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## Research Agenda of the Center for Catholic Education

Theodore J. Wallace  
*University of Dayton*

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## RESEARCH AGENDA OF THE CENTER FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION

THEODORE J. WALLACE

*The University of Dayton*

Thanks to, among others, educators Sr. Mary Peter Traviss, director of the Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership (ICEL) at The University of San Francisco, and John Convey, Provost of The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, a renewed emphasis has been placed on the importance of high quality research to Catholic education. Through their columns in *NCEA Notes* that have highlighted recent research, Sr. Mary Peter's facilitation of sessions at the NCEA convention that feature current doctoral studies by Catholic educators, and John Convey's book, *Catholic Schools Make a Difference: Twenty-five Years of Research*, Mary Peter and John have encouraged scholars to investigate questions that have potential for informing the direction of Catholic education across the United States. The importance of these efforts has prompted the need for research centers that systematically conduct studies about practice in Catholic schools. The Catholic University of America plans to open such a research center in the near future.

The University of Dayton opened a center in 1996 which has as a primary objective to collaborate in both shaping and addressing a national research agenda for Catholic schools. The purpose of this piece is to describe some of the current initiatives undertaken by the School of Education and the Center for Catholic Education at the University of Dayton:

- A research team from the School of Education at The University of Dayton is working with the Cincinnati, New York, and St. Louis provinces of the Society of Mary (Marianists) to help identify how the five characteristics of a Marianist education are in action in the schools with a Marianist heritage. The project is called "Experience and Meaning of a Marianist Education Today (EMMET)" and is designed to assist schools in making the transition

from school faculties that were once predominately staffed by vowed Marianists to staffs that are now comprised almost exclusively of lay persons. The perpetuation of the characteristic themes of education in the Marianist tradition will positively affect the Catholic identity of these schools as they go through this laicization. These themes are: 1) community and family spirit; 2) formation in faith; 3) a comprehensive, quality education; 4) commitment to service; and 5) adaptation and change in the modern world. The research team has completed a comprehensive survey that was given to students, parents, faculty, and graduates of each school. Site visits that featured focus groups of each of these school constituencies have also been completed in the 13 high schools. Future initiatives will focus primarily on how these resource persons from the University can be of service to individual schools who wish to follow up with in-service and other types of experiences to help their school communities strengthen their commitment to these themes.

- The Center for Catholic Education will host a Catholic education research conference at The University of Dayton in the fall of 1998. This will be a follow-up to a similar conference held at UD several years ago. The primary objectives of the conference will be to call together Catholic educational leaders to reflect on and recommit to the key research needed to best inform and influence the direction of Catholic schools in the United States and to design a collaborative strategy for accomplishing this very necessary research.
- The Association of Catholic Leadership Programs (ACLP) recently surveyed its 44 college and university members and compiled a directory of all programs offered by these schools for Catholic educators. The directory is being offered to prospective students as a collaborative marketing effort and to provide all ACLP members with the most current program information. This information has become especially important as the number of these programs has grown significantly in the past decade. This information will also enable schools to develop collaborative initiatives with other graduate Catholic leadership programs. Several ACLP members plan to extend this project to survey all diocesan school offices and religious orders to document and communicate, in a most comprehensive fashion, all current efforts to develop Catholic school leaders for the future.
- The School of Education at The University of Dayton, in conjunction with The Center for Catholic Education, will host a private education research conference entitled, "Private Schools: Partners in American Education," November 5-7, 1997. This invitation-only conference will feature keynote addresses, respondent panelists, and break-out sessions that will lead to the crafting of a research agenda for private education that participants will use as a guide to future research initiatives. The conference is a collaborative effort that will include the Associates on Private Education (ARPE), the Council for American Private Education (CAPE), the National Catholic

Educational Association (NCEA), the Association of Christian Schools, and the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS).

Many additional exciting examples exist that represent the excitement and focus that graduate students, Catholic schools, diocesan offices, Catholic colleges and universities, and national Catholic organizations are placing on the need to research the critical issues facing Catholic education. Thanks to this journal, the results of these projects will be more thoroughly communicated to all involved in the ministry of Catholic education.

*Theodore J. Wallace, Ph.D., is director of the Center for Catholic Education at The University of Dayton, 300 College Park, Dayton, OH 45469-0531.*

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