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Faculty Prayer in Catholic Schools: A Survey of Practices and Meaning

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This article presents a research study that utilized a web-based survey to gather data about the communal prayer experiences of faculty members in Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the United States and the meaning that such prayer holds to its participants. Key findings show that faculty prayer experiences take place readily, though frequency and form vary greatly. Faculty prayer is valued and desired by the overwhelming majority of its participants. Challenges are also acknowledged with the most prevalent relating to time and/or scheduling issues. Suggestions for addressing needs and challenges are provided.

According to the Vatican document *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 1988), the environment in a Catholic school is to be "illumined by the light of faith" (§25) and the "prime responsibility for creating [the] unique Christian school climate rests with the teachers, as individuals and as a community" (§26). Teachers share a responsibility to make faith tangible and expressed in myriad ways. Faith must be communicated within instruction and revealed through interactions. It must be made palpable within moments of celebration and times of challenge. Indeed, this is what Pope Benedict XVI (2008) addressed in a speech to Catholic educators: "Each and every aspect of learning communities reverberate within the ecclesial life of faith" (p. 3). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB; 2005), in its document *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium,* also highlights an important message to educators: "Catholic school personnel should be grounded in a faith-based Catholic culture, have strong bonds to Christ and the Church, and be witnesses to the faith in both their words and actions" (p. 10).

Faith is nurtured through a life of prayer, both personal and communal (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994). In a Catholic school setting, the prayer of the community can take several forms. One is the prayer of the Catholic school faculty. This article presents survey data on the practices of

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faculty prayer taking place within Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the United States and the meaning that such prayer holds to its participants.

Review of Literature

Catholic school faculty members serve the Church's mission as members of a faith community and "by their witness and their behavior are of the first importance to impart a distinctive character to Catholic schools" (CCE, 1977, §78). Their momentous responsibilities as sharers of faith encourage that they tend to their own faith formation. Shimabukuro (2004) in a review of Church documents concluded that "at its most fundamental level, Catholic school teaching consists of sharing one's faith with students, while concurrently deepening one's own faith" (p. 139) and research shows that teachers' awareness of their own spirituality and ability to express this spirituality favorably impacts the teacher-student relationship and supports the child's spirituality (Kennedy & Duncan, 2006). Shimabukuro (1998) also posited five themes in earlier research "depicting the teacher as a community builder (1) who is additionally committed to his or her ongoing personal spiritual/religious formation (2) and professional development (3) and to the spiritual/religious formation (4) and human development (5) of his or her students" (p. 17). Nuzzi (2002), when referring to this research of Shimabukuro, noted that "plans to strengthen Catholic identity in any school should consider the important role of the faculty, not only in carrying out the school-wide plan, but also in terms of their own spiritual development and lifelong learning" (p. 13). Prayer is an integral aspect of teacher faith formation and spiritual development.

Prayer Defined

"Great is the mystery of faith!" begins the section on prayer in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994). It continues:

> The Church professes this mystery in the Apostles' Creed and celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy, so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father. This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer. (§ 2558)

As noted in the catechism and acknowledged by theologians and spiritual writers (Cunningham, 1989; Fink, 1984; Morneau, 1998; Rupp, 2007), prayer is about relationship with God. Through prayer, the person praying is invited

to meet God, to listen, and then to respond in how life is lived. An ever-deepening relationship with God calls forth concern and love of neighbor (Morneau, 1998; O'Keefe, 2007).

Christian prayer includes both personal and communal prayer. While personal prayer is generally thought of as praying alone, communal prayer assumes a gathering of individuals. Christ spoke, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst" (Matt. 18:20, New American Version). Throughout the Catholic Church's history, the tradition of gathering to pray is evidenced in such practices as praying the Liturgy of the Hours and celebrating the Eucharist (Raab & Hagan, 2007).

Yet despite their distinctions, personal and communal forms of prayer are very much interconnected. Fink (1984) writes that they are "two faces of our relationship with God" (p. 492), noting that every person brings the depth of their personal relationship with God to the public prayer experience as well as bringing their public actions and relationships to their personal and private prayer moments. Morneau (1998) writes that "prayer isn't really prayer without both" (p. 77). In the Old Testament, the people of God gathered to pray the Psalms and their prayer reveals this personal/communal dynamic (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994); in the New Testament, Christ's own prayer reveals this interwoven reality. About Christ, Fink (1984) writes, "the public, communal form of his prayer is the context of the personal form, and the personal form is the content of the communal" (p. 489).

