



9-1-2005

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Recommended Citation

Owens, R. F. (2005). Urban Revitalization: A Case Study of One Catholic Elementary School's Journey. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 9 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.0901052013>

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URBAN REVITALIZATION: A CASE STUDY OF ONE CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S JOURNEY

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This article offers background information on U.S. trends in Catholic school enrollment from 1965 through the present, and presents a case study of one school that is attempting to address issues of enrollment, identity, effectiveness, and the elusive but critical essence of making a difference in the lives of students. The importance of leadership, mission, and a sense of community are re-confirmed as essential elements to the future success of Catholic schools in the United States.

INTRODUCTION

Almost 15 years ago, the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) published a report that addressed two key questions: (a) “What is the current status of Catholic schooling in the United States?” and (b) “What does an analysis of recent trends suggest about the prospects for Catholic schools in the future?” (Guerra, 1991, p. 3). The report reviewed demographic information, debates surrounding school effectiveness, and ways in which Catholic schools made a difference in the lives of students, particularly referring to research by Coleman (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982), Greeley (1980), Benson (1986; Benson, Yeager, Wood, Guerra, & Manno, 1986), and Lee (1985; Lee & Stewart, 1989). A review of recently released data (McDonald, 2004; NCEA, 2004) indicates that those two questions and others are as relevant today as they were 15 years ago.

1965-PRESENT

Enrollment in U.S. Catholic schools has declined by 50% during the past 30 years (see Table 1). The number of Catholic schools has decreased by 40%. Minority students comprise more than 25% of the population in Catholic schools. Non-Catholics have increased their presence in these schools as

well. An interesting, but not particularly surprising, number is the increase in lay faculty from 27% to 94.9% in the Catholic schools.

Table 1

Enrollment Trends 1965-2004

	1965	1990	2004	Percentage change 1965-2004
Total enrollment	5.6 million	2.6 million	2,484,252	-55.6%
Number of schools	13,292	8,719	7,955	-40.2%
Minority students	11% (1970)*	23%	26.5%	+15.5%
Non-Catholics	2% (1972)*	12.5%	13.5%	+11.5%
Lay faculty	27%	85%	94.9%	+67.9%
Average elementary tuition	n/a	\$925	\$2,178	+135.5%

Note. *1965 data not available. Sources of data: Brigham (1990); NCEA (1997, 2004).

Enrollment decline is often attributed to rising tuition costs (Baker & Riordan, 1998; Falsani, 2004), a shift in Catholic population, and other demographic shifts such as fewer numbers of children per family (NCEA, 2004). As early as 1973, Gabert noted that the financial strain caused by a need for increased classroom resources to remain competitive in the educational marketplace and the added expense of lay faculty would have a detrimental impact on enrollment. Koob and Shaw (1970) acknowledged a dichotomy in parental perception that was likely to and in fact has had an impact on enrollment trends:

Many Catholic lay people are disturbed by what they regard as the present deficiencies in Catholic education: alleged academic weaknesses; too little emphasis on new theological trends in the Church – or too much emphasis on these same trends; too little emphasis on racial and social justice – or too much; too much old-fashioned discipline – or too much permissiveness; the fact that their children are as likely to be taught by lay teachers as by religious.... There is still a receptive clientele for Catholic schooling, but its attitude is no longer uncritical. (pp. 6-7)

Baker and Riordan (1998) provided a thorough, yet controversial

(Greeley, 1998, 1999) account of the state of Catholic schools in the 1990s. They credited the changing population in the schools – both the student and teacher population – with changing the focus of education in Catholic schools. They hypothesized that the increased presence of students from higher socio-economic families, the increase in non-Catholic students, and the decreased presence of faculty from religious orders resulted in schools emphasizing academics over religion. Consequently, they indicated as an academic system, the Catholic school is viable, but as a religious system, it is essentially on life support. Greeley (1998, 1999) vehemently disagreed with their findings about the “eliting” of the Catholic schools and noted the positive impact of the increase in diversity among students and faculty, while simultaneously acknowledging that need for Catholic schools across the nation to remember their sense of mission.

