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## **FOCUS SECTION—Immigrants in Catholic Education: Catholic Higher Education Collaborative Conference at Loyola Marymount University**

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### **A Catholic Higher Education Collaborative: Focusing on New Ways of Supporting Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools**

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*This article discusses highlights from the Catholic Higher Education Collaborative conference (CHEC) held at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in January 2009. The conference, a result of a 2007 dialogue on Catholic schooling hosted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, was the first of six to be held at Catholic colleges and universities throughout the country. The purpose of the conference was to seek new and creative ways for Catholic higher education to partner with the nation's K-12 Catholic schools. The theme of the LMU conference was "Catholic Schools and the Immigrant Church: Lessons from the Past and a Bridge to the Future." This article includes information about the development of CHEC, a brief review of the history of immigrants and Catholic schools, an overview of conference keynote talks, and concludes with future initiatives developed from the conference in support of Catholic schools.*

**K**-12 Catholic education is at a critical juncture in its history, a point emphasized by representatives from Catholic higher education and related institutions who gathered at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in January 2009. Their purpose: to seek creative ways to collaborate in support of the nation's Catholic elementary and secondary schools.

For years, individual institutions of higher education have assisted Catholic elementary and secondary schools in various ways, including professional training programs, research, and other vital resources typically unavailable to the Catholic school, but never have they looked to harness their collective talents and resources for the benefit of all—until now. Faced with a new wave of national closures hastened by the current economic downturn, the Catholic school story—despite a proven track record (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993)—has become one of survival and struggle in large swaths

of the country (Youniss, 2000). The time to stand in solidarity with Catholic schools has come to higher education, and these institutions are answering the call via new partnerships designed to help revitalize Catholic schools in the United States (Whipp & Scanlan, 2009).

The conference at LMU was the first of six planned gatherings to be held at Catholic colleges and universities throughout the country over the next few years.<sup>1</sup> The initiative for these was established during a 2007 national dialogue on Catholic schooling hosted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, at which approximately 50 participants gathered to explore ways to strengthen the field of Catholic education. One outcome from the initial Carnegie gathering was to convene a series of national conferences around topics related to the nature of Catholic schooling. Calling themselves the Catholic Higher Education Collaborative (CHEC), these educators have set out to prove that more can be accomplished collectively than individually when addressing the serious needs of the nation's Catholic schools.

The 3-day event, cohosted by LMU and the University of San Francisco (USF), was entitled "Catholic Schools and the Immigrant Church: Lessons from the Past and a Bridge to the Future." Keynote speakers, panelists, and participants explored Catholic schools' development and present challenges in serving a diverse Church. In all, 13 Catholic schools and colleges were represented as well as numerous other Catholic educational institutions (see Appendix). The purpose of this article is to summarize the conference as well as shed light on the issue of Catholic schools and the immigrant Church. What follows is a historical review of the Catholic school as it relates to immigrant families, including the so-called new immigrants of today. Next will be an overview of the conference, including summaries of the various keynotes. The article will conclude with a list of action items put forth by conference organizers.

## **A Movement Buoyed and Sustained by Immigrants**

### *A Historical Perspective*

In April 2008 during an address at the Catholic University of America, Pope Benedict XVI thanked Catholic educators for their central role in educating immigrants: "Countless dedicated religious sisters, brothers and priests," he stated, "together with selfless parents have, through Catholic schools, helped generations of immigrants to rise from poverty and take their place in mainstream society" (para. 4). It could also be said that without the immigrants to whom the pope referred, Catholic schools in the United States would not

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<sup>1</sup> The second conference took place in October 2009 at Loyola University Chicago.

exist today. Catholic schools grew in number only as immigrants poured in, eventually reaching 10,000 at its apex in 1960 (Walch, 1996). In the course of American history, the convergence of new arrivals with a willing Church created a recipe for a system of schools that would grow and thrive for decades; it was a kind of symbiosis that ushered an educational movement into the mainstream.

