


10-2019

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## Recommended Citation

Valadez, J. R. (2019). Remembrance of a Christian Brothers' Education. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 22 (2). <http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.2202042019>

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## **Cover Page Footnote**

**Author's Note** This study was conducted under an institutional review board (IRB) approval from the University of Redlands (# 2018-25-REDLANDS). **Funding** The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research and authorship of this article. This study was funded through a Haynes Foundation Faculty Fellowship.

## Remembrance of a Christian Brothers' Education

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*This study describes the experiences of a group of individuals who attended a southern California Catholic boys' high school, and the men who taught them. The goal of this study was to relate a narrative that explained how an education, steeped in the Christian Brothers' mission provided a quality education for the poor, and shaped the lives, perspectives, and values of the graduates. The narrative, reported through a social perspective inspired by Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and the philosophical writings of Jacques Maritain and Alasdair MacIntyre, showed how the graduates received a quality education from the Brothers and absorbed a strong sense of Catholic virtue, including a commitment toward social justice, an understanding of role of building and sustaining community, and an appreciation for giving back to society. Cathedral High, a small Catholic high school in Los Angeles, is an embodiment of MacIntyre's belief that small communities, dedicated to upholding moral virtue and civility offer the possibility of reforming a society currently mired in individualistic and materialistic pursuits. A further implication is that Catholic schools, with their well-documented record for providing effective education for the poor, should remain an educational option for low-income families.*

### Keywords

Latinos; Catholic education; urban education

Hispanic immigrants have had a profound influence on Catholicism in the United States. As of 2015, Hispanics comprised 34% of the country's Catholics, up from 29% in 2007 (Pew Research Center, 2015). In comparison, Whites encompass 59% of U.S. Catholics, down from 65% in 2007 (Pew Research Center, 2015). While the proportion of Hispanic Catholics in the US continues to grow, it has not been accompanied with a corresponding growth in Catholic school attendance by Hispanic children. Ospino and Weitzel-O'Neill (2016a) estimate that 15% (285,000) of Catholic school children are Hispanic, representing only 2.3% of the total Hispanic school age population (12.4 million). According to Ospino and Weitzel-O'Neill, it

is incumbent upon Catholic school officials to reach out to Hispanic families, otherwise their relatively low participation in Catholic education places the future of the “next generation of American Catholics in peril” (2016a, p. 7). Though there are several comprehensive reports targeting Hispanic Catholics (see e.g., Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2011; Huchting, Martin, Chavez, Holyk-Casey, & Ruiz, 2014; Notre Dame Taskforce, 2009), research examining the relationship between the Church and the needs of its Hispanic constituents is still lacking (Aldana, 2016).

In this article, I begin to address Aldana’s concern by investigating the relationship of a single Catholic school within the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and its Hispanic community. The series of events I report here is emblematic of the longstanding tension between Hispanics and the Church, and places emphasis on the struggle for preserving and maintaining a Catholic high school in a large urban area serving primarily working class Hispanic students. I focused on “lived experiences” of individuals who attended Cathedral High<sup>1</sup> and the men who taught them. The guiding questions I pursued to construct this narrative were: (a) Why should Catholic schools serving working-class Hispanic communities remain open? (b) What role do Catholic schools play in the moral and ethical development of the men who attended them?

The signal event that serves as a backdrop for this narrative began in July 1984 when Timothy Cardinal Manning, Archbishop of Los Angeles, announced that Cathedral High School, one of the oldest Catholic high schools in the city, was being closed (Becklund, 1985). The Cardinal asserted that Cathedral High, located on prime real estate in downtown Los Angeles, was under-enrolled and because of changing demographics in the city was unlikely to attract more students. The Christian Brothers, the administrators of the school, disputed that claim and cited a healthy enrollment of 500 students (former principal, personal communication, May 18, 2016). Despite objections by the Christian Brothers, the archdiocese sold the seven-acre property to a real estate developer for \$11.5 million dollars (Becklund, 1985).

After announcing the sale, the archdiocese expected to hear some grumbling from alumni, but they were caught off guard by the strength and in-

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1 I have used the actual school name in this article because the case of Cathedral High was well documented in the news media and is widely known by the public.

tensity of the protests (Del Olmo, 1984). Gus Fortín,<sup>2</sup> Cathedral graduate and president of the alumni association, recalled that he “was in shock and [was] determined to do something to stop the sale.” Other Los Angeles area Catholic high schools, including Lasuen in 1971 (Benavides, 2012) and Mt. Carmel in 1976 (“Memory of Mt. Carmel,” 2011) had closed, but neither one of the schools elicited the backlash and furor from alumni and the public that Cathedral generated. Fortín started attending meetings of concerned alumni to set in motion a strategy to challenge the archdiocese’s decision.

Shortly after the sale announcement, the Friends of Cathedral (Friends), the school’s fundraising group, requested a meeting with archdiocese representatives to discuss their concerns. Bernard Hidalgo, a member of the Friends, recalled that “the meeting was disappointing.” Hidalgo remembered, “one of our guys mentioned the importance of the school and what it meant to the Mexican community.” According to Hidalgo, the archdiocesan officials were unmoved and unsympathetically affirmed that the sale would go through.

