
Executive Summary

While many challenges face Catholic schools today, it is clear that pastors are indispensable to addressing and overcoming these challenges. In fact, *The Code of Canon Law* (Caparros, Theriault, & Thorn, 1993) defines the centrality of the pastor in regard to the parish Catholic school. As highlighted by the Notre Dame Task Force on Catholic Education (2006), pastors' leadership and vision are vitally essential to the future of Catholic schools. Despite their importance as key stakeholders in Catholic education, few systematic attempts have been made to elicit their views on Catholic schools and there have been no such attempts in the last 10 years. Thus, given the nature of the Church, the importance of the parish in Catholic life, and the stipulations of Canon Law, there was a dramatic need to extend and refine existing research on priests' perception of Catholic schools.

The Notre Dame Study of U.S. Pastors directly addressed that need. Participants for this study were just over 1,000 U.S. pastors of Catholic parishes with schools that completed an electronic, Web-based survey. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain data regarding the questions of interest. The quantitative method components allowed for statistical analysis of survey data, including hypothesis testing, and were complemented by the qualitative components that provided rich, verbatim data from pastors. This mixed-method approach yielded an extensive data set that facilitated a robust analysis of a complex phenomenon: pastors' needs, perceptions, and attitudes regarding Catholic schools.

Major quantitative findings indicated that regardless of location of the parish school, pastors consistently identified Catholic identity and finances as the two most important needs facing their schools. Pastors identified the top five areas that their parish school was currently addressing: finances, marketing, long-range planning, enrollment, and Catholic identity. The data also revealed that as pastors' age, years of ordination, and Catholic school experience increase, so too does their agreement with the factors representing worth, value, access, and governance of Catholic schools. Findings demonstrated that pastors of parishes with schools who perceive the mission of their school to be supported by Catholic institutions of higher education demonstrate significant, positive increases in their evaluation of the worth, quality, access, and governance of Catholic schools compared to pastors who do not perceive such college or university support.

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capital improvements, and Catholic identity. When asked to comment openly on Catholic schools and Catholic school leadership, pastors' responses centered on embracing Catholic identity and instilling the faith, financial management, valuing Catholic schools, leadership, and the need for Catholic school families to attend Mass.

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Recommendations flow broadly from the two major thematic areas voiced most by the participating pastors: finances and faith. Financial recommendations include more effective cost management in the realm of health care, increasing revenues through strategic development efforts, leveraging the power of pooled investments, aggressive pursuit of federal and state funds, and continued advocacy for school choice. Recommendations in the area of faith and Catholic identity include: conscious integration of the school community into the overall life of the parish, broader public parish leadership roles for school faculty, staff, administration, students, and parents, spiritual renewal of teachers and administrators, embracing education as a model for all ministry, and strategic engagement of the clergy in support of Catholic schools. Further research is needed to determine

the best vehicles for addressing these concerns in a unified way, perhaps with the broader engagement of Catholic institutions of higher learning, the philanthropic community, and other Catholic leaders and stakeholders. The authors proffer that the deeper unifying challenge behind these issues is theological in nature and calls for serious reengagement with the core beliefs of Catholicism, renewed understanding of the central mysteries of the faith, and a fully realized evangelization and education of adult and young Catholics.
