



October 2016

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Recommended Citation

Spesia, D. D. (2016). Nurturing a Heart for the New Evangelization: A National Study of Catholic Elementary School Principals in the U.S.. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 20 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.2001122016>

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Cover Page Footnote

With much gratitude, I would like to acknowledge the outstanding educational researchers at the University of St. Francis in Joliet for countless hours of guidance throughout this study. In addition, this project would have never been brought to completion without the tireless support and good counsel of my favorite educational leader, my wife Tracy!

Nurturing a Heart for the New Evangelization: A National Study of Catholic Elementary School Principals in the U.S.

David D. Spesia
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The Catholic Church calls school principals to serve not only as educational leaders and ecclesial ministers, but also as agents of the New Evangelization. Given the Church's ongoing call for a New Evangelization, it is essential to establish how the principals themselves perceive this missionary mandate; it is also important to explore what elements of the principals' own faith formation have best equipped them for this unique role and what areas for ongoing growth they themselves identify. This mixed-methods study collected both quantitative and qualitative data through a survey of over 600 Catholic elementary school principals across the U.S.; personal interviews triangulated the data from the survey. The findings of this study identify a high level of comfort among the principals regarding the work of the New Evangelization, as well as a positive correlation among several areas of faith formation and their general confidence about the mission. The study concludes with recommendations for future formation at the service of the New Evangelization.

Keywords: Catholic education, New Evangelization, faith formation, principals

*"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever"
(Heb. 13:8, NAB)*

The Gospel remains the same good news in the globalized world of the 21st century as it was in the Roman Empire of the first century, yet today's rapidly shifting cultural context poses new challenges for the Church's proclamation of the Gospel. Thus Catholic schools, so intimately linked to the Church's evangelizing mission in the U.S., find themselves at the forefront of an ongoing call for a New Evangelization. This call poses new opportunities for Catholic educational leaders as a whole, but especially for the Church's elementary school principals. After all, the call for a New Evangelization is not just another professional requirement for already over-worked school principals. Rather, it is the proclamation that the Gospel must

become incarnate anew, here and now. To serve the mission of the Church today, Catholic schools must reclaim the deepest roots of their mission and identity—namely, the forming of “intentional disciples” of Jesus Christ (Weddell, 2012), the raising up of “dynamic Catholics” (Kelly, 2013), and the sending forth of “missionary disciples” (Pope Francis (2013)). Indeed, Catholic schools in the U.S. must be places “where the New Evangelization can reach out to parents and children” (USCCB, 2013).

The New Evangelization and Catholic School Principals

The New Evangelization traces its roots to Jesus’ great commission, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20), although its “newness” first began to emerge in the second half of the last century. Indeed, the Second Vatican Council (1965) reaffirmed not only that Christ has sent the Church to the ends of the earth as a unique sign or instrument of salvation, but also that “the present-day conditions of the world add greater urgency to this work of the Church” (*Lumen gentium*, para. 1). Ensuing popes would further expand upon this vision of the Church’s task within the context of an increasingly post-modern world: Bl. Paul VI reminded that “the Church exists in order to evangelize”; St. John Paul II called for an evangelization which would be new in “ardor, methods and expression”; Pope Benedict XVI insisted that the Church must “re-propose” the Gospel to those who have experienced a crisis of faith, due to the radical secularization of these times (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 2012, pp. 10-11).

More recently, Pope Francis (2013) has continued to refine this vision of the New Evangelization. His apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* challenges the entire Church to share the “joy of the Gospel,” and its implications for Catholic schools are clear:

I want to emphasize that what I am trying to express here has a programmatic significance and important consequences. I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. ‘Mere administration’ can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission.’ (para. 25)

Within this context, Catholic schools in the United States continue to be a privileged locus of the Church's teaching and evangelizing efforts. Pope Francis (2013) writes that, "Catholic schools, which always strive to join their work of education with the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, are a most valuable resource for the evangelization of culture, even in those countries and cities where hostile situations challenge us to greater creativity in our search for suitable methods" (para. 134).

In a Catholic school, the work of reaching various audiences and evangelizing the culture itself increasingly falls to the principal. The University of Notre Dame's landmark study of Catholic elementary school principals demonstrated that Catholic educational leaders are motivated by "their sense of leadership as ministry, of schools as centers of evangelization," even as they identify that "frustration with a never-ending list of urgent action items for each day points to their awareness of other important and essential tasks that they leave unaddressed" (Nuzzi, Holter, & Frabutt, 2013, pp. 53-54). Given this reality, one essential question concerns the most effective ways to support integral and holistic faith formation among busy Catholic school principals. Since recent decades have brought an increased attention to the work of Catholic school principals as ecclesial ministers, catechetical and spiritual leaders (Ciriello, 1994; Earl, 2005; USCCB, 2005a; USCCB, 2011; Lichter, 2010; Thompson, 2011; Beale, 2013; Schuttloffel, 2013), the Catholic educational community must continue focusing on the concrete faith formation needs of these unique educational leaders—as well as the most effective ways to meet these needs. As mission-driven leaders, Catholic elementary school principals would benefit from seeing the New Evangelization as a unifying and synthesizing context for their work as ecclesial ministers and educational leaders.

