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## In Service of Mission: Assessing Catholic School Guidance Counselors

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*Catholic schools are set apart from public schools in that Catholic schools aim to create for the school community an atmosphere enlivened by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity. Those who serve in Catholic schools, therefore, need to understand their role as unique, that is, faith driven. The purpose of this study was to assess this uniqueness as understood and practiced by Catholic school counselors. The findings of this study noted positive trends among Catholic school counselors, particularly in terms of academic preparation and training as well as some incorporation of Catholic identity and mission into their ministry with students. Among these findings, the most significant is that Catholic school counselors need to incorporate the identity and unique mission of the Catholic Church more effectively into their work with students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Beginning with the hiring interview and the orientation process, Catholic school counselors must make a conscious effort to thread the Catholic identity, as it is embodied in the school's unique mission, into their guidance programs, thereby distinguishing what they do as a ministry rather than a job.*

**D**ramatic changes have occurred over the last 20 years in both family composition and the economic arrangements that families use to survive. *The Child Well-Being Index* (Land, 2008) reported a varied picture for U.S. children during the past decade:

Dramatic declines in rates of violence and risky behaviors such as teen births, smoking, alcohol, and illegal drug use during the past 10 years have contributed substantially to modest and slow progress in the overall well-being of America's children... The rate of educational attainment remains stagnant, despite two decades of national focus on how to improve the education system. More children live in poverty today than did in 1975. In addition, persistent rates of obesi-

ty—which have more than tripled in 30 years—are seriously hurting children’s health. (pp.17-20)

In response to these changes, “particular demands have been placed on human service institutions, notably on schools” (Carroll, 1993, p. 216), and Catholic schools are not immune to these challenges. Historically unable to clarify their roles, many Catholic school counselors have struggled to survive in the face of societal changes and educational reform (Murray, 2008). Thus, Catholic school counselors must be clear and assertive in defining their roles and functions. They must develop effective programs designed to meet the needs of their respective populations and then collaborate with administrators to promote such programs to teachers, students, parents, and the community at large. This process can begin only with a clear understanding of the Catholic school counselor’s history, role, and mission in today’s evolving school systems.

School counseling has its beginnings in the public schools of the early 1900s. Initially, the role of the school counselor was to prepare students for placement into the work force. However, the school counselor’s role grew to include academic advisement and eventually the implementation of “counseling” services. Catholic school counseling programs also began in the early 1900s and have developed a remarkable history that reflects the Church’s cautious and critical view of society and secular disciplines (Lee & Pallone, 1966; Murray, Suriano, & Madden, 2003). Notably, its history ultimately embraces those aspects of the social sciences that affirm and elevate the message of the Christian Gospel.

In the 20th century, although tentatively accepting guidance programs from the onset, Catholic schools in the United States could be characterized as having emerged from “behind the times” in providing guidance services to offering programs comparable with, yet distinct from, those of public schools. While many Catholic school counselors perform functions and roles similar to those of their public school counterparts, especially with regard to academic advisement and counseling services, their position within the Catholic school is unique in that they are called to uphold and incorporate the Catholic identity and mission into their ministry with students.

### **Catholic School Guidance Programs: A Brief History**

During the first half of the 20th century, school counseling in most Catholic schools was viewed with suspicion because it was thought to interfere with the work of God (Lee & Pallone, 1966; Murray et al., 2003). Catholic

educators possessed an abiding interest in and desire to uphold the importance of providing religious and spiritual formation. Thus, counseling programs in Catholic schools of the 1950s, if they existed at all, could be characterized as God-centered, the responsibility of clergy and religious, rooted in strict discipline, and suspicious of psychological theory. With plenty of religious sisters, brothers, and priests to serve, this orientation presented little or no problem, making the goal of religious and spiritual formation readily attainable in most Catholic schools.

However, in the decades following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), due to a decreased number of men and women entering religious communities and seminaries as well as an increase in the number of clergy and religious opting to work in fields outside of education, the Church experienced a dramatic decline in the number of clergy and vowed religious serving in Catholic schools. The Catholic community soon came to realize that this trend was unlikely to reverse itself (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1992). It increasingly fell to the laity who served in Catholic schools to provide those services. Just as this “sign of the times” characterized the teaching of religion and theology during the immediate post-Vatican II era (Galletto, 2000), so too it now characterizes contemporary Catholic school counseling.

The second half of the 20th century witnessed the complexion of Catholic school counseling programs shifting dramatically as they became more psychologically based and driven by assessment. As promising as this change has been, it has led to mission-centered challenges for Catholic schools. While almost every teacher and school counselor is trained in a secular discipline, most have received little or no formative development in regard to their individual and collective vocations in the mission of Catholic education (Jacobs, 2005). Nevertheless, a review of the mission statements and publications from Catholic secondary schools indicate that these schools offer a Catholic education within a unique tradition (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, 2002).