After the Revolutionary War the survival of Catholic schools was seriously in doubt (Walch, 1996). Attempts to start Catholic schools prior to that time were limited by legal restrictions and anti-Catholic sentiment; as a result most Catholics in the New England colonies chose to educate their children at home (O'Toole, 2008). But the fight for independence from British rule united Catholics and Protestants alike, opening the door for new possibilities for Catholic schooling after the war's conclusion (Walch, 1996).

In 1810 Elizabeth Seton opened one of the first Catholic schools in the United States; with religious women at the helm, and a mission to serve the poor, it would be regarded as a model for a system of schools that would follow (Buetow, 1985). During that time, Europeans began to settle in America in large numbers. The period from 1820-1870 saw the arrival of more than 5 million Irish and German immigrants (O'Toole, 2008; Walch, 1996). Arriving with what many viewed as three strikes against them—illiterate, impoverished, and Catholic—these and other mostly Catholic immigrants found solace in a Church, and its schools, that provided needed services and also sheltered them against various forms of anti-Catholic nativism (O'Toole, 2008).

The voluminous Europe-to-America migration pattern continued full-force until around 1920, allowing Catholic schools to grow further and prosper in parts of the nation (Walch, 1996). But just as it had prior to the Revolutionary War, anti-Catholic sentiment swelled as immigration increased (Denig, 2000). The reasons for this latest wave of prejudice were varied, but included the fact that a growing Catholic Church threatened the Protestant hegemony of the period (Ahlstrom, 1972). Catholic educators were conscious of the backlash and did their best to meet the rising nativism with a concerted effort to make their students “not only Catholic, but also American” (Buetow, 1989, p. 207). Catholic schools of the time struggled to find an appropriate balance in being both different from its public counterpart, yet equally American (Walch, 1996).

With the continued support of a still mostly European migration, Catholic schools continued to grow in the first half of the 20th century until reaching their peak in the mid-1960s. The election of John F. Kennedy as president in 1960 was a seminal event for American Catholics, whose perceived working-class status and questionable national loyalty had continued to be dominant

narratives; Kennedy's election symbolized how far Irish immigrants had come after escaping famine in the 1850s (Youniss, 2000). But it also offered hope to every Catholic immigrant who worked to find acceptance in the new land.

### ***Portrait of a New Immigrant***

After 1965 Catholic schools began a precipitous decline in both the number of schools and in the student population (see Youniss & Convey, 2000). The reasons for this loss in market share have been the subject of frequent analysis (e.g., Baker & Riordan, 1998; Montejano, 2007; Oates, 1989; O'Keefe, et al., 2004; Youniss and Convey, 2000; Zehr, 2002), but scant attention has been paid to the relationship among Catholic schools and recent arrivals, or the new immigrants, as they are referred to in the literature. Population data from roughly the last 100 years point to a significant shift in both the number and country of origin of immigrants. From 1920-1965 roughly 200,000 new people arrived annually in the United States (Phan, 2004). As in previous decades, most of these were of European origin, but since 1965 the average annual U.S. immigration rates increased to greater than 500,000, with most of these arrivals coming from non-European countries, such as Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Phan, 2004). One reason for this dramatic change was the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which eliminated the origins quotas that had previously favored Europeans; the new open-entry system (fully implemented in 1968) allowed large-scale immigration from Asian and Latin American countries (Carlson, 1994).

Within the shift from European to non-European immigrants, arrivals from Latin America have clearly had the greatest numerical impact in the country. According to census data, the Latino population has increased by greater than 50% over a 10-year period since 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). A look at a given year offers further evidence: In 2003, 53% of the foreign-born U.S. residents were from Latin American countries; another 25% were from parts of Asia; and in the same year, foreign-born residents from Europe comprised merely 13%, a distant third. Papademetriou estimates that by 2040, 63% of the U.S. population will be ethnic minorities, with the great majority of these coming from Mexico, Central America, and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean (as cited in Majied-Martinez, 2008). Examining the settling patterns of new arrivals offers clues for the future. Unlike its European forbearers, who resided in mostly rural areas, today's immigrant overwhelmingly settles in large urban or metropolitan areas (Carlson, 1994).