In a Catholic school, the prayer of the community is an aspect of the Catholic school culture. Culture is shaped by a group's shared values and beliefs (Deal & Kennedy, 1983; Sergiovanni, 1984) and in a Catholic school setting, these ideals include Catholic core convictions, common meanings*,* Gospel values, and traditions such as prayer (Cook, 2001; Earl, 2005). Describing Catholic school culture, Cook (2001) writes that it is a

> way of life, rooted in Christ, a Gospel-based creed and code, and a Catholic vision that provides inspiration and identity, is shaped over time, and is passed from one generation to the next through devices that capture and stimulate the Catholic imagination such as symbols and traditions. (p. 16)

According to Cook, traditions include routine rituals, those repeated practices undertaken by the group that reinforce values and provide structure and meaning. Communal prayer would qualify as one such routine. Cook writes, "If routine rituals can serve to remind people of their culture and its values, then it makes sense that a Catholic school would make prayer as routine as taking attendance" (p. 48).

Research on Prayer

Spiritual writers readily note prayer's power to transform attitudes, actions, relationships, and worldview (O'Keefe, 2007; Rupp, 2007; Silf, 2004). Silf (2004) writes: "We will know the power of prayer by its fruits, though these fruits may be a long while in ripening. Hard hearts may soften, old resentments yield to new compassion, breakdown leads to breakthrough" (p. 132). Francis and Evans (1995) reviewed empirical research on the subjective effects of prayer and concluded that there are "certain positive psychological or behavioral concomitants of practicing prayer or of living a prayerful life" (p. 379). These include quality of life and purpose in life. Poloma and Pendleton (1989/2001) used data gathered via telephone interviews in the annual Akron Area Survey ($n = 560$) to consider the relationship between prayer and perceptions of quality of life and concluded that a positive relationship exists. Four types of prayer were identified—meditative, ritualistic, petitionary, and colloquial—and were found to relate differently to five quality of life indicators: life satisfaction, existential well-being, happiness, negative affect, and religious satisfaction. Specifically, they determined that existential well-being and religious satisfaction are affected by meditative prayer, negative affect by ritual prayer, happiness by colloquial prayer, and no indicators by petitionary prayer. They concluded that the five dimensions of quality of life "show differing relationships with forms of prayer but a consistent and positive relationship with prayer experience" (p. 255). Francis and Evans (1996/2001) utilized a questionnaire with 12- to 15-year-olds in England comparing two groups, those that never attended church ($n = 1,640$) and those that attended most weeks ($n = 669$), and through the data concluded a definite positive relationship between personal prayer and perceived purpose in life. The authors write, "the frequency of personal prayer is, therefore, an important predictor of perceived purpose in life both among adolescents who never attend church and among adolescents who attend church most weeks" (p. 278).

In addition to studies on the subjective effects of prayer, a number of survey studies quantify prayer practices and/or importance to individuals. Poloma and Gallup (1991) conducted a national study and through interviews ($n = 1,030$) found that nearly 9 out of 10 Americans acknowledge praying, and within prayer, "experience a deep sense of peace and the strong presence of God" (p. 128). This research targeted the general population and was not specific to Catholic school teachers, nor were interview questions specific to communal prayer practices. In a more related study, Benson and Guerra (1985) implemented a 260-question survey to Catholic high school teachers

(n = 1,062) to ascertain beliefs and values. Their survey included a 12-question section entitled "Religious Practices and Experiences," and within their findings they note that "8 out of 10 teachers report a fairly active prayer life" (p. 27). Their research, however, does not mention communal faculty prayer.

It was the intent of this research to explore the communal prayer practices of the Catholic school faculty in elementary and secondary schools, or the body of administrators and teachers working in elementary and secondary Catholic schools. The primary questions addressed included the following:

1. What are the practices of faculty prayer taking place within Catholic schools in the United States?

2. What does participation in faculty prayer mean to its participants?

3. Do Catholic school faculty members believe that their communal gathering for faculty prayer impacts the life of the school community? If so, in what ways?

Methodology

A survey instrument with selected response and open-ended questions was developed and implemented for data collection. Quantitative methods were used to provide a statistical analysis of selected response survey items. A qualitative analysis of narrative responses obtained through open-ended questions considered emerging themes. A combination of both data forms provides a rich data set giving a fuller picture of faculty prayer practices and what participation in these practices means to participants.

Participants

Participants for this study were elementary and secondary Catholic school faculty members (n = 702). Faculty members were contacted from three (arch)dioceses for each of five regions in the United States (see Figure 1). For each region—northeast, south, west, southwest, and northwest—teachers from dioceses within at least two different states were contacted. Some of the dioceses constituted large urban areas and others more rural. Dioceses were selected based upon location and size so that a variety of voices could be gathered through the survey.