The Need and Purpose of the Study

Catholic school principals face a new set of challenges as they strive to create a "culture of witness" in their school communities (USCCB, 2012). One fundamental problem concerns how Catholic elementary school principals understand this call for a New Evangelization, as well as what they see as most important and effective in providing for their ongoing faith formation as leaders within the Church. Indeed, Catholic educational leaders must help ensure that their schools become missionary in their inner dynamism, or they will fail to fulfill their true work at the service of the Church. The purpose of this study was to explore the following questions: (a) how Catholic elementa-

ry school principals perceive the New Evangelization; (b) how they view their own faith formation as preparation for this work; and (c) what ongoing faith formation needs do they perceive to be helpful in light of this call. The results of this study could help arch/diocesan leaders identify what works best and what is most needed in both the initial formation of new principals and the ongoing formation of current principals. Catholic colleges and universities could also use this study to re-frame their educational leadership and teacher preparation programs. If Catholic schools are going to avoid either dying a slow death or becoming merely private schools, they need to promote the New Evangelization's "culture of encounter" (Pope Francis, 2013), throughout all of their organizational and operational structures. Given this need and purpose of the study—or the "why"—the next sections of this article will proceed to explore the "how," the "what" and the "what next": that is, the study's method and its findings, as well as a discussion of recommendations.

Method of the Study

Nuzzi et al. (2013) offered the following as the final recommendation of their national study of principals: "It is crucial for the ministry of Catholic schools to be known, seen and experienced as instruments of the New Evangelization" (p. 58). Inspired not only by the Notre Dame Study's method and findings but also by this particular recommendation, this study of Catholic elementary school principals collected data via a web-based survey; individual telephone interviews then helped triangulate this data. A mixed-methods approach gathered both quantitative and qualitative data regarding its research questions about the principals' attitudes and perceptions about the New Evangelization, as well as their own faith formation experience and needs.

A Profile of the Participants

Participants in the study included 683 Catholic elementary school principals from across the U.S. Since the researcher disseminated the web-based survey with the prior permission and cooperation of diocesan superintendents of schools, the study included 51 dioceses, which was a 30% participation rate among the total pool of dioceses and archdioceses in the country. These 51 arch/dioceses had 1,471 schools during the 2014-2015 school year (McDonald & Shultz, 2015), so the 683 participating principals constituted a 46% response rate among those arch/dioceses which chose to participate in the study. Moreover, the sample size of 683 was approximately 13% of the total population of 5,368 principals nationally, and a power analysis revealed

it to be statistically significant assuming a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level. After completing the survey, nine principals volunteered to participate in follow-up interviews, and this qualitative data helped triangulate the quantitative data from the survey.

The participants of this study consisted of a representative sampling of diocesan schools from the following regions of the country—Northeast, East, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, West, and Northwest; they were also representative of the four main locations identified by the NCEA—urban, inner-city, suburban, or rural (McDonald & Schultz, 2015). Other relevant demographic data of the participating principals included their age and years of experience as a principal. The study utilized a non-probability convenience sampling which depended on whether arch/diocesan superintendents decided to forward the surveys to their principals, as well as whether the principals volunteered to complete the survey.

Data Collection

The researcher organized the survey's questions into three main sections, which corresponded to the three primary research questions of the study—regarding confidence about the New Evangelization, effective elements of the principals' prior faith formation, and perceived needs for ongoing faith formation. This allowed for quantification of scalar data from summary columns for each of the three sections, along with an analysis of the reliability of each grouping of questions.

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha for Scalar Data from the Survey's Three Primary Sections

Survey Section	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
#1 New Evangelization	.941	9
#2 Prior Faith Formation	.943	24
#3 Future Faith Formation	.945	20

As Table 1 indicates, the Cronbach's alpha analysis (SPSS 22.0) of scalar data from the summary columns for each of the survey's three main sections revealed a very high level of reliability. There were no questions whose deletion would have resulted in a stronger Cronbach's alpha, and so the researcher did not need to eliminate any questions when analyzing the data.

The survey instrument utilized a five-point Likert-like scale with one of two different sets of responses, depending on the type of questions or statements proposed: 1) *Not at All—Somewhat—Moderately—Very—Extremely*; 2) *Strongly Disagree—Disagree—Neutral—Agree—Strongly Agree*. The core content of the survey emerged from the context of a number of sources. Questions about the New Evangelization incorporated insights from the USCCB's *Disciples Called to Witness* (2012) and Pope Francis' *The Joy of the Gospel* (2013). Questions regarding personal faith formation included themes from the *General Directory for Catechesis* (Congregation for the Clergy, 1998) and the *National Directory for Catechesis* (USCCB, 2005b), as well as the U.S. Bishops' *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* (USCCB, 1999) and *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (USCCB, 2005a). Finally, questions about future formation needs utilized insights from the *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers* (USCCB, 2011) and Fr. Robert Barron's *Seven Great Qualities of a New Evangelist* (2012).

