of the focus group meeting, and all comments made at the meeting will remain anonymous.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request. This is a topic which is of vital importance to all of our Catholic schools. God bless you for your efforts and your time.

Sincerely,

Rev. John M. Schultz

APPENDIX F



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A FOCUS GROUP

- TITLE:** Why do parents choose Catholic schools?
- INVESTIGATOR:** Rev. John M. Schultz
Saint Boniface Parish
9367 Wattsburg Road
Erie, PA 16509
(814) 825--4439
jayserie@yahoo.com
- SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Duquesne University.
- PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a focus group which will meet to discuss the answers collected on a survey of why parents choose Catholic schools for their children. and to have the opportunity to express your own reasons for enrolling your children in Catholic schools.
- RISKS AND BENEFITS:** No risks are expected to participants. The study will help to advance scholarly knowledge about why parents choose Catholic school for their children. The benefit to participants is knowing that their input into the focus group may be of help to Catholic schools in formulating plans and policies for attracting students and using resources efficiently. All comments made at the meeting will be de-identified and any personally identifiable information will be deleted.

COMPENSATION:

Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you. No monetary compensation is provided for your participation in this survey project.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

No identity will be made in the data analysis. An audio tape made during the focus group discussion will be erased after it is transcribed onto paper. While transcriptions of discussions will be shared, all comments will be de-identified and it will not be possible to link any comments made with any specific person. Your response(s) will only appear in statistical data summaries. All materials will be destroyed at the completion of the research.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board (412-396-6326).

Participant's Signature

Date

APPENDIX G

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What was your general reaction to the results of the survey questions? Are you surprised by any of the parental responses to the survey?
2. Of the ten items listed in the survey, how do you react to the three responses which got the largest number of parental selection as a reason for choosing Catholic school? What is your reaction to these three being the top three responses?
3. Of the ten items listed in the survey, how do you react to the three responses which got the least number of parental selection as a reason for choosing Catholic school? What is your reaction to these three being the bottom three responses?
4. Are there any items that figured prominently in your decision making process that were not included in this list of ten items?
5. How well do your own responses to the survey questions coordinate with the responses of parents who took the survey?
6. Do you have any other comments about the survey itself or the responses of parents who took the survey?

APPENDIX H

LETTER OF INSTRUCTION TO PRINCIPALS

September 2007

Dear Colleague,

I hope your school year is off to a great start! I can't believe how quickly August came to an end and another academic year snuck up on us! But I hope and pray that this year will be a great year for both you and your students!

As I told you last spring, I have been working on my doctoral degree at Duquesne University. I told you I would ask for your help...so here comes the asking! As I enter the final stages of work for this degree, I really do need your help.

I have designed a web survey to be taken by parents to determine the reasons they really choose Catholic school. It is difficult, as you know, to understand why parents choose our schools, and for a variety of reasons they may not always tell us the whole answer. I told you last year that the NCEA is awaiting the results of my survey and at least two other dioceses want to replicate this survey. Although we all do exit interviews when someone leaves our school and we all try to meet and greet new families, we may never understand why they really chose our school. I will be happy to share my results with you at the end of the study and perhaps you will be able to use it. All of us face the same challenges – declining numbers of students from which to draw, increased expenses and limited resources to use to attract new students. Perhaps a good understanding of what brings parents and students to our schools will help us all to be more effective.

I am hoping you can help me in two ways. If you can assist me before September 28 I would be very appreciative. Here is what I need you to do:

1. Please invite twenty (20) of your current parents to go to the website and take the survey between October 1 and 15. This must be a random sample of your current parents – and instructions follow on the next page with two suggestions on making sure this is a random sample. Before October 1 and after October 15 the survey will not be active on line. There is also a consent letter enclosed – please reproduce this for the parents as well as the attached cover letter. It explains to the parents how the survey will work and gives them a password to use to enter the survey.
2. Please select one (1) additional parent to attend a focus group to discuss the survey results at Saint Boniface on November 7th at 7:00 p.m. Again, this should be a random selection – see the information attached on how to make this a random selection. Again, a cover letter and consent letter are attached – please have them return the consent letter to me – either in advance or when they come to the focus group session.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call upon me.

CELL PHONE	814-873-7941
OFFICE PHONE	814-825-4439
E-MAIL	jayserie@yahoo.com

Thank you for your help with this project. Please remember that the SEPTEMBER 27 deadline to obtain parent help with this survey is very important. Check the details below on how to pull a random survey of your parents. And I will be happy to share the results with you when the survey is completed. Thanks!

Sincerely,
Fr. Jay Schultz

TWO SUGGESTIONS for drawing random samples of parents to take the web survey and to find a parent to attend the focus group session on November 7th.

If you use some method OTHER than one of these two methods to select your parents, please let me know how you did it!

Thanks again for your help!

METHOD #1 – The “HIGH TECH” method

If you have your parent names in a database in the computer, this is the easiest way to do it. Copy and paste the list of parent names into a column in an EXCEL spreadsheet. Then in the column right next to it, paste the function =RAND() which is EXCEL’s way of putting a random number between 0 and 1 in the cells. Then sort both columns – the list of names and the random number – by the random numbers. This rearranges the list in random order from the lowest to the highest random number. Take the first twenty names from the list to invite to take the web survey and take the 21st name to invite to participate in the focus group.

METHOD #2 – The “LOW TECH” method

Take a parent list, cut the names apart, place them in a bowl or box and mix them up like you do for a drawing. Then draw the first 20 names out to invite to take the web survey and one additional name to invite to the focus group session. It’s old-fashioned, but it works!