Catholic schools are called to be set apart from public schools in that Catholic schools aim to create for the school community an atmosphere enlivened by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity. These schools assist students in their formation as unique persons, reflective of the new creation that they became by baptism (Vatican Council II, 1966). Catholic schools also strive to relate to all human cultures the good news of salvation, so that the light of faith will illumine the knowledge that students gradually gain of the world, life, and mankind (Vatican Council II, 1966).

In schools where this “secularization” of personal vocations is normative, it is common for highly trained professionals to view their work as a

job. However, in Catholic schools, work is called to be a concrete expression of personal vocation (Jacobs, 1996). Many Catholic educators are therefore concerned that, without a significant presence on campus of clergy and members of religious communities, the identity and heritage of their schools will gradually disappear. This shift has produced a need for religious and non-religious faculty at these schools to be involved in examining and reclaiming the components of a Catholic school's identity and unique heritage, including the distinctive understanding and approach to school counseling (Youniss, Convey, & McLellan, 2000).

According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA; 2005a), professional school counselors are uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, personal/social, and career development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating, and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success. Given that Catholic education seeks continuous formation of the Christian person, the focus of the Catholic school is on the individual person's spiritual, moral, intellectual, social, cultural, and physical development. It is the duty of Catholic school counselors, then, to uphold this Catholic school mission as well as the unique mission and identity of their schools by providing services to help children to develop morally healthy attitudes toward themselves and others. Therefore, the goal of Catholic school counseling programs should be to promote the child's spiritual and emotional growth, to support loving and positive communication within the family and school setting, and to increase school success for children, families, and teachers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Given that Catholic schools are set apart, those who serve in these schools are called to understand their role as uniquely faith driven. Thus, the purpose of this study was to assess the uniqueness of the understanding and practice of Catholic school counselors using survey analysis of public and Catholic school teachers from six different regions of the United States.

### ***Research Questions***

The following research questions guided this study:

- Are there significant differences in academic background and training between Catholic and public school counselors?
- Are there significant differences between Catholic and public school counselors in the performance of their role?

- Are Catholic school counselors knowledgeable about how their counseling program is reflective of their school's Catholic identity and unique mission?
- Do Catholic school counselors incorporate the Catholic identity and mission of their school into their ministry with students?

## Methodology

### *Participants*

Participants for this study were randomly selected from the directory of the Catholic high schools in the Archdioceses of Philadelphia, Milwaukee, Metuchen, Newark, Chicago, and Arlington as well as from a list of the public schools in the surrounding areas. In the interest of examining similarities and differences among Roman Catholic dioceses, the researchers sought to obtain a geographic cross-section of dioceses. A letter was sent to each high school counselor inviting him or her to participate in this study. Submission of the survey served as consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured. Fifty-one public and 59 Catholic school counselors completed the survey and were included in the analysis.

There was a wide age range of both Catholic and public school counselors (24 to 74 years of age for Catholic school counselors and 24 to 68 years of age for public school counselors), with a mean age of 48.84. Gender and religious affiliations of the school counselors are presented in Table 1. Of the Catholic school counselors responding, 20.9% were from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia (8 males and 15 females), 8.2% from the Archdiocese of Milwaukee (4 males and 5 females), 8.2% from the Archdiocese of Chicago (2 males and 7 females), 6.4% from the Diocese of Arlington (2 males and 5 females), 4.6% from the Archdiocese of Newark in New Jersey (3 males and 2 females), and 2.7% from the Diocese of Metuchen (2 males and 1 female). There were also 2.7% from independently run Catholic schools (0 males and 3 females). Overall, the percentage of female respondents (70.9%) exceeded the percentage of male respondents (29.1%).

For religious affiliation, 89.8% of Catholic school counselors reported to be Roman Catholic, while more than two-thirds (68.6%) of public school counselors reported being Christian (35.3% Roman Catholic, 33.3% Protestant). Although close to 20% of public school counselors reported being Jewish (13.7%) or other faith traditions (5.9%), fewer than 4% of Catholic school counselors reported being from non-Christian faith traditions. It should be noted that the survey asked about respondents' religious affiliations, not religious practices. The religious affiliations of practicing Catholic school counselors are an important consideration because this affiliation may influence how these counselors view their role and whether, in fact, their practice is

Table 1

*Frequencies and Percentages for Gender and Religious Affiliation of Guidance Counselors*

Gender/Religious Affiliation	Public School	Catholic School	Total	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
Gender				.261	.106
Male	11 (21.6%)	21 (35.6%)	32 (29.1%)		
Female	40 (78.4%)	38 (64.4%)	78 (70.9%)		
Religious Affiliation				35.6	.000
Protestant	17 (33.3%)	3 (5.1%)	19 (18.6%)		
Catholic	18 (35.3%)	53 (89.8%)	71 (64.5%)		
Jewish	7 (13.7%)	1 (1.7%)	8 (2.5%)		
Muslim	0	0	0		
Other	3 (5.9%)	1 (1.7%)	4 (3.6%)		
None	6 (11.8%)	1 (1.7%)	7 (6.4%)		

uniquely faith driven. Further, one's religious affiliation may affect one's desire to uphold, support, and promote his or her school's Catholic identity and unique mission.