The basic timeline for the study was as follows: The researcher first sent letters of introduction via the U.S. postal service to diocesan and archdiocesan superintendents across the country. This correspondence informed the superintendents about the purpose of the study, asked for their assistance in disseminating the survey with their respective principals, and noted that a follow-up email would contain a link to the survey. Two weeks later, the 173 Catholic school superintendents received an email with a brief description of the study and an invitation to forward the survey to their respective principals. The survey instrument itself included an open invitation to any principals who might want to participate in a follow-up interview regarding the New Evangelization and the related questions about faith formation. The second phase of this mixed-methods study consisted of nine telephone interviews, in which the researcher utilized best practices in interview protocol. By using both the survey and interview responses, in accordance with all IRB standards, this mixed-methods study triangulated the data gathered from Catholic elementary school principals.

Data Analysis

The statistical analysis plan in this study incorporated both descriptive analysis—including basic frequencies and chi-square—and inferential analysis which included Cronbach's alpha, Pearson's correlation, and regression analysis. The study relied on the following assumptions as it analyzed its data.

First, for the data which were related to categorical scales, the researcher utilized basic descriptive analysis. Secondly, other than the introductory demographic questions, all of the questions on the web-based survey employed a similar five-point Likert-like scale, and so the study also analyzed the data in continuous scales according to the three main sections of the survey. Thirdly, since scalar data from each of the main sections of the survey related directly to the three primary research questions of the study, inferential statistics were particularly appropriate here; the researcher was able to compare differences among groups and to correlate the connections between different variables. Finally, for the qualitative data from the interviews and from the semi-closed responses on the survey, the researcher transcribed and coded the data, identified core themes or categories, and then related these findings to the quantitative data. Throughout its analysis of the data, the study assumed an alpha or significance level of $p \leq .05$.

Findings of the Study

Research Question #1: Confidence Regarding the New Evangelization

How confident do Catholic elementary school principals feel about serving as leaders of the New Evangelization? The most succinct answer would be “very”—although not absolutely. On a five-point scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree,” study participants responded to nine statements regarding their level of comfort about the Church’s evangelizing mission. The *frequencies for scalar data for New Evangelization questions* show an extremely strong response on all of the questions related to the New Evangelization, with a mean of 4.44 and the most frequent response being a five, or “Strongly Agree.” (See Table 2.)

Table 2

Frequencies of Scalar Data for New Evangelization Questions (n = 666)

Measure	5 Point Scale
Mean	4.44
Median	5.00
Mode	5.00
SD	0.62

A review of descriptive statistics for individual questions offered very helpful insights about the attitudes of the principals. Additional analysis of the individual survey questions related to the New Evangelization focused on the percentage of the respondents who replied “Strongly Agree” to each statement. Given that respondents who either disagreed, were neutral, or merely agreed with any of these questions regarding the New Evangelization thereby indicated various levels of hesitation about a given statement, the most enthusiastic and unqualified responses helped identify the most consistent “net promoters” of the New Evangelization (Reichheld, 2003).

As Table 3 indicates, Question #18 on creating a culture of Christian witness had both the highest mean at 4.64 and 71% of the Catholic elementary school principals responding “Strongly Agree.” Qualitative data from both the survey’s open-ended responses and the telephone interviews also confirmed that these educational leaders understand that their schools exist in order to help make disciples of Jesus Christ. As one principal stated in an interview, “Catholic schools are at the heart of evangelization, and the elementary school is where it needs to start; that’s where seeds of faith are planted.” At the other end of the spectrum, Question #19 stood out as having the weakest overall response rate, with a mean of 3.94 and only 28% of the principals expressing unqualified agreement about being willing to reach out to non-practicing Catholics. This result should provide a focus for future research and practice in working with Catholic educational leaders, given that part of the essential work of the New Evangelization consists of inviting non-practicing Catholics to a renewed commitment to Christ and the Church. Question #21 had a mean of 4.30 with 42% of the respondents indicating that they “Strongly Agree” that they are capable of serving as leaders of the New Evangelization. Although this may appear to diminish the overall enthusiasm expressed on the other questions in this section, the researcher’s interpretation is that Catholic elementary school principals feel confident about fulfilling various roles and responsibilities which are in fact related to the work of the New Evangelization, but they are still somewhat hesitant to think of themselves as leaders of the New Evangelization. This was the only statement in this section which explicitly mentioned the New Evangelization, and it may well be that many of these principals are more than comfortable engaging in different dimensions of the work, but they may still be hesitant to self-identify as leaders of the New Evangelization.