A 1976-1996 RAND study measuring the economic progress of immigrants in California offered bleak prospects for most immigrants (Schoeni,

McCarthy, & Vernez, 1996). Not surprisingly, immigrants dominated the lowest-skilled jobs in the state; for instance, the authors noted that 85% of workers with less than 9 years of schooling were immigrants. While noting some diversity in immigrants' ability to achieve economic parity with native-born workers, the earnings of most immigrant workers declined significantly compared to native-born workers, even after adjustments in levels of education; the immigrant rate of wage growth did not accelerate for any immigrant group, leading the authors to conclude that—especially for Mexican and Latin American immigrants—a substantial wage gap will persist in the state into the future. Rumbaut (1994) has referred to this post-1970 effect as an “hourglass” economy, one in which fewer opportunities for social mobility exist among poorly educated immigrants.

Despite the obvious challenges, Fisher (2008) posits that the influx of a new and diverse population has reenergized the Church. But what of its schools? The implications of this seismic shift in United States immigration patterns have yet to be addressed adequately by the Catholic school leadership. Who are the new immigrants? What are their cultural patterns? Might Catholic schools meet a need and become a home for its newest arrivals, much as it did for its European forbearers? Anthropologists (see Phan, 2004) have noted that the recent wave of non-European arrivals also comes with different social characteristics:

These so-called new immigrants—those arriving in the post-1965 period—are phenotypically and culturally distinct from the old immigrants, who more closely resembled Anglo-Americans in terms of their physical characteristics and cultural patterns...Moreover, research shows that the new immigrants are less inclined than the old immigrants to blend fully into American society. (Johnson, Farrell, & Guinn, 1999, p. 391)

A study examining the role of Catholic school education in the lives of immigrants concluded that immigrants from Mexico—the largest group in the United States—are also the most underrepresented group in Catholic schools (Lawrence, 2000). This is perhaps due in part to the increased levels of academic and other supports needed for immigrant children in U.S. schools, much of which Catholic schools have been unable to provide. Chu (2009), for instance, describes the challenges that immigrant children face in the United States as those related to language, academic performance, provision of resources, and issues of accountability.

Cattaro (2002) has noted the transition Catholic schools have made from national schools in the inner city to multicultural ones that address the needs

of immigrants. Using as his theoretical framework a cyclical model that moves from conversion to immigration to integration and, finally, to mediation, Cattaro emphasizes the latter as a concept that has successfully helped Catholic schools in transition. His case study of four inner-city New York schools notes the mediating approaches used by the leaders in those schools; mediating techniques, he contends, calms immigrants' apprehension and helps them adjust to public life in a foreign land.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2005), too, have noted Catholic schools' ability to welcome diverse populations:

As we continue to address the many and varied needs of our nation's new immigrant population, the Church and its schools are often among the few institutions providing immigrants and newcomers with a sense of welcome, dignity, community, and connection with their spiritual roots. (p. 4)

But today's successes become tomorrow's challenge as populations shift rapidly and old parish and school structures are constantly challenged. Since roughly 1 out of every 5 children in K-12 schooling is a child of an immigrant (Chu, 2009), new arrivals present a unique opportunity for Catholic schools. While no longer predominantly a cultural haven for immigrants, Catholic schools today have the chance to reach out to new immigrants in ways that honor and preserve their distinctive characteristics and promote inculturation (Cattaro, 2002). But this will not come without a concerted effort at all levels: How dioceses, school departments, and communities respond to the nation's most recent arrivals will go a long way in determining the future of Catholic schools.

## **Catholic Schools and the Immigrant Church: A Conference Agenda**

### ***A Cultural Mosaic***

As the above suggests, the issue of Catholic schools and immigrants is multifaceted and worthy of substantive exploration. Catholic schools' rich history of serving immigrants and its implications for the future in no way can be covered comprehensively in a 3-day conference. CHEC conference organizers, therefore, structured presentations around Catholic schools' past lessons (Days 1 and 2) and future trends (Day 3) as they related to the conference theme. Keynote speakers, panelists, and participants were invited to share their stories, resulting in a cultural mosaic that illuminated the unique contribution Catholic schools have made in serving immigrant populations, as well as the challenges ahead. Conference attendees were reminded throughout by

facilitators to consider practical steps on behalf of Catholic schools. As the dean of the School of Education at USF, Walt Gmelch, stated in his opening remarks, “The challenge is to move from analysis to action.” It was a sentiment echoed by his LMU counterpart, Shane Martin, and others throughout the conference.