### ***Instrumentation***

The School Guidance Survey (Murray & Suriano, 2005) contains 27 items employing various formats, including non-dichotomous, polytomous, such as multiple choice and Likert-scaled (scale 1-10) items, and open-ended questions. The use of both structured and open-ended questions enabled the eliciting of answers that were valid and unbiased. The estimated completion time was 15 to 20 minutes. The researchers developed the survey instrument because, to date, there were no other surveys that measured the same constructs. A pilot study of the instrument was conducted with 10 experienced school counselors who were asked to review the content. Overall, respondents stated that the instrument accurately depicted the roles of school counselors. Their feedback and recommendations were included in the final instrument, resulting in the present 27-item instrument, with a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .74.

In addition to demographic data, the instrument included role description criteria from the ASCA (2005b). ASCA's counselor role description is based on the amount of time dedicated to particular guidance activities and to the counselor's process for dealing with student issues. The main areas of a school counselor's role are counseling, consultation, college/career planning, and coordination of activities. These areas were organized into various questions

on the instrument. In addition, the instrument included four open-ended scenarios for the purpose of examining counselors' mission-centered focus in treating real-life situations. Criteria for the coding of the scenarios were predetermined, and each submitted instrument was coded anonymously.

Chi-square analyses were performed on the four scenarios presented in the survey, which were designed to elicit responses to how school counselors would counsel either a student in scenarios 1, 2, and 3 or a faculty member in scenario 4. The following are the scenario questions: Scenario 1: A female student comes to you and tells you that she is pregnant. Scenario 2: A student in your high school approaches you about leading a protest against the war on school property. Scenario 3: A student is reported to you by a teacher for cheating on an exam. Scenario 4: Several faculty members are upset and come to you because a Muslim student needs to leave the classroom three times a day for religious prayer.

### *Analysis of the Data*

The population for this research was public and Catholic high school counselors. Included within the Catholic dioceses were the privately owned Catholic schools founded and sponsored by religious communities. Public schools within geographical proximity of the Catholic schools also were surveyed. A total of 650 individual survey instruments were sent to 108 public schools and 80 Catholic schools. There were 110 returned responses, 51 from the public schools and 59 from the Catholic schools.

Respondents were informed that this study addressed the mission of the school in relation to their counseling program. Open-ended responses were coded for mission-driven answers, which included words such as purpose, philosophy, mission, and vision. The Catholic responses were coded as mission oriented if they included a religious or theological focus.

A power analysis using Cohen's  $d$  (Cohen, 1988) was performed to determine the effect size or measure of strength of effect for the survey data. Using Cohen's  $d$ , a medium effect size at the alpha .05 level was calculated, indicating the need for a total of 64 subjects. The survey was distributed to two groups, thus yielding a minimum of 32 subjects in each group as an adequate sample size. The analysis of the data involved frequency distributions, independent sample  $t$ -tests, and chi-square tests. All qualitatively coded answers were transformed into quantitative data for the purpose of consistency within the analysis.



## Results

### *Descriptive Findings*

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of demographic data for 110 individual school counselors. The mean years employed as a school counselor and the number of years the counselors worked at their current school were found to be higher for those working in the Catholic schools. Additionally, although there were significantly more full-time public school counselors, there were significantly more part-time Catholic school counselors.

Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations for the Demographic Data of Public and Catholic School Guidance Counselors*

Variable	Public School	Catholic School	Total	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Years Worked as Guidance Counselor	12.24 (9.68)	13.24 (11.14)	12.77 (10.45)	.500	.618
Years Worked in Current School	8.28 (8.70)	9.86 (9.48)	9.14 (9.12)	.903	.584
Number of Full-Time Guidance Counselors	5.57 (2.70)	2.80 (1.53)	4.08 (2.55)	6.49	.000
Number of Part-Time Guidance Counselors	0.55 (1.63)	1.32 (1.83)	.96 (1.78)	2.34	.021
Number of Students in the School	1601.43 (667.27)	723.25 (444.55)	1137.94 (710.98)	7.95	.000
Age	45.46 (13.02)	51.76 (13.78)	48.84 (13.73)	2.44	.016

The results of counselors' overall work satisfaction and the support that they receive in their current schools are presented in Table 3. The level of satisfaction was calculated on a scale of 1 (*low satisfaction*) to 10 (*high satisfaction*). There were no significant differences between Catholic and public school counselors in their overall work satisfaction or the amount of support that they receive from the administration and faculty. However, the amount of perceived parental support reported by Catholic school counselors was significantly higher than that of the public school counselors. In general, the mean levels of satisfaction and support for Catholic and public school counselors were moderately high (7 or higher) for all areas.