Table 3

Statements on New Evangelization with Means and "Strongly Agree" Responses

% Strongly Agree	Mean	Statement	Survey Question No.
71	4.64	I am comfortable helping to create a culture of Christian witness in my school.	18
68	4.60	I have been called by God to contribute to the mission of the Church.	14
66	4.58	I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in the Church.	13
61	4.49	I am open to ongoing conversion of heart and mind.	15
58	4.46	I enjoy helping to form intentional disciples of Jesus.	17
57	4.46	I am comfortable advocating for the poor, addressing issues of social justice, and defending the dignity of the human person.	20
52	4.38	I am comfortable sharing the Good News of the Gospel with others.	16
42	4.30	With the help of God's grace, I feel capable of fulfilling my role as a leader of the New Evangelization.	21
28	3.94	I am willing to reach out to fellow Catholics who are not actively practicing the faith.	19

Although two of the open-ended responses on this section of the survey reacted negatively to the very idea of the Catholic schools as centers of the New Evangelization (e.g., "Are we looking for educators or evangelists?"), a number of principals commended positively about the need to focus on such mission-essential questions for Catholic schools. Indeed, in the free-response section of the web-based survey, 12% of the open-ended comments specifically mentioned the need to reach the parents and families of school children. This fundamental task of the New Evangelization was also reinforced in the study's telephone interviews. On seven different occasions, the interviewees mentioned the importance of providing ongoing faith formation or evangelizing opportunities to connect parents and families more deeply with the Catholic faith of the school community. As one principal stated, "We're seeing that it [the New Evangelization] really needs to be directed to the

family—that’s where the faith used to be handed down, and there’s a generation gap, and we need to help these families form their children in the faith.” Moreover, the interviewees emphasized both the importance of keeping Christ at the center of the New Evangelization and the need to cultivate a personal relationship with Jesus. As one principal stated, “[The New Evangelization] takes me back to my own thoughts and centering myself on Christ, the call to enter into a deeper relationship with Christ in a more profound way, and then to share that message of the Gospel, the good news of Jesus, with all those around us.”

Research Question #2: Effective Prior Faith Formation

What practices and general areas of faith formation do Catholic elementary school principals believe have been most effective in their personal faith journeys? To answer this multi-part question, the researcher surveyed principals first about specific practices and then about general areas of their prior faith formation.

As Table 4 depicts, descriptive statistics of the scalar data from SPSS’s “compute” column indicated that the principals responded more favorably to the six general areas of faith formation ($M = 4.06$; $SD = 0.76$) than to the specific practices of faith formation ($M = 3.44$; $SD = 0.76$). The section of the web-based survey focused on specific practices included 18 different activities, and respondents rated them on a five point Likert-like scale. Descriptive data for these specific practices helped rank and prioritize the principals’ responses.

Table 4

Frequencies of Scalar Data for Prior Faith Formation, Both Specific Practices & General Areas

	Specific Faith Formation Practices (N = 598)	General Areas of Faith Formation (N = 651)
Mean	3.44	4.06
Median	3.00	4.00
Mode	3.00	5.00
SD	0.72	0.76

Table 5 shows both the mean and the percentage of respondents who rated the activity as “Extremely Important”—i.e., the “net promoters” (Reich-

held, 2003). Participating in Sunday Mass and committing to daily personal prayer rank as the most important elements of the principals' personal faith formation, with mean scores of 4.64 and 4.46 respectively, as well as having 70% and 59% response rates as "Extremely Important." This data verifies what might be an intuition of many who work in Catholic education—namely, that the commitments to daily prayer and Sunday worship are essential for Catholic school leaders. In the telephone interviews, the principals reinforced the importance of the Sacraments for the work of the New Evangelization.

Table 5

Specific Faith Formation Practices with Means & "Extremely Important" Responses

Mean	Specific Faith Formation Practice	% Responding "Extremely Important"
4.64	Participating in Sunday Mass	70
4.46	Committing to daily personal prayer	59
3.85	Spiritual reading and reflection	25
3.72	Volunteering with local organizations	24
3.71	Providing direct service to the poor	24
3.67	Participating in retreats or days of reflection	28
3.56	Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction	25
3.55	Praying the Rosary	25
3.49	Receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation	19
3.48	Meditating on the Scriptures	20
3.44	Making the Stations of the Cross	18
3.41	Engaging issues of justice & human dignity	16
2.92	Consulting with a spiritual director/mentor	12
2.87	Engaging in inter-religious dialogue	9
2.84	Engaging in political action for justice	8
2.83	Attending daily Mass	15
2.69	Online catechetical formation	4
2.59	Praying the Liturgy of the Hours	11

The second part of the study's inquiry into prior faith formation focused on the six general areas of faith formation identified by the Church (Congregation for the Clergy, 1998; USCCB, 2005b):

1. Growing in knowledge of the faith through study of the Church's Scripture and Tradition.
2. Encountering Christ in the Liturgy and the Sacraments and opening oneself to the Paschal Mystery.
3. Exploring the Christian vision for the moral life, in light of the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and the Church's social teaching.
4. Learning how to pray with Christ, participating in shared prayer and devotions, and fostering a personal relationship with God.
5. Participating in the Church's communal life and nurturing the virtues which support the faith community.
6. Contributing to the evangelizing mission of the church and becoming a witness to Jesus Christ in the world.

These categories would be familiar to many principals from the NCEA's ACRE and IFG assessments; as noted above, the principals rated these general areas more highly than the specific practices, with a mean of 4.06 ($N = 651$; $SD = 0.76$). When the researcher analyzed the data on general areas of faith formation individually, the findings complemented the findings regarding specific practices of faith formation.