One thousand, seven hundred fifty faculty members were contacted via e-mail (350 individuals per region) with 44 returned as non deliverable and with 702 responding. This represents a response rate of 41%.
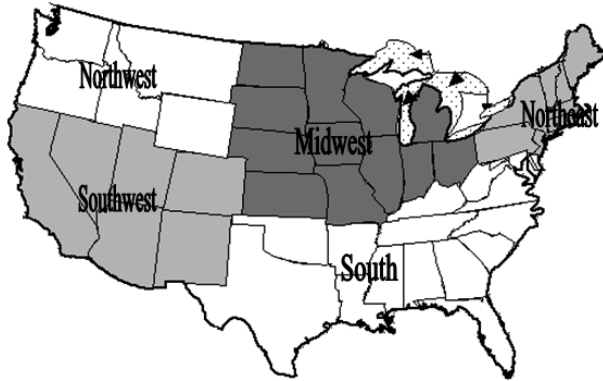
Figure 1. Regions of the United States from which the sample was drawn.

Instrument

This research study utilized a 21-item electronic survey instrument developed specifically for this study. Questions were developed to provide data for three areas: (1) respondent demographics; (2) practices of faculty prayer taking place within Catholic schools; and (3) the meaning of such practices for participants. Questions utilized both closed and open formats.

The survey instrument consisted of originally developed items that took into account the researcher's interest in the prayer experiences for faculty taking place in Catholic schools as well as their meaning to participants. As the instrument was specifically designed for this study, it was tested for content validity by a small group of Catholic school faculty members and a spiritual director. Their questions and/or suggestions were incorporated into the design.

Design and Procedure

The study was initiated in October 2008. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent via e-mail in which a link to the electronic survey was included. E-mail addresses were obtained through the Internet, specifically via school websites. Thus, only teachers and administrators whose e-mail addresses were readily available online were contacted. Participation was entirely voluntary. Invitations were sent during a four-month period: October 2008 through January 2009. Only one invitation was sent to each teacher and administrator.

As noted above, the response rate for survey participation was 41%. This research does not make the claim that the percent of respondents represents any particular region of the country, type of diocese, or percentage of Catholic

school faculty members. Further, it does not claim to represent the non re-spondent group. Rather, the use of the survey merely provides for a popula-tion of Catholic school faculty members from varied dioceses to be included for a consideration of their perceptions.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis of this study's quantitative data was utilized to provide percentages of each type of survey response along with means and standard deviations when appropriate. Descriptive statistics were used to iden-tify emerging themes related to respondent demographics, practices of faculty prayer taking place, and meaning of the prayer gatherings to participants.

Narrative responses obtained through open-ended questions provided ad-ditional data. These were added to a database file for qualitative analysis to consider emerging themes. One question prompted respondents to "Describe a meaningful faculty prayer experience in which you have participated." Textual responses to this question were coded in multiple ways. First, catego-ries from a closed-ended survey item asking participants what prayer experi-ences take place at the school provided a set of responses that were utilized as codes for reviewing the textual data of this open-ended item. Second, cat-egories from yet another survey question, asking participants what form or forms of prayer were used, provided a different set of codes. Because some comments could not easily be categorized by either set of these codes, a third review of all textual data created new codes. In the end, all data was triple-coded, once according to prayer experience, once according to prayer form, and once by emergent categories. A second question prompted respondents to "List up to three challenges that you experience related to faculty prayer." Codes were developed in the analysis of this data as meaning emerged. For this open-response item, 13 coded areas were defined.

Survey Findings

Demographic Information

Demographic data show that the majority of the faculty members worked in schools with a faculty size between 20 and 40 members (50.6%) or small-er (25%). The majority of respondents were female (80%), which closely matches the ratio of those contacted (81% and 19%) as well as the ratio of female/male teachers in Catholic schools (78% and 22%) reported in the *Annual Statistical Report on Schools, Enrollment, and Staffing* (McDonald & Schultz, 2008). The majority of respondents fell within the age ranges of 40–49 and 50–59 (24.2% and 29.1%, respectively), though all age ranges were