Much has been written about the importance of Catholic school identity and community and the contributions of these elements to school effectiveness and student achievement (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman et al., 1982; Greeley, 1982; Manno, 1987; Sweeney, 1987). Coleman (1987) in particular introduced the concept of the social capital present in many Catholic schools as key to their effectiveness on multiple levels. He found that students benefited from the strong bonds created in the Catholic school community around the common value system that was often present. The resulting relationships formed the basis of a functional community, a community in which parents, teachers, students, and the wider community of both parish and neighborhood worked together to create a productive and nurturing educational and social environment for the child (Convey, 1987).

The critical role principals, teachers, and parents play in the effectiveness of a school as a learning environment for students is well documented (Convey, 1992; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Fullan, 2003; Hunt, Joseph, & Nuzzi, 2001; Owings & Kaplan, 2003; Wilson & Daviss, 1996). Convey (1987) believed it is the principal who is mainly responsible for creating the positive ethos that supports the development of a functional community, reiterating the widely accepted belief that teachers and parents must work together so that the child may fully benefit from the social capital of the home and learning environment working together.

Despite enrollment declines overall, 230 new Catholic schools have opened since 1985. There are regional differences in enrollment patterns. Enrollment increases are noted in the Plains, Southeast, and West/Far West sections of the United States, while New England, the Mideast and the Great Lakes Region have experienced decreases (Augenstein & Meitler, 2000).

Aside from population issues, why do some schools enroll adequate numbers, while others, often in the same area, experience decline? The remainder of this article will address this question by presenting a case study

from one particular Catholic school. The challenges experienced by this school mirror those of Catholic schools across the country. The purpose is not to generalize findings, but to share information that might be relevant to similar schools, and to take the lessons learned to shed light on how this school's experience could be useful to the wider Catholic school community.

THE CONTEXT

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Archdiocese of Chicago – then the largest non-public school system in the United States – operated 283 schools (242 elementary schools and 41 high schools) serving 112,000 students and employing 5,800 teachers (Office of Catholic Schools, 2003). More than half of these schools are located within the city limits of Chicago; the remainder are in adjacent suburbs. Of the 132 elementary schools in Chicago, populations range from a low of 30 students to a high of 900 students.

This is the story of St. Jude (a pseudonym), one of the Chicago Archdiocesan schools in the lowest population range. During the 2003-2004 academic year, it served 137 PreK through Grade 8 students, ranking it among the 10 smallest Catholic schools in Chicago. In its prime, this 120-year-old school served 1,200 students.

There are eight Catholic elementary schools within a two-mile radius around St. Jude. Two of these schools have waiting lists for enrollment because their buildings have reached capacity; the rest have populations between 198 and 300, ranking all of them in the lower quartile of population size, but not necessarily placing them at risk for potential closure. Seven of the schools have parish affiliations. All eight schools are located in zip codes that tend to be associated with higher income families, but each of the schools draws students from neighborhoods across the city, making them more ethnically and socioeconomically diverse than might be expected otherwise.

Several questions emerge when reviewing St. Jude's enrollment situation: Should efforts be made to keep this school open or is it time to throw in the proverbial towel? Why has St. Jude struggled to maintain enrollment? If schools within walking distance have waiting lists – what keeps these wait-listed students from enrolling at St. Jude's? Schools with comparable numbers have been closed in recent years, why keep this one open? Does St. Jude's fill a need in the community? There are several nearby Catholic schools that could absorb St. Jude's students. In fact, families in the area have multiple public, private, and Catholic school options. Is the school needed?

Answers may appear simple and straightforward, particularly if reviewing this case with hard targets for enrollment and finances: close this school to strengthen enrollment at the other schools; the parish cannot continue to support the school, something it has done at a rate of \$300,000 for each of

the past 3 years. In fact, as pastors, school boards, communities, and archdiocesan officials across the country know, most parish school situations are complex and resist facile analyses.

METHOD

Data for this case study were collected over a 2-year period. To this participant observer who is both an insider (parent of a St. Jude student) and an external resource to the school (university elementary education professor), St. Jude's story proved to be compelling on multiple levels and worthy of documentation. Research questions included: Why is enrollment lower in this school than in other local Catholic schools? Should this school stay open? Can this school stay open? If it should, can it? If it can, should it?