Table 6

General Areas of Faith Formation with Means and "Extremely Important" Responses

Mean	General Areas of Faith Formation	% Responding "Extremely Important"
4.25	Christian prayer	47
4.24	Liturgy and the Sacraments	47
4.01	Moral life in Christ	34
3.99	The Church's communal life	34
3.98	The evangelizing mission of the Church	35
3.89	Knowledge of the faith	31

As Table 6 illustrates, both “Liturgy and the Sacraments” and “Christian prayer” received “Extremely Important” responses from 47% of the respondents, with a mean of 4.24 and 4.25 respectively; this corresponds with the findings noted above about “participating in Sunday Mass” and “committing to daily personal prayer.” In the more qualitative, open-ended section of the survey, 12% of the responses expressed frustration with the demands placed upon principals, with their already over-taxed schedules, and with the wide-ranging duties of the job. However, several of the interviewees mentioned that they had benefitted from embedding time for prayer and ongoing faith formation within their day-to-day schedules. In each of the nine telephone interviews, the principals specifically noted the importance of carving out some time for daily prayer, meditation and/or reflection. As one described it, “The key is daily prayer with Christ. Critical...What happens through prayer is amazing; it changes your frame of reference to help you realize that it’s not dependent on you but it’s dependent on God.”

A related sub-question regarding prior faith formation asked whether there was a significant positive relationship between the perceived effectiveness of prior faith formation and overall confidence regarding the New Evangelization. The researcher conducted a Pearson’s correlation analysis to begin addressing this question, and it indicated a moderate positive correlation between the perceived importance of prior faith formation and the principals’ attitudes about serving as leaders of the New Evangelization, $r(565) = .400$, $p = .000$; this correlation was statistically significant at the $p \leq .05$ level. After conducting a linear regression analysis both on the specific activities and on the general areas of prior faith formation noted in the survey, the researcher identified several activities and areas which may help predict confidence in serving as a leader of the New Evangelization (at the $p \leq .05$ level of significance).

The model summary disclosed that these predictors accounted for 17% of the variance ($R^2 = .170$), which was significant, $F(579) = 7.66$, $P = .000$, at the $p \leq .05$ level. Therefore, the researcher examined the specific prior faith formation activities individually and found three activities which were statistically significant at the $p \leq .05$ level. Table 7 identifies these: participating in Sunday Mass ($\beta = .139$, $p = .002$, $t = 3.06$), committing to daily personal prayer ($\beta = .114$, $p = .020$, $t = 2.33$), and Scriptural meditation ($\beta = .186$, $p =$

.003, $t = 2.98$). Along with the recurrence of Sunday Mass and daily prayer, the inclusion of Scriptural meditation was a notable addition. The researcher speculated that for many of the principals surveyed, Scriptural meditation may be closely related not only to their preparation for Sunday Mass but also to the form and content of their daily personal prayer. On a related note, interviewees spoke about the importance of Bible study groups in her personal experience, while another addressed the need to get the right resources in the hands of parents, “so they see the value of Scripture.”

Table 7

Linear Regression Analysis for Specific Activities of Prior Faith Formation & Confidence about the New Evangelization

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	β	T	
(Constant)	2.658	.201	--	13.195	.000
Spiritual reading	.071	.041	.104	1.743	.082
Online formation	.017	.028	.028	.602	.547
Scriptural meditation	.106	.036	.186	2.982	.003*
Sunday Mass	.129	.042	.139	3.060	.002*
Eucharistic Adoration	-.008	.030	-.015	-.274	.784
Reconciliation	.001	.032	.002	.044	.965
Daily Mass	-.051	.027	-.109	-1.924	.055
Engaging justice issues	.066	.035	.114	1.894	.059
Direct service to poor	.018	.035	.029	.515	.607
Daily personal prayer	.087	.037	.114	2.329	.020*
Spiritual direction	.004	.027	.008	.155	.877
The Rosary	-.016	.034	-.030	-.481	.630
Stations of the Cross	.029	.035	.050	.831	.407
Volunteering locally	-.021	.030	-.035	-.714	.475
Liturgy of the Hours	-.005	.030	-.010	-.155	.877
Political action	.013	.032	.024	.410	.682
Inter-religious dialogue	-.018	.031	-.034	-.590	.556
Retreats	.013	.029	.023	.435	.664

* Significant at $p \leq .05$ level

Next, the researcher regressed summary data regarding the New Evangelization onto the six general areas of faith formation. The model summary disclosed that these predictors accounted for 21% of the variance ($R^2 = .21$), which was significant, $F(629) = 29.47$, $P = .000$, at the $p \leq .05$ level. This indicated that one or more general areas of prior faith formation may help predict confidence in serving as a leader of the New Evangelization. Hence, the researcher proceeded to analyze the coefficients of the various elements.