Table 4 presents a summary of the counselors' reasons for accepting the position at their school. The interest of this question was whether a commitment to Catholic education was a primary consideration for working in a Catholic school. The responses indicate that counselors working in Catholic schools accepted the position for a religiously based reason 16.9% of the time. When Catholic school counselors were compared with public school

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations for Counselor Satisfaction and Support*

Satisfaction/Support	Public School	Catholic School	Total	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Overall Satisfaction	7.98 (1.34)	8.25 (1.31)	8.13 (1.33)	1.05	.297
Administrative Support	8.24 (1.69)	8.47 (1.51)	8.36 (1.60)	.77	.441
Faculty Support	7.75 (1.59)	8.26 (1.56)	8.02 (1.59)	1.71	.091
Parent Support	7.12 (1.66)	8.23 (1.55)	7.71 (1.69)	3.55	.001

*Note.* The level of satisfaction was calculated on a scale of 1 (*low satisfaction*) to 10 (*high satisfaction*).

counselors, who reported no mission-based reasons for choosing to work in public schools, there was a statistically significant difference. However, the results indicated that the majority (82.14% or 46 of 56 counselors) of Catholic school counselors do not initially select employment at their current school due to a desire to work in a Catholic school setting. The variables of commitment to Catholic education, work satisfaction, and perceived level of support, however, may influence the school counselor's desire and ability to promote his or her school's identity and unique mission.

Table 4

*Reasons for Accepting Position at Current School*

Reason for Acceptance	Public School	Catholic School	Total	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
				35.6	.000
No Mission-Oriented Reason	51 (100%)	46 (78.0%)	97 (88.2%)		
Mission-Oriented Dimension Included in Reason	0	10 (16.9%)	10 (9.1%)		
Missing Data	0	3 (5.1%)	3 (2.7%)		

Another important finding is that 89.8% of school counselors working in Catholic schools did not experience a mission-focused new counselor orientation program (see Table 5), which would have assisted them in integrating their professional counseling training into the school's Catholic identity and mission. Public school counselors also indicated that they did not have specific mission-oriented training when they began working at their schools. The majority of training for both Catholic and public school counselors was reported as "short introductions to other faculty during a luncheon" or "a several-day orientation with guest speakers during the summer." Further analysis

Table 5

*Orientation Program for New Counselors*

Orientation Program	Public School	Catholic School	Total	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
No Mission-Oriented Orientation for New Counselors	50 (98%)	53 (89.8%)	103 (93.6%)		a
Mission-Oriented Orientation for New Counselors	0	0	0		
Missing Data	1 (2.0%)	6 (10.2%)	7 (6.4%)		

*Note.* *a* cannot be computed.

indicates that, of the combined 103 Catholic and public school counselors who responded to this question, there were no reported orientation programs for new faculty and staff that incorporated the school mission. Thus, the chi-square could not be computed. Given that orientation programs do not address how their counseling program is reflective of their schools' Catholic identity and unique mission, Catholic school counselors are seemingly on their own in determining how to incorporate this identity and mission into their ministry with students.

Participants were asked, via an open-ended question, how they would like to see their school counseling programs improved. These findings are presented in Table 6. It is important to note that counselors' responses may have been included in more than one category. Although there were some individual differences between Catholic and public schools, there were many similarities in the way that public and Catholic school counselors would like to improve their programs. Of the responses from Catholic school counselors, the majority (57.4%) indicated that they would like either more staff or more time to work with students individually or during group guidance lessons. Having more or better communication with the administration, including the counseling director, was also a theme that emerged from the responses. Two responses from Catholic school counselors were coded as mission-oriented answers, indicating how they would like to "incorporate ideas into a program that we can all use effectively to help students and support the philosophy of our school" and "work more closely with the academic studies and youth ministry offices to have overlapping goals and help students see how their academic, social, and spiritual lives overlap." These responses were coded as mission oriented because they included a religious aspect or focus. Such responses demonstrate that some Catholic school counselors seek to incorporate better their schools' identity and mission into their work with students.

Table 6

*Guidance Counselors' Suggestions for Program Improvement*

Suggestion	Public ( <i>n</i> = 40)	Catholic ( <i>n</i> = 54)	Total ( <i>N</i> = 94)	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
				4.90	.557
Mission-Oriented Response	0 (0%)	1 (1.85%)	1 (1.06%)		
More Counselors or Guidance Staff	13 (32.5%)	15 (27.8%)	28 (29.8%)		
More Time with Students	13 (32.5%)	16 (29.6%)	29 (30.9%)		
Better Communication	5 (12.5%)	7 (13.0%)	12 (12.8%)		
Fewer Administrative Tasks	6 (15.0%)	4 (7.41%)	10 (10.6%)		
Other	22 (55.0%)	17 (31.5%)	39 (41.5%)		
Missing Data	11 (27.5%)	5 (9.26%)	16 (17.0%)		

*Note.* Counselors' responses may have been placed into more than one category.