CHEC conference attendees—approximately 80 representatives from Catholic higher education, K-12 schools, the National Catholic Educational Association, dioceses from around the country, and members of the philanthropic community—provided a regionally and culturally diverse forum for the exchange of ideas, much of which extended beyond conference talks to breaks and at table. In these informal settings, old relationships were strengthened and new ones were forged. As envisioned by conference organizers, these moments were as vital as the conference talks themselves; as they viewed it, the seeds planted in informal moments can become opportunities that flower into new models, programs, or research initiatives on behalf of the nation’s schools.

### ***Keynote Presentations: Creating Communities that Welcome***

The keynote presentations were a highlight of the conference. Considered as a whole, overarching themes of welcome and inclusion were interwoven by the different speakers. Whether referenced as “radical interconnectedness,” or as “a circle of compassion,” presenters noted (either implicitly or explicitly) the opportunity and challenge for Catholic schools to reach new as well as underserved populations, many of which may not have previously considered them.

USF president Fr. Steven Privett, S.J., opened the conference by debunking myths and emphasizing perspective in relation to understanding immigrants and immigrant issues. The Catholic perspective, he noted, is clearly rooted in Scripture where, he stated, “everybody has equal status at the table of the Lord.” He provided conference attendees with a handout documenting myths about immigrants, such as they take jobs from Americans, overburden the health care system, and they do not want to learn English or pay taxes. In response to these oft-repeated narratives, he provided documented evidence to the contrary. To illustrate the importance of perspective, Fr. Privett spoke of the time he took his university staff to the Mexico-U.S. border crossing; standing at the boundary, he asked his people to look back at the United States and imagine it from the perspective of the immigrant. The powerful image allowed them to consider, albeit briefly, the often arduous journey of the im-



migrant, not only to new locations but to cultural experiences often worlds apart from their own.

In another presentation, Rev. Gregory Boyle, S.J., put a face on and gave life to the “vulnerable and the weak” referenced by Fr. Privett. Using his work with gang members as the subtext for his talk, Fr. Boyle challenged attendees to find God at the margins. He asked participants to begin by “imagining a circle of compassion and imagining that no one’s outside it.” Punctuated throughout with humorous and moving stories of his own life working with those on the margins, he reiterated his ongoing commitment to address “the forces that exclude.” In the end, he offered a clear formula for overcoming prejudice: “We never toppled a sinful social structure with a strategy,” he stated, “we did it with solidarity.”

Like Fr. Boyle, Br. Michael Collins, F.S.C., offered examples from his life and work to illustrate the need for a more inclusive school system. Using his definition of immigrant as “someone who finds himself in a new place,” Collins recounted a life of “firsts” as a Black person in Catholic schools. He conveyed personal stories of prejudice and racism that began with his first days as a child in a Catholic school and continued beyond his days as an administrator in Catholic schools. As a result, attendees were given insight into the life of someone who “surrendered some of who he was” in order to fit into a world wary of the cultural immigrant. Collins noted that in 2008 students of color made up 29% of the Catholic school population. The challenge, in his estimation, is for Catholic schools to welcome new cultures, which in turn enhance the culture of the school. He framed the issue in the form of a query: “How do we find a place for people who haven’t been included in our schools?” In the end he offered several recommendations for consideration:

1. Colleges and universities must find ways to welcome more people of color (in 2006, 50,000 Black males received a bachelor’s degree in the United States; in the same year, 500,000 Black males were incarcerated).
2. Schools must recruit more people of color into teacher training programs.
3. Schools need a curriculum that is bias free and contains the contributions of men and women of color in an integrated way.
4. Catholic leaders must identify and train people of color for leadership in Catholic schools.