Table 8

Linear Regression Analysis for General Areas of Prior Faith Formation and Confidence about the New Evangelization

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	β	T	
Growing in knowledge of the faith	.064	.034	.100	1.85	.064
Encountering Christ in the Liturgy and the Sacraments	.133	.040	.181	3.31	.001*
Exploring the Christian vision for the moral life	.032	.039	.045	.82	.410
Learning how to pray with Christ	.046	.037	.064	1.23	.218
Participating in the Church's communal life	.015	.036	.022	.41	.680
Contributing to the evangelizing mission of the Church	.098	.035	.148	2.76	.006*

* Significant at $p \leq .05$ level

As Table 8 indicates, two of the six general areas of faith formation were statistically significant at the $p \leq .05$ level: "Encountering Christ in the Liturgy and the Sacraments" ($\beta = .133$, $p = .001$, $t = 3.31$), and "Contributing to the evangelizing mission of the Church" ($\beta = .098$, $p = .006$, $t = 2.76$). The significance of the "Liturgy and Sacraments" was consistent with the repeated importance of the Mass, and "Contributing to the evangelizing mission of the Church" supported the research and theory of those who see intentional and conscious participation in the mission of the Church as essential to the

New Evangelization (Weddell, 2012; Kelly, 2012; USCCB, 2012). In short, while it may sound tautological, it appears that the more Catholic school principals intentionally contribute to the Church's evangelizing mission, the more confident they will feel regarding the New Evangelization.

Research Question #3: Future Faith Formation Needs

Which specific practices and general areas of future formation do Catholic elementary school principals feel would be most helpful as they operationalize the New Evangelization in their schools? To address this third major research question, the researcher analyzed a selection of six general questions regarding future faith formation, as well as 14 specific faith formation practices.

Table 9

Frequencies of Scalar Data for Future Faith Formation, both General Statements about Perceived Needs & Specific Activities

	General Statements on Future Faith Formation (N = 639)	Specific Activities for Future Faith Formation (N = 620)
Mean	4.23	3.98
Median	4.00	4.00
Mode	4.00	4.00
SD	0.53	0.69

In Table 9, descriptive statistics of the scalar data from SPSS's "compute" column reveal a strong consensus among the principals who participated in the study regarding the importance of future faith formation, both when responding more generally ($M = 4.23$; $SD = 0.53$) and when rating specific activities ($M = 3.98$; $SD = 0.69$). The six general questions at the start of this section of the survey utilized a five-point scale (1 = Not Important; 2 = Somewhat Important; 3 = Moderately Important; 4 = Very Important; 5 = Extremely Important), and the researcher analyzed responses to these statements individually.

Table 10 indicates that the principals rated most highly the statement which read, "Overall, I think that ongoing faith formation is essential for helping Catholic school leaders serve as agents of the New Evangelization" ($M = 4.45$; $SD = 0.61$). In the telephone interviews, one principal commented that there must be creative ways to address the need for ongoing formation

since, “In Catholic education everyone is expected to do everything, but that’s not a sustainable proposition.” Lack of time also emerged as a recurring concern on the open-ended responses of the survey.

Table 10

General Statements on Future Faith Formation with Means and “Strongly Agree” Responses

% Strongly Agree	Mean	Statement	Survey Question No.
47	4.45	Overall, I think that ongoing faith formation is essential for helping Catholic school leaders serve as agents of the New Evangelization.	30
33	4.26	I would like to grow in understanding of the Scriptures, Church tradition, and Doctrine.	26
32	4.22	I would be open to faith formation experiences which would nurture my desire for holiness.	25
29	4.14	I would appreciate workshops regarding the Church’s teachings on key moral issues of our day.	27
28	4.11	I would appreciate additional instruction in the practice of Christian prayer and in the great tradition of Christian spirituality.	28
27	4.10	I would be interested in practical strategies for promoting membership in the Christian community and participation in the Church’s mission in the world.	29

The next part of the survey asked the principals to rate the helpfulness of a number of specific faith formation activities. When the researcher analyzed this data in a summary “compute” column of SPSS, the principals were generally supportive of these specific topics for future faith formation, with a mean of 3.98 (N = 620; SD = 0.69). An analysis of responses to individual topics helped prioritize some of the future needs.

Table 11
Specific Activities for Future Faith Formation with Means & “Extremely Helpful” Responses

Needs for Future Faith Formation	N	Mean	SD	% Responding “Extremely Helpful”
Fostering a personal encounter with Christ	652	4.03	.890	30
The basic proclamation of the Gospel	651	4.04	.830	28
A daily prayer plan	649	3.98	.894	27
A distinctively Catholic world view	651	3.82	.995	24
The significance of the Eucharist	649	4.09	.879	34
Digital resources and new media	650	3.90	.959	26
Strategies for missionary transformation	649	3.67	.963	18
Reflection on sin and Reconciliation	652	3.78	.958	21
Keeping Christ at the center of pedagogy	653	4.22	.823	40
Instruction on the Sacred Scriptures	652	4.05	.854	29
Inviting others to Sunday Mass	653	3.92	.992	30
Spiritual support and formation for families	647	4.29	.799	42
Promoting vocations	652	3.93	.939	26
Reflecting on the Church’s mission	647	3.93	.927	26