Table 1

Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics	*n*	Percent
Sex		
Female	493	80.3
Male	121	19.7
Age		
20-29	94	15.3
30-39	115	18.7
40-49	149	24.2
50-59	179	29.1
> 60	78	12.7
Position		
Early elementary teacher (K1-2)	107	18.0
Upper elementary teacher (3-5)	103	17.3
Middle grades teacher (6-8)	119	20.0
High school teacher	172	28.9
Administrator other than principal	25	4.2
School principal	69	11.6
Experience		
First-year teacher	46	7.5
2–5 years experience in a Catholic schoo	147	24.0
6–15 years experience working in a Catholic school	203	33.2
16+ years experience working in a Catholic school	217	35.3
Religion		
Catholic	556	91
Christian	55	9

represented. Level of experience shows that the majority had 6 or more years teaching experience within a Catholic school (68.5%) with slightly more than half of that percent having more than 15 years experience (35.3%). The overwhelming majority of respondents were Catholic (90.3%). Table 1 presents a summary of the descriptive information about respondents' characteristics.

Practices of Faculty Prayer Taking Place within Catholic schools

Six questions asked respondents to name the faculty prayer experiences taking place at their schools. Data showed that prayer before meetings is the most common prayer experience taking place (94.8%), though this is closely

Table 2

Practices of Faculty Prayer Taking Place within Catholic schools

Practice	n	Percent
Prayer experiences for faculty taking place*	n = 667	
Prayer before meetings	632	94.8
Mass	617	92.5
Prayer to begin the day	529	79.3
Faculty retreat	500	75.0
Scripture study/faith sharing	143	21.4
Frequency of faculty prayer**	n = 665	
Daily	203	30.6
A few times a week	36	5.4
Once a week	165	24.8
Less than once a week	261	39.3
Who leads faculty prayer**	n = 664	
Principal	175	26.4
Faculty members take turns	371	56.0
Other (campus minister, religion director, priest, or member of spirituality committee)	118	17.8
Most commonly used form of prayer in faculty prayer gatherings**	n = 661	
Faith sharing	12	1.8
Gospel reflection	31	4.7
Intercessory prayer	27	4.1
Liturgy of the Hours	5	0.8
Spontaneous invocation	44	6.7
Traditional prayer (Our Father, Hail Mary)	161	24.4
Use of Scripture	61	9.2
Use of resource book (or devotional) for facilitating prayer	275	41.7
Other (some combination of the above, composed prayers, music or poetry)	45	6.8

 *Respondents asked to check all that apply.
**Respondents asked to consider faculty prayer experiences other than attending Mass.

followed by participation in Mass (92.5%). The least likely prayer experience occurring is Scripture study/faith sharing (21.4%). Faculty prayer is occurring less than weekly (39.3%) in some schools and daily (30.6%) in others. When it comes to leading prayer, the majority of respondents noted that faculty members take turns (56%), though in some settings the principal is the primary leader (26.4%) or another designated person assumes primary responsibility (e.g., campus minister, religion director, priest, or member of spirituality committee; 17.8%).

Though a variety of prayer forms are experienced, the form most commonly used when the faculty gathers to pray is a resource book (or devotional) to lead prayer (41.7%). The second most common experience is the recitation of a traditional prayer like the Our Father or Hail Mary (24.4%). Fifty-nine percent of the respondents believed that the amount of time the faculty gathers for prayer was adequate. Table 2 presents a summary of practices of faculty prayer taking place within Catholic schools.

The Meaning of Prayer Experiences for Participants

Survey participants were asked a number of questions about what faculty prayer meant for them and how they believed it influenced aspects of their school life, including open-response questions. Overwhelmingly, respondents described faculty prayer as meaningful to them and impacting the life of the school. However, there were challenges that respondents described in relation to faculty prayer; the greatest challenge related to time.

Two questions asked respondents to rate the extent to which they believed praying as a school faculty mattered to them personally and impacted various aspects of school life. Over half of the respondents noted that praying as a school faculty greatly mattered to them (59.9%) and believed that such prayer greatly strengthens the school's Catholic identity (76.9%), incarnates the school's mission statement (70.9%), and gives witness to the greater school community (61.8%). Participants did not believe as strongly about faculty prayer's impact on their teaching or administration (43.6% responding greatly), school decisions (35.6%), or job satisfaction (42.9%). Responses show that participants believe more strongly in the public witness of their communal faculty prayer and slightly less in its daily influence. (See Table 3 for a summary of response percents, means, and standard deviations.)

Open-ended questions provided greater insight into what praying as a school faculty meant for each respondent. The first of these questions asked participants to "describe a meaningful faculty prayer experience in which you have participated." Four hundred eighty-six individuals chose to provide a response. Of those, a few (3.3%) noted that no experiences were meaningful while others expanded their notion of faculty prayer to include praying as a school community (2%). Of those remaining, certain themes emerged.