Data sources included over 100 hours of formal and informal interviews with parents, teachers, school board members, students, and alumni, attendance at 45 relevant school meetings, and document analysis, primarily meeting minutes, historical artifacts, and a personal log. The professional and the personal overlapped and intersected in spite of diligent attempts to keep them separate. It was critical, yet admittedly difficult at times, to distinguish between the role of interested parent, who wanted to see the school stay open, and objective researcher, documenting the school's situation. As is necessary in any study, but perhaps even more so in this case, it involved articulating and verifying whether something fell into the category of gossip, hearsay, belief, perception, fact, or a combination of these categories. Additionally, the bias was readily acknowledged and attempts were made to limit it through critical conversations with outside observers, particularly other university education faculty, and rigorous triangulation of data.

DISCUSSION

Several key themes emerge from the analysis of data. These include the critical roles of leadership and communication in providing both a vision and a strategic plan; the awareness of image and articulation of identity for moving revitalization efforts forward; and the importance of actively cultivating a spirit of community. Each theme builds upon the previous one – effective leadership led to better articulation of identity which resulted in a more robust spirit of community. Without the effective leadership, there would have been no story to tell. Consequently, the data will be unfolded chronologically.

RECENT HISTORY

St. Jude is a well-maintained, classic, three-story brick structure that typifies Catholic schools built in the early 20th century. It is similar to other local

Catholic schools in terms of services and activities offered – band, choir, sports teams, before and after school care, and computer lab. Standardized test scores were similar. All of the teachers hold state teacher certificates and, at minimum, a bachelor’s degree in education. The student body is diverse ethnically and economically. The preschool program is accredited by the National Association for the Education of the Young Child (NAEYC), a designation held by only 7% of programs nationwide. In spite of this, between June 2000 and June 2002, enrollment declined from 200 PreK through Grade 8 students to 137.

Two inter-related issues provide clues regarding the drastic enrollment decline. Part of the answer stems from community perception about the school; the other part has to do with issues of school leadership. Public perception is a powerful marketing tool that can work for or against a school. From June of 2000 through June of 2002, it worked against St. Jude’s.

St. Jude parish had been owned and operated by a non-diocesan religious order of priests for over 100 years. In January 2000, the parish became an archdiocesan parish and a new pastor from the priests of the Chicago archdiocese was named. At the conclusion of the 1999-2000 school year, with the approval of the school board, the pastor dismissed the principal of 2 years. A search committee was formed to recruit a new principal, but one was not hired by the beginning of the 2000-2001 academic year. The pastor, newly named associate pastor, school secretary, and classroom teachers divided administrative duties during the 2 subsequent academic years. Each member of the leadership team was capable and competent, but adding administrative duties to their already full plates was a challenge. A teacher noted, “They kept the ship afloat, but couldn’t really plan many adventures for it. We kept our heads above water, but there was a sinking feeling.”

While other schools in the neighborhood undertook aggressive marketing campaigns, St. Jude’s enrollment steadily declined. Rumors began to surface that a new principal had not been hired because the school was slated to close. Class sizes fell as low as 6 children in some grade levels. Although still several hundred dollars a year lower than neighboring schools, tuition rates rose in an attempt to reduce reliance on the parish. The absence of a designated school leader was detrimental not only to enrollment but also to teacher morale, parental commitment, and the curriculum. The future of St. Jude’s School looked bleak.

KEY ROLE OF LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION

Several researchers have documented the critical role the principal plays in the effectiveness of a school (Sebring & Bryk, 2000). Without a competent leader, it is difficult to maintain academic standards, to provide an effective

learning environment, and to sustain overall quality (Fullan, 2003). During the summer of 2002, an experienced administrator from a public suburban school district who held a doctorate in education and a Master's Degree in Special Education accepted the position as principal of St. Jude. In the pastor's announcement to the school community, he noted that the new principal was "an answer to my prayers." While the response to her credentials was one of excitement, there was also suspicion. Several parents articulated similarly themed questions: Why would someone so qualified, making considerably more money, accept this position? Had she been fired? Was there a scandal?

When her former school district's suburban newspaper featured a story noting that this much loved principal had decided to leave her current position because she wished to complete her career where she had started it – in a Catholic school – because this seemed to be a place she could really make a difference, many fears were allayed. She further explained in meetings with parents at the beginning of the school year that she defined "making a difference" as more than keeping St. Jude's open; she welcomed the opportunity to play a role in the spiritual and religious development of children.