The words of Privett, Boyle, and Collins challenged participants to think deeply about the immigrants’ plight and the Catholic call genuinely to be welcoming to the “stranger in our midst.” The practice of tolerance, some have said, is often merely represented as disguised intolerance. In other words, we

must take care that our altruistic works are authentic in ways that challenge the existing hegemony. As conference attendees learned, Catholic schools and colleges are no less immune than other institutions when it comes to sinful social structures that push people to the margins. Those associated with Catholic schools have an obligation, however, to recognize and correct these flaws in themselves and in the institutions they represent.

### ***Anthony Bryk: Looking Back and Forward***

While the aforementioned presenters painted a compelling portrait of the perspective and needs of immigrants, Anthony Bryk's keynote was more broadly a response to the question of "what's next" for Catholic schools. Building upon his previous research on Catholic schools (a process of coming to know them that he described as an "accidental odyssey"), Bryk offered a mixed report card since his seminal work, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good* (Bryk et al., 1993). The good news was that others had learned from the successes of Catholic schools, placing a renewed emphasis on academics and small school size. But that was also, paradoxically, the bad news, at least for Catholic schools; the changes in education, particularly the advance of charter schools, provided a new avenue that mirrored successful elements of the Catholic school. Further bad news was that the same staffing, finance, and budget issues that his group had identified in 1984 were the same problems that still plagued Catholic schools today.

The heart of Bryk's presentation focused on the constitutive elements that maximize school improvement. Based on his soon to be published work on Chicago inner-city public schools, Bryk and his team identified five essential supports for school improvement: (1) instructional guidance system; (2) professional capacity; (3) parent, school, and community ties; (4) student-centered learning climate; and (5) leadership as the part that drives each of the above. Taking the time to move carefully through these, Bryk noted that each was essential if substantive school improvement was to take place.

Building upon the implications of his research, Bryk concluded by suggesting new ways in which Catholic higher education can best support Catholic schools. He focused on higher education's role in developing the technical core—the people, tools, materials, and ideas that are the basic elements of schooling. Technology, he suggested, was a "lever" that had the capacity to enhance the quality and quantity of those who teach, as well as change the central way in which work in a school is organized (i.e., breaking out of the traditional 9-3 model).

All of this led Bryk to a final proposal: Catholic higher education as a sponsor for networks of charter schools inspired by a Catholic philosophy. The value of Bryk's proposal will certainly inspire debate among Catholic educators, as it did among conference attendees, but hopefully Bryk's underlying point—that business as usual for Catholic schools will no longer sustain them—will not be lost in the sure to be heated conversation about charters inspired by a Catholic philosophy.

### Conclusion

The CHEC conference at LMU succeeded in bringing together more than 80 members from Catholic higher education, Catholic school superintendents, principals, and members of the community around an important topic for Catholic schools: the immigrant Church. Conference attendees participated in 3 days of presentations and discussion that asked them to think critically about issues of diversity, prejudice, multiculturalism, and inculturation in Catholic schools. Bryk's closing talk cast a challenge to schools of education to work innovatively and more efficiently to prepare Catholic school teachers and leaders for the future. Overall, the conference demonstrated that Catholic higher education institutions have the capacity to come together to begin to create new partnerships with and on behalf of the nation's Catholic schools.

In the end, conference attendees agreed to the following action items, as delineated by Shane Martin at the close of the conference:

1. Dissemination of the keynote talks via podcast, to make them accessible to a larger audience;
2. A future publication in *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* to focus on the topic of immigrants and Catholic schools;
3. Call for a working group to focus on curricular issues in educator preparation, specifically addressing issues of immigration, race, ethnicity, and class—the group will note previous research in this area and identify best practice;
4. Expanding the membership of the CHEC collaborative to include more Catholic institutions of higher education;
5. Exploring new ways to provide support for the technical core of teacher and leader preparation.

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## Appendix

### Participating Colleges and Universities at the Catholic Higher Education Collaborative Conference at Loyola Marymount University

Boston College  
 Fordham University  
 Gonzaga University  
 John Carroll University  
 Le Moyne College  
 Loyola Marymount University  
 Loyola University Chicago  
 Marquette University  
 Santa Clara University  
 The Catholic University of America  
 The University of Notre Dame  
 The University of San Francisco  
 Xavier University