Difficulty in doing so may be related to the finding that no school counselors reported receiving training on how to incorporate the school's mission into their work.

Similar to the Catholic school counselors, the majority of the public school counselors (65%) also desired either more counseling staff or more time for counseling activities and interactions with students. Only a few stated that they wished for more communication among counselors and administrators or more input into their specific function as a counselor. The "other" category was used for the counselors' responses regarding the improvement of counseling curriculum or increasing the budget. Finally, counselors from both public and Catholic schools indicated a need for fewer administrative tasks, such as filling out applications.

### ***Research Questions***

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, the researchers sought to identify significant differences in the academic background and training of Catholic and public school counselors as well as any significant differences in the performance of their roles. Second, the researchers investigated whether Catholic school counselors are knowledgeable about how their counseling program is reflective of their schools' Catholic identity and unique mission and whether, in fact, they incorporate the Catholic identity and mission of their school into their ministry with students. The significant findings for the research questions are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

*Summary of the Significant Findings for the Research Questions*

Research Question	Public versus Catholic School	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
RQ 1: Institution for Bachelor's Degree	More Catholic school counselors attended Catholic institutions.	23.94	.000
RQ 1: Institution for Master's Degree	More Catholic school counselors attended Catholic institutions.	8.19	.017
RQ 1: Resources for Continuing Education	More Catholic school counselors use multiple resources for continuing education.	9.76	.021
RQ 2: Time Spent Consulting with Parents	Public school counselors spend more time consulting with parents.	8.97	.030
RQ 2: Time Spent Consulting with Administrators	Public school counselors spend more time consulting with administrators.	18.94	.001
RQ 2: Time Spent with Coordination Activities	Public school counselors spend more time on coordination activities.	11.29	.046
RQ 2: How a Guidance Program is Distinct	Catholic school counselors use mission-oriented/religious reasons for explaining how their programs are distinct.	7.90	.005
RQ 3: How Guidance Programs Are Reflective of the Schools' Mission	Catholic school counselors reflect the religious/mission-oriented nature of their schools in their guidance programs.	11.69	.039
RQ 4: Scenario 1 (Pregnant Student)	Catholic school counselors use more mission-oriented (religious) dimensions in the situation.	6.68	.010
RQ 4: Scenario 4 (Muslim Student)	Catholic school counselors use more mission-oriented (religious) dimensions in the situation.	5.81	.016

***Academic Background and Training of Catholic and Public School Counselors***

To identify whether any significant differences in academic background and training existed between Catholic and public school counselors, the researchers looked at the type of undergraduate and graduate school programs that participants attended as well as their special training and professional development. The respondents' classifications of undergraduate and graduate schools were identified and divided into Catholic, public, or schools affiliated with another religious denomination. The majority (76.5%) of counselors who currently work in public schools attended public undergraduate and graduate institutions. However, several (9.8%) public school counselors attended a Catholic college or university for their undergraduate studies and 15.7% for their graduate studies. Only a small percentage (2.0%) of public

school counselors attended another type of college for their undergraduate and graduate training.

Of those counselors working in the Catholic schools, a little over half (52.5%) attended a Catholic institution for their undergraduate studies. However, 55.9% of counselors attended a public college or university for their graduate degrees. Only a small percentage (8.5%) of Catholic school counselors attended a non-Catholic religiously affiliated school for their undergraduate studies, while no Catholic school counselors reported attending a non-Catholic religiously affiliated school for their graduate studies. Thus, the majority of school counselors working in public schools attended public undergraduate and graduate institutions, while more Catholic school counselors attended Catholic undergraduate and public graduate institutions. Overall, there were significantly more Catholic school counselors who attended Catholic institutions for both undergraduate and graduate training,  $\chi^2 = 23.94, p = .00$ ;  $\chi^2 = 8.19, p = .017$ , respectively.

*Special training.* In regard to school counselors who participated in training in addition to their formal professional graduate school preparation, the most frequent responses indicated that counselors had training in teaching or had additional post-master's degree credits. Other training included principal certificates or degrees in other fields (e.g., English). Only a few Catholic school counselors (5.1%) had training whose content incorporated Catholic theology or faith. In general, only 18.4% of all counselors did not have additional training beyond a master's degree.

The types of professional development counselors reported attending were categorized as professional development workshops, continuing education classes, professional journals, and multiple forms of development that included several or all of the above noted categories. Significantly more Catholic school counselors used multiple resources for continuing education,  $\chi^2 = 9.76, p = .021$ . The majority (70.9%) of both Catholic and public school counselors used multiple forms of professional development. Of the three types of resources presented, professional development workshops alone yielded the highest percentage of counselors, with 13.6% of Catholic school counselors and 19.6% of public school counselors participating. Professional journals alone were the least frequently used source of continuing education among counselors.