Responses were initially coded according to event (see Table 4). In doing so, it became evident that retreats are meaningful prayer experiences for many faculty members. The data shows that 3 out of every 10 respondents (29.8%) noted a retreat experience as a meaningful prayer experience to them. Of that number, some focused their comments on personal time for prayer provided

Table 3

Meaning of Prayer Experiences: Percent, Mean, and Standard Deviation of Responses

	Percent				*n*	*Mean*	*SD*
	1	2	3	4			
To what extent does praying as a school faculty…							
matter to you?	1.2	6.5	32.6	59.9	666	3.51	.67
provide an experience of God?	2.1	13.2	34.8	50.1	661	3.33	.78
deepen personal/collegial spirituality?	3.0	10.6	36.1	50.5	662	3.34	.79
impact your teaching/(if an administrator) your administration?	3.3	17.9	35.3	43.6	658	3.19	.84
increase your awareness of colleague experiences and needs?	3.8	13.2	31.8	51.4	658	3.30	.84
To what extent do you believe praying as a school faculty…							
strengthens the school's Catholic identity?	0.6	3.6	19.0	76.9	668	3.72	.56
incarnates the school's mission statement?	1.2	5.0	23.1	70.9	663	3.63	.64
impacts schools decisions?	5.9	19.5	39.1	35.6	662	3.04	.89
contributes to positive collegial relationships?	1.8	9.9	35.1	53.3	664	3.40	.74
influences job satisfaction?	4.5	16.1	36.7	42.9	660	3.18	.86
gives witness to greater school community?	2.7	8.3	27.3	61.8	659	3.48	.76

Note. Responses were coded 1 = *not at all*, 2 = *minimally*, 3 = *moderately*, 4 = *greatly*

to them while others highlighted the time for sharing and strengthening community with fellow faculty members. Both personal prayer and communal sharing are important aspects of the retreat experience as noted by one respondent: "Retreat times are great because there are no other challenges for our time—just ourselves and God. I like the times when a Gospel passage is repeated several times and we can listen for specific words, or ideas." Another respondent stated, "We shared at a staff retreat when we most feel the presence of God. It was a good experience to hear everyone share and also learn about their relationships with God."

According to other data gleaned in the survey, only 75% of schools currently hold faculty prayer retreats. Their meaning for participants might point to the

Table 4

Percent of Participants Noting the Experience as "A Meaningful Prayer Experience"

Prayer Experience	Percent
Faculty retreat	29.8
Mass	6.4
Prayer to begin the day	9.9
Prayer before meetings	3.1
Scripture study/faith sharing	4.7

Note. *n* = 486.

need for more opportunities of retreat afternoons or days during which faculty members have time for both personal reflection and communal sharing.

Responses were also coded to consider prayer form. When comparing this data to data of the most readily used prayer form for faculty prayer, polarized results are noted: Many respondents find faith sharing, intercessory prayer, and Gospel reflection meaningful to them, yet these forms occur far less often in schools than using resource books/devotionals for leading prayer and praying a traditional prayer like the Our Father (see Table 5). This might point to the infrequency of use, thus making the prayer experience more profound when it does occur; or, alternatively, it may be that because it is more personal, it is more meaningful. This latter point was especially striking in the responses as the following examples illustrate: "The most meaningful are the intercessory experiences that illuminate the support we have for each other." "I always welcome the opportunity to share things that are on my mind or things that I'd like to pray for. By listening to other faculty members' intentions, it gives me insight into what's going on in their lives."

A third process of coding focused on descriptive elements of the prayer experience. A priori codes were not used; rather themes emerged. The most readily described element was sharing (42.4%). Responses highlight sharing experiences, personal reflections, needs, and prayer intentions (see Table 6). The following two examples illustrate: "I like when the faculty member shares why they chose a specific prayer and how it affects them. I like that we always include prayers of the faithful."

> When I was diagnosed with breast cancer, I felt the love, care, concern, and prayers of those I work with. A few days before my surgery the priest came to my classroom after school and did the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Many of those I work with were able to share that experience with me.