The pastor, associate pastor, principal, and school board began working to involve teachers and parents in the re-invigoration of the school. Teachers were relieved of administrative duties they had shouldered for the past 2 years. They were encouraged to participate in professional development activities designed to enhance their teaching skills (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Recognizing the key role parents play in a school (Bauch, 1987), the principal and pastor invited several parents to serve on newly created committees such as fundraising, marketing, grant writing, and technology.

A commitment to keeping the school open was evident through a marked increase in attendance at school meetings and by the number of volunteer service hours contributed at various marketing and fundraising events; however, the writing was on the wall. Unless enrollment increased and the school could become significantly more financially independent, the parish could not afford to keep it open. The pastor was supportive and encouraging, but realistic.

The marketing committee was particularly active and worked diligently to develop and implement a plan for recruiting prospective students. Efforts focused predominantly on enrollment in the preschool and kindergarten grades since the demographics of the parish and the surrounding neighborhood indicated that there were many families with young children. One marketing committee member believed strongly "If we can get people to come in the door, they'll want to be a part of St. Jude's, but most of them don't even know we're here. We have to get the word out." As a result of the marketing efforts, more prospective parents toured the school during the first

open house of academic year 2002-2003 than had visited the school the entire previous year.

In December of 2002, an announcement at a Parent Night meeting took many by surprise and was met with dissension. The pastor, principal, and school board had voted to re-name the school Jude Academy and Arts Center. Several parents voiced concern that they had not been asked about eliminating "St." from the name, or about creating an arts curriculum focus. The stated fears were that the school, in its attempt to market to a wider population, was de-emphasizing its Catholic roots, and because of the arts emphasis, that it was going to become a school similar to the one in the movie *Fame* with students dancing and singing in the hallways.

The principal and pastor clarified that arts would be infused throughout the curriculum: it would not replace the core subjects, but rather supplement and strengthen them. Developing an integrated fine arts curriculum was seen as something that would set St. Jude's apart from other schools in the neighborhood. This was a change that was initiated in consultation with the archdiocese. Several Chicago public schools have re-invented themselves as schools with a particular curricular emphasis. Admission to these magnet schools is highly sought by students across the city. The thought was that the same magnet school concept could work to the advantage of Catholic schools.

The principal and pastor explained that adding "Academy" to the name would emphasize a strong commitment to academics. The addition of academy to the name was not controversial. A strong rationale for eliminating "St." was more difficult to ascertain and generated considerable debate. The pastor emphasized that the decision was not made lightly. Extensive discussions were held with the school board and with the archdiocesan marketing consultant. A parent asked if this was a marketing strategy designed to attract a more diverse student body, particularly non-Catholics. The pastor consistently stated that the new name should in no way be interpreted as a strategy to hide Catholic identity. It was not a shifting of focus away from the religious basis of the school. A school board member articulated the belief that despite the removal of "St." from the name, the Catholic identity of the school would still be evident to anyone who walked in the door. This evidence included tangible items, such as statues of saints, crucifixes on the walls, and uniforms, as well as the intangible, such as a spirit of community. The school would continue to welcome children of all religions, but Jude Academy would remain in mission and practice, a Catholic school. Whether out of rebellion or habit, many parents continue to refer to the school as St. Jude Academy.

The principal's vision and direction provided critical leadership during this period. After the dust settled, parent and teacher concerns fell into spe-

cific categories. Teachers were concerned that they did not have adequate preparation to infuse the arts into the curriculum. Some welcomed the challenge and sought out professional development to help them in this endeavor. Parents wanted to know what would be eliminated during the day to make time for the arts curriculum. The principal shared concrete examples of how the arts would be used to enhance the regular school curriculum, not replace it (e.g., bringing poets-in-residence and artists-in-residence into the classroom to team teach with the teachers). A local theatre group would provide a drama program during the language arts block.

Some parents believed those were “nice little extra things” but were not entirely necessary. One consistent concern was that the school had computers and Internet access, but it was not particularly state of the art or integrated into the curriculum. A vocal group of parents expressed a desire to have money spent on technology, rather than poets and artists. One parent’s comment, “I like art as much as the next guy, but I’d rather have my child be able to compete in the technology world,” summed up the feelings of many.