### ***Differences in Role Performance between Catholic and Public School Counselors***

To identify whether any major differences exist between Catholic and public school counselors in how they perform their role in the school, the researchers looked at participant responses in regard to how they spend most of their time and which aspects of their school counseling program they viewed as unique. School counselors' responsibilities were used to determine the amount of time that counselors spend in counseling (academic and personal), consulting (with parents, teachers, administrators, and others), college/career planning, and coordinating activities (including testing, scheduling, organizational activities, or evaluation of the counseling program). The results indicated that public school counselors spend significantly more time consulting with parents,  $\chi^2 = 8.97, p = .030$ ; consulting with administrators,  $\chi^2 = 18.9, p = .001$ ; and performing coordination of activities,  $\chi^2 = 11.3, p = .046$ , than do Catholic school counselors.

Table 8 presents the counselors' beliefs about the unique aspects of their counseling programs. Many counselors' responses were placed into more than one category. It is important to note that over half (58.2%) of the counselors did not respond to the question, and there were no Catholic school counselors who highlighted the religious nature of their schools as a reason for their distinctiveness. Of interest is the finding that 43.5% of the counselors from both schools indicated that their counseling team members work well together and are supportive, cohesive, and dedicated to their work. Examples of "other" responses from those working in the Catholic schools were, "It is not a standard program. It has been patched together with mostly parent volunteers," and, "Counselor turnover has been high the past year." Additional responses from the public school counselors include, "It's almost all paperwork; we spend our days programming, filling out applications and transcripts," and, "The workload is not uniform among counselors." Overall, there were more similarities than differences found between Catholic and public school counselors regarding the unique aspects of their schools and performance of their role.

### ***Understanding the Catholic School's Identity and Mission in the Counseling Program***

To identify how knowledgeable Catholic school counselors are about how their counseling program is reflective of their schools' Catholic identity and unique mission, the researchers looked at participant responses to how their counseling programs are reflective of their school's mission and which areas of students' growth and development they are most effective at fostering. This

Table 8

*Unique Aspects of Counselors' Specific Guidance Programs*

Unique Aspect	Public ( <i>n</i> = 22)	Catholic ( <i>n</i> = 24)	Total ( <i>N</i> = 46)	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
				.676	.713
Counselors Are Cohesive, Hard Working, and Supportive	11 (50.0%)	9 (37.5%)	20 (43.5%)		
Other General Responses	11 (50.0%)	14 (58.3%)	25 (54.3%)		
Missing Data	29 (56.9%)	35 (59.3%)	64 (58.2%)		

*Note.* Counselors' responses may have been placed into more than one category.

was an important part of this research in that it gave counselors an opportunity to describe their mission statements in terms of their role as a school counselor. The results indicated that there was a significant difference between Catholic and public school counselors regarding the acknowledgment of their mission. While some counselors working in a Catholic school mentioned that the school is religiously based or that their mission incorporates faith development and follows the example of Jesus in a Christ-centered environment, only 8 of 51 responses (15.69%) reported such aspects of their mission.

In addition, 10 of the Catholic school counselors indicated that their counseling programs seek to educate the whole person intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Examples of the "other" category included answers such as, "encouraging [students] to never give up—to believe in themselves," or, "We work as a team, supportive of the school's mission." It is important to note that 43 of 51 responses (84.31%) did not indicate that the school's mission statement was integrated into the counseling program or counselors' work with students, parents, teachers, administrators, or other constituents. Nonetheless, Catholic counselors frequently addressed the mission of the school and the development of the whole person when asked how their counseling program reflects the mission of their school,  $\chi^2 = 11.69$ ,  $p = .039$ .

The public school counselors' responses to how their mission is reflective of their counseling program yielded 48 responses. More than one-third (39.6%) of counselors fell within the "other" category, which included statements such as, "Have all students strive for their best at all times," and "We support student success through whatever means are required." There were more public school than Catholic school counselors who responded by emphasizing post-high school needs or focused on helping students become responsible citizens.



The instrument also contained an open-response item that asked counselors to cite which areas of student growth and development they were most effective at fostering. For this item, counselors' responses were open-ended and may have been included in more than one category. The majority (58.8%) of both Catholic and public school counselors reported that their guidance programs were most effective in the area of college and career development (this included responses that addressed academic development). The only additional area noted was personal counseling and development. There were no Catholic school counselors who responded that their counseling programs were effective in the area of spiritual or faith development.