Table 5

A Comparison of Prayer Form Most Commonly Used When the School Faculty Gathers to Pray and Prayer Form Described in Recalling a Meaningful Prayer Experience

	Prayer form most commonly used when the school faculty gathers to pray (percent)*	Prayer form described in recalling a meaningful prayer experience (percent)**
Use of a resource book/devotional	41.7	4.7
Traditional prayer (Our Father, Hail Mary, etc.)	24.4	0.9
Use of Scripture	9.2	10.8
Spontaneous invocation	6.7	2.8
Gospel reflection	4.7	25.4
Intercessory prayer	4.1	41.8
Faith sharing	1.8	12.2
Liturgy of the Hours	0.8	1.4

Note. * *n* = 660
 ** *n* = 213

The sharing that occurs during the prayer experience creates awareness. According to other data from the survey, the majority of respondents believe that praying as a school faculty increases awareness of colleague experiences and needs (51.4% greatly; 31.8% moderately). Respondent comments highlight this awareness: "When the faculty gathers and prays for intentions, the insight into people lives is always meaningful." "We have daily morning prayer for anyone on campus. We share some of our families' joys and challenges during this time. This has helped me to be more understanding of others."

Challenges to Faculty Prayer Experiences

In an open-response item respondents were asked to list up to three challenges related to faculty prayer. Four hundred ninety-eight respondents answered the question. In coding the responses, it became clear that there is great diversity in how faculty prayer is experienced. Some describe prayer as rote and lacking in meaning, while others describe prayer as spoken "off the cuff" and not well prepared. Some describe personal struggles in leading prayer while others resent that prayer is always led by the administration. Some yearn for traditional prayer while others desire nontraditional experiences. In the end, responses reflect the diversity of the people of God.

Some patterns did emerge, however; the 10 most prevalent challenges mentioned and their frequency of occurrence are included in Table 7. The most readily noted challenges included time (insufficient time allotted, scheduling

Table 6

Percent of Participants Noting the Element in Relating a Meaningful Prayer Experience

Element of the Prayer Experience	Percent
Sharing (events, needs, experiences, reflections)	42.4
When the prayer occurs (specific time during the academic year or within a specific liturgical season)	29.4
The prayer environment and/or use of ritual, music, or other artistic element	9.8
Realization of God working in their lives	7.3
Being in the presence of God/awareness of God	5.7
Quiet time, time for personal reflection	5.3

Note. n = 245.

issues; 46.3%), limited participation/some faculty seemingly lacking interest (27.9%), and prayer lacks meaning or relevance (12.0%).

The question of time was multilayered. Respondents wrote about the lack of time to prepare prayer, insufficient time for prayer, and scheduling issues as the following sample response shows:

> Time, time, and time. There isn't enough of it! We are all busy before, during, and after school. Faculty need to be with students when they are present, and are busy with personal and professional concerns when students are not with us.

Limited participation or some faculty seemingly lacking interest was the second greatest concern, though considerably less of a concern than the time issue. Responses showed that absence of some faculty was greatly felt by those gathering for prayer. In addition to noting the absence of others, some respondents noted an overall lack of interest by the faculty to pray together. "I wish more of the faculty would come. Not everyone thinks it is important, so they skip it. Sometimes our principal is not even there." "Some people do not want to pray and their negative attitude can hurt the experience."

The third challenge is that prayer lacks meaning or relevance. A number of respondents did not qualify the challenge; they simply noted that faculty prayer was not meaningful. Others, however, were more descriptive. Some individuals described experiencing the prayer as boring, superficial, or a formality. "It seems to be more of a formality than anything else; something we *have* to do because we are a Catholic school," wrote one respondent. Another commented, "It is usually done quickly before a meeting with little emphasis

Table 7

Frequency Ranking of the Top 10 Challenges Experienced Related to Faculty Prayer (n =498)

Challenges	Number of times indicated	Percent
Time (insufficient time allotted, scheduling issues)	231	46.3
Limited participation/Some faculty seemingly lacking interest	139	27.9
Prayer lacks meaning or relevance	60	12.0
Discomfort (with type of prayer, with leading prayer, with sharing during prayer)	54	10.8
Prayer experience is not one's preferred prayer style	52	10.4
Prayer inclusiveness	35	7.0
Lack of resources for leading prayer/Limited access to resources	32	6.4
Distractions	29	5.8
Limited opportunities for faculty prayer or to lead prayer	25	5.0
Hearing God's Word and applying it	24	4.8

on the experience but the fact that it was done." Others expressed more of a concern that the prayer lacked "relevance to all who participate" and noted a challenge of "finding a prayer that is meaningful to all." Still others expressed that prayer lacked connection to what they were living. One respondent wrote, "the prayer is not relevant to our situation." Another expressed the desire for "prayer that has a purpose and is meaningful to today's problems."

Discussion

This research examined the communal prayer experiences of faculty members in Catholic schools and what they mean to participants. Key findings show that faculty prayer experiences take place readily, though frequency and form vary greatly. Praying together as a school faculty is valued and desired by the overwhelming majority of participants. Challenges related to prayer experiences were also recognized.