The first noteworthy finding reported in Table 11 was that the least desirable topic was “strategies for missionary transformation,” with a mean of 3.67 and only 18% of the principals responding “Extremely Helpful.” The researcher’s speculation about this relatively weak response was that the topic itself may have been unclear to many of the principals; it also seemed to contradict an identified need for the schools to reach out to parents and families according to the survey’s open-ended responses. In other words, perhaps many respondents were unsure what “missionary transformation” might mean and/or what kind of strategies it might include. A second and very positive finding was that “keeping Christ at the center of pedagogy” had the highest percentage of principals responding “Extremely Helpful” (40%). The researcher’s

interpretation of this priority was that it likely relates to the recent emphasis on Catholic identity in many elementary schools across the U.S. This emphasis also relates to the challenge that schools face in developing curriculum and instructional methods authentically centered on Christ, so that religion will not be reduced to merely one part of each day's learning. Finally, there was one important topic which emerged from the interviews but was not included on the survey. It centered on the fruitfulness of small faith-sharing groups and opportunities to grow in and through relationships with fellow Christians. Whether it would be a Bible study, a book club, a prayer circle, or perhaps even a professional learning community of committed Catholic school educators, there was strong support for the potential of such group experiences to foster the ongoing faith formation which principals recognize they need.

A related sub-question about future faith formation needs asked, "Is there a significant positive relationship between perceived needs for future faith formation and confidence in serving as a leader of the New Evangelization?" A Pearson's correlation analysis disclosed that there was a moderate positive correlation of perceived future needs for faith formation with confidence regarding the New Evangelization, $r(633) = .404$, $p = .000$; this correlation was statistically significant at the $p \leq .05$ level. Given this significant correlation, the researcher conducted a regression analysis to assess which specific elements identified as needs for future formation were most strongly associated with being comfortable about the work of the New Evangelization.

The model summary disclosed that these predictors accounted for 16.5% of the variance ($R^2 = .165$), which was significant at the $p \leq .05$ level, $F(600) = 9.496$, $p = .000$. Therefore, the researcher examined the recommendations for future faith formation individually and found two activities which were statistically significant at the $p \leq .05$ level. Table 12 identifies these: fostering a personal encounter with Christ ($\beta = .135$, $p = .015$, $t = 2.45$), and promoting vocations ($\beta = .171$, $p = .004$, $t = 2.90$). These two areas suggest a positive predictive value such that, the more one is interested in fostering a personal encounter with Christ and promoting vocations, the more confident one feels regarding the New Evangelization. The researcher interpreted these as signs of hope, since one's personal relationship with Christ in and through the Church stands at the heart of the New Evangelization and provides the hinge upon which a Christian sense of vocation hangs. In addition, a renewed appreciation of vocations to the priesthood and religious life continues to be essential for the Church's mission in the world. Finally, several of the inter-

viewees of this study also noted the importance of the sacramental encounter with Christ for the work of the New Evangelization. As one principal stated, “I think a lot of Catholic schools miss the obvious fact that we have Jesus in the Eucharist, and if the goal is to bring people to Jesus, maybe we should bring the people to Jesus!”

Table 12

Linear Regression Analysis of Perceived Needs for Future Faith Formation and Confidence Regarding the New Evangelization

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	β	T	
(Constant)	3.117	.148	.135	21.039	.000
Fostering a personal encounter with Christ	.093	.038	-.029	2.448	.015*
The basic proclamation of the Gospel	-.021	.040	-.140	-.537	.592
A daily prayer plan	-.095	.038	.097	-2.490	.013*
A distinctively Catholic worldview	.060	.034	.021	1.758	.079
The significance of the Eucharist	.014	.040	.000	.352	.725
Digital resources and new media	.000	.033	-.010	-.007	.995
Strategies for missionary transformation	-.006	.037	.010	-.172	.864
Reflection on sin and Reconciliation	.007	.038	.107	.172	.864
Keeping Christ at the center of pedagogy	.080	.043	-.013	1.852	.065
Instruction on the Sacred Scriptures	-.009	.046	.054	-.201	.841
Inviting others to Sunday Mass	.033	.035	.030	.958	.338
Spiritual support and formation for families	.023	.042	.171	.541	.589
Promoting vocations	.114	.039	.061	2.902	.004*
Reflecting on the Church's mission	.041	.043		.959	.338

* Significant at $p \leq .05$ level

Discussion and Recommendations

Conclusions and recommendations for future practice begin by focusing on the fact that this study confirms a number of important intuitions or assumptions which those who love Catholic education might hold: namely, that Catholic elementary school principals have the heart for the New Evangelization, and that they feel confident about serving the Church in this capacity; they see the Mass and their daily personal prayer to be of

fundamental importance in preparing them for this mission; and they clearly see and value the importance of future faith formation in order to continue growing as leaders of the New Evangelization. Finally, Catholic educators should take particular note regarding the positive correlation between overall confidence about serving as leaders of the New Evangelization and interest in future formation on the topics of fostering a personal encounter with Christ and promoting vocations. Given these observations, three recommendations for future practice follow:

1. Catholic school leaders should develop and share pastoral strategies for reaching out to members their school communities who have different levels of commitment to practicing the faith.