### ***Incorporating the Catholic School's Identity and Mission into Work with Students***

To identify how Catholic school counselors incorporate the Catholic identity and mission of their school into their work with students, the researchers looked at participant responses to a variety of counseling scenarios. The results indicated a significant difference between Catholic and public school counselors for scenarios 1 and 4. Scenario 1 revealed that Catholic school counselors incorporated mission-oriented reasoning when counseling a pregnant student. However, despite this significant difference,  $\chi^2 = 6.68$ ,  $p = .010$ , only 7 out of 54 Catholic school counselors (11.9%) included a religious or mission-oriented explanation in their responses, while none of the 48 public school counselors (94%) who responded included a mission-oriented rationale. Several public and Catholic school counselors did not respond to this question.

Scenario 4 yielded 53 responses from the Catholic school counselors and 46 from public school counselors. Catholic school counselors responded significantly more often with a mission-oriented reason,  $\chi^2 = 5.81$ ,  $p = .016$ . It is important to note, however, that 2 of the 46 public school counselors (3.9%) and only 11 out of the 53 Catholic school counselors (18.6%) included mission-oriented responses in their answers.

The results for scenarios 2 and 3 revealed no significant differences between the responses of public and Catholic school counselors. Catholic school counselors had one mission-oriented response out of 51 (1.7%) for scenario 2 as well as 3 mission-oriented responses out of 56 (5.1%) for scenario 3.

When assessing a counselor's college interview protocol, the results indicated that the majority of Catholic school counselors do not ask students whether the religious affiliation of an institution is important to them in their decision-making process. This is important to note because counselors

reported that they spend approximately 6 to 10 hours per week with academic counseling and college/career planning. Typical Catholic school counselor interview questions tended to focus on academic major, location of the college or university, size of the college or university, and career interests. As school counselors assist students in planning for their future, it appears relevant to the mission of most Catholic schools to continue addressing issues related to one's spiritual development; however, only three Catholic school counselors asked students whether religious affiliation of the school was important to them in their decision-making process.

Public school counselors most often ask students about the location of the college or university as well as the cost and the size of the college or university that they wish to attend. The questions that were coded in the "other" category included whether a sibling or parent went to a specific college or university, the factors that are important to the student in his or her search for a college, or whether the student had visited the college or university. It is also important to note that one public school counselor responded that he or she would inquire about the school's religious affiliation.

### **Summary and Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to assess the uniqueness in the understanding and practice of Catholic school counselors. With few exceptions, the most significant finding of the study is that, most often, Catholic school counselors do not effectively incorporate the identity and unique mission of the Catholic Church into their work with students, parents, teachers, and administrators. The results of this study found that public schools had a greater number of full-time counselors and a greater number of students in their schools and that public school counselors spent more time consulting with parents and administrators and coordinating activities. In contrast, Catholic schools had more part-time counselors and, overall, counselors had a greater mean age, went to Catholic undergraduate and graduate institutions, and desired to work in a specific Catholic environment. Additionally, Catholic school counselors had more parental support, used multiple forms of resources for continuing education, and mentioned more mission-oriented or religious reasons for how their programs were distinct. These counselors provided more mission-oriented responses, indicating how their programs were reflective of their schools' mission. Finally, Catholic school counselors noted more mission-oriented and religious dimensions in their responses to scenarios regarding counseling pregnant female students and consulting with faculty members

about a student who desires to leave the classroom frequently for Muslim religious prayer.

The number of full-time public school counselors appears to be related to the significantly greater number of students in the public schools. According to the ASCA (2005b), the ratio of one counselor for every 250 students is recommended as best practice. Although many schools are unable to keep this exact proportion, the greater number of students in a school would call for more full-time counselors. Catholic schools are not bound by the ASCA counselor-student ratio and generally have fewer students. One possible reason that public school counselors responded with fewer mission-oriented answers may be they focus heavily on coordinating activities. Public school counselors, as opposed to Catholic school counselors, report spending significantly more time with such activities as testing, scheduling, organizational activities, or evaluating the counseling program. The need for testing and other measures of accountability clearly has made an impact on the public school counselors' use of time. Although Catholic schools aspire to have all students make measurable educational gains, they are not obligated by law to meet the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements expected of public schools.

Both public and Catholic school counselors appear to be comparable in reports of their level of work satisfaction. Public school counselors, however, spent a significantly greater amount of time consulting with parents. One possible explanation for Catholic school counselors' spending less time consulting with the parents is that Catholic school parents have selectively chosen a Catholic education for their children. Sending a child to a Catholic school generally involves a greater financial commitment by parents, and may account for less variability regarding mission, faith, and values. A shared mission may also account for this study's findings that Catholic school counselors have more parental support. Parental support of the counselors may indicate that the parents are aware of how the school operates and that they support the overall mission of the Catholic school and the role of the school counselors in guiding their children.

When compared with public school counselors, Catholic school counselors more frequently referenced their school's mission as a primary reason for working in a Catholic school. However, as a cohort, the majority of Catholic school counselors made no mention of their school's Catholic identity or unique mission as a reason for their choice of employment. This is not to imply that the faith dimension of Catholic education is not important to the majority of Catholic school counselors, but, based on the findings, one can assume that it is not the primary reason for selecting Catholic education.