The principal continuously provided information over the next several months to help parents, teachers, and students gain a better understanding of what the “Arts Center” part of the name would mean in practice as well as in concept. Educational articles were distributed and discussions were held. Misconceptions were addressed and a better understanding of how the design would be implemented emerged. Teacher reports of their personal levels of comfort improved as the next year progressed and as one explained, she realized, “It doesn’t mean I have to be a singer or dancer to work here.” It is interesting to note that for most people, an “arts focus” was equated with the performing arts, rather than any of the other multiple art forms.

Prospective parents at open houses tended to respond favorably to the idea of exposure to the arts for their child, but consistently followed up with questions about academic rigor and test scores. They often indicated that they were excited about the possibilities for arts integration, especially people who had an arts background themselves, but they wanted academics to be a priority. The either/or perception was typical.

In hindsight, the principal later wondered if it may have been a safer choice to select science, math, or technology as the thread that binds the curriculum together since those tend to be more readily accepted as important for academic success. On the other hand, the issue for some parents did not seem to be the curricular area of focus, but instead, the perceived lack of communication in developing the new focus and resulting name change. Teachers and parents consistently voiced opinions that after the announcement about the changes were made, the principal provided effective leadership through the transition from St. Jude to Jude Academy. It is clear that she was responsible for leading efforts to create a positive ethos (Convey, 1987).

“HOW CATHOLIC IS THIS SCHOOL?” UNDERSTANDINGS OF IMAGE AND IDENTITY

Boyer (1983) has written extensively about the importance of a school having a clear vision that is shared by all stakeholders. For Catholic schools this vision is centralized around mission and identity. What does it mean to be a Catholic school? Catholic schools often have reputations for academic rigor, but should the identity move beyond academics? Casey (2002) suggests that Catholic schools explicitly identify themselves as places where the students and adults “live faith, community, and service” (p. 11). In an effort to market themselves to a wider community, some schools may choose to downplay their Catholic image (McCready, 1989). Parents at St. Jude’s struggled with this issue. They understood that they needed to attract more students, but they wondered if that mandated de-emphasizing the faith-based nature of the school, in favor of highlighting the arts focus or academic rigor during conversations with prospective families.

Catholic parents new to the school indicated that they wanted their child to go to a Catholic school so they would participate in religion classes, but they emphasized academics as equally, if not more important to them. They often asked several questions about academics, test scores, and high school admittance, but very few questions about how religion was taught. Non-Catholic parents generally did ask questions about how religion was taught, and asked in particular if instruction was more values/morality based than “religion” based. This was a difficult question to address; what exactly was the right answer for that question? In terms of enticing enrollment, was there one answer for Catholics, and a different “right” answer for non-Catholics? The perhaps vague, but seemingly satisfactory answer offered by most open house tour guides was that the school’s emerging identity was as an arts and academic center that focused on children’s spiritual development that was respectful of their backgrounds.

As interest in the school expanded and applications began to increase, tour guides noted more of a sense of confidence in stating that the school was Catholic in mission and identity. One tour guide noted:

A prospective parent asked yesterday “How Catholic is this school?” She explained that she’s not Catholic so she was a little worried about her child being exposed to a lot of Catholic stuff, but she likes the arts focus. I wondered if anyone ever walks into the Jewish Day School and asks, “How Jewish is this school?” I told her that everyone is welcome here, but that yes, there is a lot of “Catholic stuff” that goes on. I might have de-emphasized that before, but it’s one of our strengths so I don’t feel a need to hide it.

Another tour guide commented, "I was giving a tour to a woman who said she was impressed with the local public preschool. She said, 'Other than the Catholic thing, how are you different from the public preschool?' I told her I couldn't exclude the 'Catholic thing' and still adequately answer her question. That's the basis of our community."

PURPOSEFUL BUILDING OF COMMUNITY

Interviews with families newly enrolled during the 2004-2005 academic year indicated that their decisions regarding which schools to visit relied heavily on perceptions and things they had heard. This is consistent with issues of perception as described by Keebler (1997): "Whether you realize it or not, the school sends strong signals to the community and parish" (p. 11). People could not necessarily articulate what those messages were, but there was something that drew them to visit the school. Most talked about having heard that the school was turning itself around. Several indicated that they knew someone who had enrolled their child the previous year and loved it.