Basic Christian outreach to families, and even to faculty and staff members, will be essential to the future of Catholic schools in an increasingly secularized setting. Principals should cultivate marketing and enrollment team members who are comfortable sharing their faith with others and who embody the joy of the Christian life. One principal who volunteered for a telephone interview said that she sees the New Evangelization as “committee work” within the school setting. In other words, it need not fall solely to the principal as spiritual leader of the school community, but the most fruitful path might involve a carefully chosen team of people with the right mind and heart for the work. The formation of core evangelization teams could serve as mission-driven committees focused on reaching out to unchurched families in inviting ways. Such groups could identify those who are most fully engaged in the life and practice of their faith, and then enlist them to help reach out to others who are in their immediate circles. These guides would help practice the “art of accompaniment” (Pope Francis, 2013, para. 171), which strives to meet individuals wherever they are on their respective faith journeys and then invite them to ongoing conversion of heart.

2. Pastors and diocesan leaders should continue encouraging active participation in Sunday Mass and should share strategies for developing a discipline of daily prayer among their Catholic school principals.

This should include formation in *lectio divina* and the Liturgy of the Hours as a means of promoting meditation on Sacred Scripture, and it could also involve sharing online resources and strategies for incorporating guided meditations into faculty meetings and professional development schedules. Those who provide ongoing formation for Catholic school leaders could

build off of the importance of personal prayer identified by the principals themselves in response to the survey, as they look for ways to grow in a deeper understanding of what happens at Mass and to enrich their appreciation for the living Word of God. As spiritual leaders of their school communities, Catholic school principals need “a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them...unfailingly each day” (Pope Francis, 2013, para. 3).

3. Catholic schools should explore available options for a distinctively Catholic curriculum, which would “keep Christ at the center of pedagogy.”

While the educational world has emphasized the “across the curriculum approach”—e.g., for reading, or math, or technology—it is time for Catholic schools to differentiate themselves from public and charter schools through an intentional focus on “Christ across the curriculum.” If there are schools that have already implemented such a “Christocentric core” approach, it would be helpful to begin analyzing common features and assessing their effectiveness in forming disciples of Jesus Christ. The U.S. Bishops’ framework for a high school theology curriculum may prove to be an initial step in such a direction, although this too would benefit from cross-curricular discussions among high school faculty. By defining themselves according to what is most central to their existence, Catholic schools will help children and families, along with faculty and staff, reclaim a distinctively Catholic world view. Pastors and Catholic schools offices could also collaborate with other diocesan offices which focus on adult faith formation to create workshops which would help foster small faith-sharing groups within school communities and among principals. These workshops could focus on some of the top priorities identified by the principals for future faith formation: “fostering a personal encounter with Christ,” “the basic proclamation of the Gospel,” “the significance of the Eucharist,” “instruction on the Sacred Scriptures,” and “spiritual support and formation for families.” Such initiatives could also help the schools promote vocations to the priesthood, religious life, and marriage and family. These workshops should center on the first proclamation or kerygma, which is “first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways” (Pope Francis, 2013b, para. 164).

Finally, additional research should include study of the best practices and most effective strategies for delivering spiritual support and formation

for families. An exclusive focus on the faith formation of children will bear only a little lasting fruit if there is not also a transformation of the faith of the children's parents and guardians. Catholic schools serve the mission of the Church to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth, and they have great potential for touching the hearts and minds of parents and extended family members who may be distanced from the Church. Working with faithful faculty and staff members, principals could have a tremendous impact on helping the school environment and home environment become even more mutually supportive.

Conclusion

“The mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit is brought to completion in the Church, which is the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit” (Catholic Church, 1994, para. 737). This mission hinges not only on lifelong personal conversion of the faithful, but also on the pastoral and missionary conversion of the Church herself. Catholic schools, therefore, must continue to nurture transformation among all stakeholders. This study has provided data to support that Catholic elementary school principals already feel confident about completing the work of the New Evangelization—even though they may not yet be completely ready to self-identify as leaders of the New Evangelization and may need help with strategies for reaching out to non-practicing Catholics. These principals perceive their own faith to be strongly rooted in a commitment to daily prayer and worship at Sunday Mass. Their responses indicated a positive correlation between meditating on the Scriptures and feeling a greater confidence about the New Evangelization. Overall, Catholic elementary school principals acknowledge the importance of ongoing faith formation, and they are particularly interested in focusing on the challenge of “keeping Christ at the center of pedagogy.” Their responses also indicated a correlation between confidence about the New Evangelization and interest not only in fostering an encounter with Christ but also in promoting vocations. If they are to continue nurturing the hearts of students and families, as well as faculty and staff, Catholic elementary school principals will need to have their own hearts nurtured in practical and meaningful ways. This is the task of the Catholic educational community as a whole. It is a work of central importance to the New Evangelization. In the end, if Catholic schools are to serve the mission of the Church in the 21st century, then the Church herself must accompany Catholic elementary school principals as they make the words of the Lord Jesus their own: “take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart” (Matt. 11:29a).

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