Additionally, when compared with their public school counterparts, Catholic school counselors reported more mission-oriented responses when describing the uniqueness of their school's counseling program. However, as a cohort, only 16.7% of Catholic school counselors indicated that their programs were distinct due to a mission-oriented or religious reason. Again, this is not to suggest that the Catholic dimension of their schools is unimportant to the majority of Catholic school counselors surveyed. Rather, it is to imply that it is not among the primary reasons for distinctiveness. Similarly, only 15.7% of Catholic counselors indicated that their programs were reflective of the schools' mission by way of more mission-oriented responses. Despite the significance of these findings, there were few Catholic school counselors who appeared truly to understand and relate the mission of their school to their counseling programs.

This pattern among Catholic school counselors is also seen when examining their mission-oriented responses to real-life scenarios. Although mission-oriented reasons are more prevalent when addressing the issues of pregnant students and a Muslim student's need to leave the classroom for prayer, there were still very few Catholic school counselors (11.9% and 18.6%, respectively) who incorporated the mission of the school in their responses. The counselors may be clinically trained to address such issues, yet the data from this study indicate that most counselors do not incorporate mission-centered thinking as essential to their approach.

This dearth of mission-oriented focus was also noted in the question protocol used by counselors with students who are preparing for college. The results indicated that many Catholic counselors do not ask about the religious affiliation of a potential college or the importance of religious activities that a college or university would provide. This is important to note because it also was reported that Catholic school counselors spend approximately 6 to 10 hours per week counseling students about college and career planning. Although choosing a major, the location and size of the school, and financial assistance are very important issues to address in a college interview, so too is the continued spiritual and religious formation that, hopefully, has been enhanced during high school.

The failure of Catholic school counselors to incorporate the Catholic identity and unique mission significantly into their work with students, parents, teachers, and administrators warrants consideration. The trend in post-Vatican II Catholic school counseling is toward an emphasis on psychological theories, at the expense of the religious formation of the student. This comes as little surprise when considering the lack of emphasis on spiritual and religious

formation of Catholic school counselors as well as the lack of orientation and ongoing formation offered by the Catholic schools in which they serve.

By way of response to this trend, it is incumbent upon the Catholic diocesan leadership to view this void in theological and spiritual formation among Catholic school counselors as indicative of a greater void in and need for continuing education of adult Catholics. At both the diocesan and local school settings, dioceses must take seriously their mission to educate all members of the Body of Christ, not just those enrolled in Catholic schools. Catholic school leadership, both at the diocesan and local school level, must initiate an inclusive formational program for all Catholic school employees who would serve to integrate the Catholic identity and unique mission at each level of service within each school.

When applied to the adult spiritual formation of Catholic school counselors, Catholic universities and colleges preparing school counselors must have as their goal the integration of mind, heart, and spirit. When these operate in an integrated way, then compassionate action can be anticipated (Goodell & Robinson, 2008), and their school's Catholic identity and mission will be effectively served.

Beginning with the hiring interview and the orientation process, Catholic school leadership must make a conscious effort to thread the Catholic identity, as it is embodied in the school's unique mission, into each academic and extracurricular program offered. Catholic school diocesan officials must make a concerted effort to include in the agenda of school counseling the need for congruence in their personal and professional lives (Palmer, 1998, 1998/1999), thereby distinguishing what they do as a ministry rather than a job.

### ***Limitations of the Study***

With regard to instrumentation, there are several limitations. The instrument employed for this study was developed by the researchers to elicit information about the identity and mission of school counselors and their programs. Although precautions were taken to provide reliability and internal validity, it was difficult to achieve high external validity. Given that there is a limited amount of research on school counseling programs in relation to identity and mission of the school and that no instrument previously existed, it was necessary to construct a new instrument.

Responses to the pilot study of the instrument demonstrated that it took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Although this was taken into account, the length of the instrument was considered necessary for determining how school counselors implement identity and mission into their role. It should be

noted that the instrument was constructed as concisely as possible and that caution was taken to avoid bias or ambiguity in the items. Nevertheless, the length might have deterred some counselors from answering all the questions or responding to the instrument at all.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

Future research should focus on increasing the response rate within each diocese and increasing the number of participating dioceses as well as considering the value of a national survey. This would allow for the evaluation of differences between dioceses. Additionally, the present study surveyed the religious affiliation of Catholic school counselors but not their religious practice. Future research should assess the implications of religious practice on the role of Catholic school guidance counselors. Finally, the findings of this study support the need for the implementation and careful evaluation of orientation and training programs in which religious and non-religious Catholic school faculty may be actively involved and renewed in their commitment to examining and reclaiming the components of their school's Catholic identity and unique heritage.

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