Notably, when probed further about what made them decide to enroll in the school or stay even after they had been accepted in a first choice school, Catholic and non-Catholics alike responded with indicators often associated with faith-based communities. These included feeling a sense of belonging, enjoying the relationships they had developed with people who seemed to share common values, and appreciating the emphasis on nurturing that was evident. Many used words like warm, inviting, welcoming, caring, and spiritual to describe the school community.

Hudson (2003) emphasized that cultivation of community must be intentionally and purposefully nurtured. Common experiences, purposes, beliefs, ethics, values, and intentions serve to bond people in relationships. Many parents shared stories about wanting to be a part of the St. Jude's community. Several Catholic families indicated that they changed parish affiliations when their child began attending St. Jude because they wanted to worship on Sundays with the other families.

Participation in both the school and parish community by families with young children increased noticeably. The school fundraiser which raised \$30,000 during 2002-2003, netted \$80,000 during 2003-2004. Membership in Father's Club increased from 6 to 30 in 1 year. Membership in Mother's Club changed from a majority of alumna of the school and women whose children graduated years prior, to include a majority of women who currently had children in the school. Parishioners equipped a designated parent and tots room to be used for babies and toddlers during the 10:30 Sunday family Mass. A special Liturgy of the Word was created for older children in another room during this Mass. These efforts seemed to convey to families that they are welcome and wanted at this parish.

CONNECTING TO THE LARGER COMMUNITY

When the new dean joined the School of Education in 2001-2002 at a local Catholic university, she sought from faculty members recommendations of partner schools—public and Catholic – for an initiative which would bring a host of university resources into elementary classrooms. St. Jude’s was recommended as a partner school, but it was not selected primarily due to its size. Several months later, the dean served on an archdiocesan accreditation team that was assigned to review St. Jude’s. The following week, noting that she had “absolutely fallen in love with that little school” she added them to the official partner list. The dean commented that in her visits to the school, she was impressed with the leadership abilities of the principal and with the commitment of the teachers. Additionally, she commented that the school had a good feeling about it.

Partnerships between universities and community agencies have become increasingly popular during the last two decades (Walsh et al., 2000). Often, the overarching goal of partnerships is to provide access to a wider array of resources for both partners (Harkavy, 1999). The university has benefited from this partnership through access to classrooms for education majors completing clinical experiences and through research opportunities for faculty members. One of the advantages for the school is that it has the opportunity to work with the university’s art department, music school, and theatre school to strengthen its arts curriculum. While the arts focus initially met with dissension at the school, the prospect of partnering with the university in an initiative that included an arts emphasis was greeted with excitement and enthusiasm from parents and teachers. Perhaps the presence of the university legitimizes the arts in the curriculum.

CONCLUSIONS

Enrollment at St. Jude’s has increased from 137 to 165 during the past 2 years. Enrollment for the 2005-2006 academic year is expected to reach almost 200. There is currently a waiting list for one of the preschool programs. Attendance at open houses for prospective families has increased by 90% from 2 years ago. How did this happen?

First and foremost, the pastor, associate pastor, and principal provided capable and consistent leadership. Second, marketing is no longer left to hearsay; instead there is a strategic plan to market the school for its strengths of academic rigor, arts-based curriculum, and faith-based community. Third, parents, teachers, and students work to cultivate a spirit of community within the school and larger community. The partnerships with the parish and the university in particular have served to increase the positive perceptions of the school.

Parents responded regularly in interviews about their experiences at St. Jude that they were making a difference and felt a sense of belonging. Families that had joined the school since 2002 in particular were clear in their enthusiasm for St. Jude. They valued being a part of the re-invigoration of the school. They saw tangible results for their recruiting and marketing efforts. It is of course possible that they would feel the same sense of satisfaction participating in the re-invigoration of any school. Rallying around a common goal often creates feelings of camaraderie and a sense of community.

While the majority of families who have been in the school for more than 3 years welcomed the marketing and recruiting efforts, there were those who resented the efforts. The prospect of an increase in class size was a concern for some. "My child is in a class with seven other children. I don't want him to be in a class with 20 kids. I like the small size of the school." The problematic part of this perspective was the belief that a school with eight children in a classroom would remain open much longer.