It is not surprising that communal faculty prayer experiences are taking place in Catholic schools, as these institutions are defined as having a faith-based Catholic culture (Cook, 2001; USCCB, 2005). Prayer is an expression of faith (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994); the routine ritual of praying together not only expresses the faith of the group, but also reinforces values of the Catholic school culture (Cook, 2001). The research shows that

faculty members value their prayer experiences. When expressing the degree to which praying as a school faculty matters to them, only 1.2% of respondents indicated that it does not, with 6.5% indicating minimally, 32.6% moderately, and 59.9% greatly.

Though faculty prayer experiences are taking place, the frequency of such prayer occurring varies greatly. Slightly less than a third of the respondents are gathering daily to pray, but slightly more than a third are gathering less than weekly. In comparing these two groups the following can be noted: (a) More elementary school faculty members pray daily (78% of those reporting daily) and more high school faculty pray less than weekly (49% of those reporting less than weekly); (b) for faculty members praying less than weekly, 57% note that the amount of time the faculty gathers for prayer does not feel adequate. This latter statistic is especially striking. It reveals that in schools where faculty prayer experiences are occurring less than weekly, the majority of such faculty members desire more.

Faculty prayer experiences not only vary in frequency but also in form. The survey asked respondents to consider faculty prayer experiences outside of participation in the Mass. The most commonly used form when the school faculty gathers to pray is the use of a resource book (or devotional) for facilitating prayer (41.7%) or a traditional prayer such as the Our Father or Hail Mary (24.4%). This data is helpful when considering how participants experience faculty prayer. When asked to recall a meaningful faculty prayer experience, few highlighted either of these forms (5.6% combined). On the contrary, experiences of intercessory prayer (41.8%), Gospel reflection (25.4%), and faith sharing (12.2%) were recalled.

Rating questions yield interesting data about respondents' views of the prayer experiences giving witness and impacting teaching and school related decisions. The overwhelming majority of respondents readily acknowledge that they believe faculty prayer strengthens the school's Catholic identity (76.9%), incarnates the school's mission statement (70.9%), and gives witness to the greater school community (61.8%). Participants offered lower ratings for faculty prayer's impact on ministry (43.6%), and school decisions (35.6%). It would seem that respondents feel more strongly about the role of prayer in giving witness than influencing their ministry.

Recommendations

In light of the data gathered, the following recommendations are suggested.

Prioritizing time for faculty prayer. Time was the number one challenge facing individuals participating in faculty prayer who readily noted insufficient time for the prayer experience, limited time available for preparing prayer, and scheduling issues. Of those expressing time issues, common school "busy–ness" was readily expressed as interfering with the prayer experience or limiting time for prayer (25% of those noting time as a challenge). Additionally, the data show that 41% of respondents want more faculty prayer taking place at their schools with the remaining 59% expressing that sufficient faculty prayer experiences are taking place. In considering both of these pieces of data, it seems that more time is not the desire but rather, more quality time. One such quality experience is that of the prayer retreat, noted by 29.8% of respondents as providing a meaningful experience of prayer for them. Prayer retreats typically provide distance from school work, as they often take place off site; fewer distractions, as students and parents are not interrupting prayer moments; and oftentimes, silence, a valued condition for meeting God. In our fast-paced world, especially for individuals carrying demanding professional responsibilities, time set aside for prayer retreats can provide opportunities for meeting God and for connecting with one another.

Retreats, however, are special moments of prayer; opportunities need to be present at the school itself that reveal prayer as a priority in the life of the faculty. School leaders can help in simple ways by letting parents know when the school faculty gathers to pray, asking parents to respect that teachers will be unavailable at such times, and scheduling times for prayer to emphasize its importance. These might include setting up a weekly/daily prayer schedule and scheduling special prayer events such as a faculty prayer retreat, prayer services to coincide with particular liturgical seasons, and optional faith sharing opportunities. Scheduling such events at the start of the school year signals their priority to all faculty members. Faculty members might also be surveyed about preferred times for prayer and specific prayer events they would appreciate. In schools in which the faculty is praying less than weekly, such a survey might reveal the faculty's desire for more frequent gatherings for prayer.

Bringing the help of prayer into everyday situations. The majority of respondents believe that praying as a school faculty increases awareness of colleague experiences and needs (51.4% greatly; 31.8% moderately). Many respondents noted the profound experiences of intercessory prayer for connecting, supporting, reaching out to others, and praying for the needs of individuals and the group. This was evident in responses highlighting praying for ill and grieving community members.

Despite the recognized value of intercessory prayer, some participants expressed that prayer seemed somewhat separated from the experiences of everyday school life. When citing challenges to prayer, it was described by some (12%) as something that takes place with little meaning attached or lacking in relevance to what is lived or taking place within the Catholic school. Additionally, though respondents expressed beliefs about the experience of faculty prayer and its impact on ministry and school decisions, stronger beliefs were expressed about the public witness of their communal faculty prayer.

As noted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), prayer is vital at all times and it is important to "bring the help of prayer into humble, everyday situations" (§ 2660). Morneau (1998) writes that "prayer can transform our work" (p. 98) making work life joyful, and, according to Rupp (2007), "the surest sign of prayer's genuineness is when it influences what we say and do" (p. 109). Research shows that prayer can have a positive effect on quality of life (Poloma & Pendleton, 1989/2001) and purpose in life (Francis & Evans, 1996/2001).

Faculty members can be encouraged to bring the help of prayer into everyday experiences. School leaders can facilitate simple practices, like inviting intercessions when leading prayer and encouraging that intercessory prayer always be part of the group's prayer. Frequent communication about concerns and school needs can be provided to school faculty who might then be more inclined to voice related intercessions when the group gathers to pray. Resources that connect school-related themes to particular Scripture passages and provide ideas for prayer can be provided to help faculty members prepare and lead prayer. Through ideas such as these, a school leader can help draw the faculty to the ongoing message that the school is a faith-based culture and that in prayer, the needs of the school community can be voiced.

Providing faith formation. As one of the challenges to faculty prayer, some respondents noted that the prayer of the group was not their preferred prayer style (10.4%) and expressed concerns about the types of prayer shared: Some respondents openly admitted struggles with certain prayer forms; some even seemed somewhat judgmental in their assessment of colleague prayers as inadequate or inaccurately spoken. It would seem that religious formation in prayer styles, forms, and traditions of the Church would help to open all to greater acceptance and variation. Opportunities for learning about variations as well as experiences of different prayer forms are needed. Religious formation is an important part of and complement to professional formation (CCE, 1982). To nurture the spiritual growth of faculty members, school leaders can provide faith formation opportunities (Belmonte & Cranston,

2009; Shimabukuro, 1998). These might include celebrating liturgies together, scheduling optional faith sharing meetings, arranging for presentations on prayer topics, and providing for periodic prayer retreats.

Conclusion

Catholic school faculty members are called to work together to create a school climate "illumined by the light of faith" (CCE, 1988, § 25) and to "be witnesses to the faith in both their words and actions" (USCCB, 2005, p. 10). According to the United States Catholic Bishops, the responsibilities in witnessing to the faith require "strong bonds to Christ and the Church" (p. 10). Prayer develops those bonds. But is it important that Catholic school faculty members pray together? This question is answered in two parts.

First, faculty prayer is important to the Catholic school community. In a faith-based Catholic school culture, praying together is one routine ritual (Cook, 2001) that provides a public means for expressing faith. The communal gathering of prayer reveals what is valued by the group and thus gives witness to the beliefs and practices that are important. This research shows that Catholic school faculties are gathering to pray, though the frequency and form of such prayer varies from school to school. Additionally, more than half of the Catholic school faculty members surveyed acknowledge that such prayer strengthens the school's Catholic identity and gives witness to the greater school community.

Second, faculty prayer is important to the individuals who are praying together. The communal prayer experience provides an opportunity to experience God, connect to one another, and be drawn outward (O'Keefe, 2007). This research shows that praying together as a school faculty is valued and desired by the overwhelming majority of those surveyed. Moreover, slightly more than half of the Catholic school faculty members surveyed acknowledge that such prayer greatly provides an experience of God and increases awareness of colleague experiences and needs.

Challenges to faculty prayer taking place are also recognized. Time issues, limited participation by some faculty, and lack of relevance and meaning experienced by some were the three most commonly expressed concerns by those surveyed. School leaders can help to address the challenges by prioritizing time for faculty prayer and providing faith formation opportunities for the faculty. There is no guarantee, however, that more time scheduled for prayer, greater variation in prayer experiences, or greater awareness of types of prayer will in fact lead each praying member to an experience of God, a deeper connection to one another, and a loving action in response to God's

call. Nonetheless, each of the suggestions mentioned provides a condition that can cultivate prayer. In so doing, the praying community may indeed experience "Christ in their midst" and be strengthened for Catholic school ministry.

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