Children in Grades 4 through 8 are more representative of a diverse population than are those in preschool through Grade 3. The population of the school has shifted, as has the population of the neighborhood. At one meeting, a parent referred to "those rich people trying to take over our school." It is clear that the families served by the school have changed, but to categorize the families who joined the school during the last 3 years as "those rich people" would be inaccurate. That said, if the school wants to maintain its diverse population, efforts will need to be made to assure students from a variety of backgrounds choose to attend and can afford to attend St. Jude's.

The pastor and the archdiocese have acknowledged the strides the school has made in enrollment and in becoming more financially independent from the parish. If these forward trends continue, then the "Can this school remain open" question should be answered in the affirmative. There are enough children in the neighborhood to create viable enrollment figures that match or exceed surrounding schools. Attendance at open houses for prospective families indicates St. Jude's is seen as a feasible choice by greater numbers than in the past. Thus, the question becomes, "Should this school remain open? What is unique about St. Jude's that sets it apart and justifies its existence?" That is more difficult to answer.

Based on professional and systematic analysis of the quality of the education students receive, there is justification to answer yes to that question, but it must also be acknowledged that the other neighborhood schools offer high quality academic programs as well, so that alone does not necessarily make St. Jude's stand apart. The St. Jude students appear to be happy, content, and nurtured at this school. The parents consistently indicate their satisfaction with the school. Parents value belonging to the St. Jude's community. They look forward to seeing each other each day at drop off and pick

up times. They look forward to praying together at Mass on Sundays and to participating in school functions.

But again, it is likely that could be said about experiences of parents at other local Catholic schools. In actuality, that is the point. The question is not necessarily “What sets St. Jude’s apart from other local Catholic schools?” Perhaps the better question is “How does each Catholic school contribute to the overall existence of a local functional community beyond the walls of each individual building?” Thinking more globally about the Catholic community, not just about a specific, though beloved, school or parish may be more useful to the preservation of Catholic schools.

In 1966, McCluskey wrote in relation to speculation about the future of Catholic schools, “It is always easier to explain how we got where we are than to predict where we’re going....But where are we going? And have we got the fuel to get there?” (pp. 13, 17). Clark (2001) is hopeful there is ample fuel, believing that the 21st century will be the golden age of Catholic education. According to Clark, Catholic schools will experience a re-invigoration during the coming years because “the opportunities for ever-deepening religious and spiritual refreshments are without end” (p. 36).

St. Jude’s provides an example of a functional community that utilizes its social capital and human capital to benefit the children. St. Jude’s has increased enrollment, the quality of its education, and its ability to impact the spiritual development of the children because it capitalizes on competent leadership, involved parents, capable teachers, and a commitment to preserving its Catholic identity. For those reasons alone, it would be desirable to say that it deserves to stay open, but that may be too altruistic in that it disregards other issues, particularly parish fiscal responsibility.

Steinfelds (2003) advocates taking a perspective that recognizes the role of Catholic schools, individually and as a system, in the broader mission of Catholic institutions:

The Catholic Church in the United States has embedded its tradition in institutions. These institutions have always done their work based on the tradition’s deepest understanding of what it means to be human: to be human is to be a social being; it is to live and die in a community of love and affection....Catholic education as it begins its next 100 years must enlarge its mission, extend its reach, enrich the Catholic community and thereby enrich culture. Do more, for more people. (pp. 13-14)

Gone are the days when Catholic families send their children exclusively to the local parish school. There may be no parish school, the parish school may be too expensive, the parish school may have a waiting list, or the parish school may elicit a negative perception. Perhaps rather than the individualistic, survival of the fittest approach that has emerged during the

past several decades, endeavors should be focused on improving the collective reputation of Catholic schools as a system to the benefit of all schools, allowing each to do more for more people. Catholic schools and those trying to preserve them must not become myopic.

Realistically, each school will have its individual strengths and should market accordingly, but the overall goals of marketing should recognize the collective identity and the strength of the larger functional community of which each school is a part. The essence of parish life is the spirit that acknowledges the communal nature of our existence; this is at the heart of the Catholic school system.

This re-envisioning of the collective beyond the individual identity requires conversations regarding common understandings about mission and goals. It requires discussions about maintaining a Catholic identity in a system that out of necessity and desire welcomes children from other faiths and all socioeconomic backgrounds. It requires visionary leadership at all levels of the Catholic educational system. Most importantly, it requires that Catholic schools and those who wish to help them enter their golden age recognize that their community is not confined to a brick and mortar boundary.

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