It was a discouraging meeting and a reminder to the Friends of the long-standing hostility that existed between the archdiocese and the Los Angeles Hispanic community. They approached the meeting hopefully and did not expect the archdiocese to “close off discussion so firmly.” The archdiocese’s hostility called to mind Cardinal Manning’s predecessor, the late James Cardinal McIntyre, who was often at the center of controversy regarding his relationship with the city’s Hispanic community (Hinojosa, 2016). An event epitomizing the relationship between McIntyre and the Hispanic community occurred on Christmas Eve, 1969 when a group of 300 people, led by Cathedral graduate Ricardo Cruz<sup>3</sup> and the *Catolicos por la Raza* (A. Caza, personal communication, February 7, 2016), gathered outside the Cardinal’s residence

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2 All participants in this study were given pseudonyms. See Table 1 for a list of participants. Real names were used for public figures who are now deceased: Cardinal McIntyre (d. 1979); Cardinal Manning (d. 1989); Ricardo Cruz (d. 1993); and Brother Bede (d. 2000).

3 Ricardo Cruz, a 1961 graduate of Cathedral High, was an attorney and an advocate for many Hispanic causes in Los Angeles. He was an early organizer of the *La Raza Law Students* and a founder of *Catolicos por la Raza*, a group critical of the practices of the Catholic Church. Cruz died in 1993.

at Saint Basil's Cathedral to protest the Church's indifference to Hispanic concerns (Garcia, 2008; Lopez, 2016). Cardinal McIntyre, visibly upset at the intrusion, compared the protestors to the "rabble as they stood at the foot of the cross, shouting 'Crucify Him'" (Garcia, 2008, p. 158).

A month following the demonstration, the 84-year-old McIntyre retired and was replaced by Cardinal Manning. Manning's appointment in 1970 was viewed as an attempt to assuage the Hispanic community's concerns with the Church. Encouragingly, Manning's early efforts included the creation of a special ministry to address Hispanic issues ("Timothy Cardinal Manning," 1989). Despite these efforts, the Friends' experience with Chancery officials did not indicate a change in longstanding attitudes toward Hispanics. Hidalgo remembered being angered with the outcome of the meeting but was also determined not to give up. He said: "Some of the guys said what's the use? It's the Cardinal and there's nothing we can do. Others did not want to back down."

Much to the credit of some of the men, the Chancery officials did not intimidate them, rather members of the group seemed to be energized by the meeting. Hidalgo recalled that Al Guerrero, a local TV reporter and a member of the Friends said: "Did you ever know of a Cathedral guy to back down from a fight?" The meeting, in fact, convinced them that their mission to save Cathedral was more significant than a nostalgic longing for preserving their school.

After that discouraging first meeting at the Chancery Office, the Friends began to meet regularly to plan their strategy. Cathedral's vast social network throughout the city included individuals working in the local media, numerous lawyers and corporate officers, and a significant number of individuals working for local government. Hidalgo said: "There were Cathedral graduates working for nearly every one of the city councilmen." Hidalgo recalled that the strategy involved a two-pronged approach: "We developed a strategy using the media and using the courts to stop the sale." The combination of a barrage of publicity, rallies, and news reports kept the issue in the public eye and a series of legal maneuvers was targeted to convince the archdiocese to rescind the sale. Hidalgo stated that there was also the "role of the Brothers." He continued:

The Brothers were prevented by Canon Law from criticizing the archdiocese...they could appeal to the Vatican if they thought they were being harmed. The case they were making was that closing the school

would injure the Brothers financially. They sent a group of Brothers including one who was a Canon lawyer to Rome to make the appeal. The decision was never made public, but my sources tell me that the Vatican wanted this thing over.

In the end, the archdiocese could not withstand the combination of media attention, legal challenges, and Vatican pressure. On December 3, 1985, after nearly 18 months of effort, the archdiocese relented and canceled the sale (Becklund, 1985).

The story behind Cathedral's sale and ultimately its preservation would be incomplete without a word about Cathedral's situation since then. The Christian Brothers, recognizing the importance of Cathedral to the city's growing immigrant Hispanic population, continued to devote resources to maintain Cathedral's presence in the city. In 1995 the Brothers decided that the most effective way to preserve Cathedral was to reorganize the school as a private academy, run by the Brothers with minimal direction taken from the archdiocese. According to Brother Matt Tapfern, former teacher and administrator, "the archdiocese has had a hands-off policy since then." Currently, Cathedral's enrollment of over 750 students exceeds the high point it achieved in the 1960s (former principal, personal communication, May 18, 2016).

Before launching into the narrative recalling the participants' remembrances of Cathedral, I briefly reviewed the background of U.S Catholic education. My review concentrated on noteworthy historical evidence and significant findings regarding the effectiveness of Catholic schools.

### Literature Review

Much of the historical research on Catholic education focused on the desire of Catholic immigrant parents to find alternatives to the public schools for their children. Parents raised concerns to their local priests and bishops citing the lack of moral guidance their children received in public schools, but others were also critical of the anti-Catholic bias of many school authorities (Lazerson, 1977).

In response to Catholic parental concerns, American bishops campaigned to establish Catholic schools in all parishes in the US and exhorted Catholic parents to enroll their children in the schools (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Walsh, 2003). Although that goal for parish school growth was never fully realized, the expansion of Catholic schools continued until the mid-1960s.

By 1965, the peak year of Catholic school enrollment in the US, 5 million students (12% of total school enrollment) attended 13,000 Catholic schools (Snyder, 1993).

The rise of Catholic education, however, was followed by a sudden downturn in the fortunes of Catholic schools. By 2016 enrollment dropped to 1.9 million students (3.6 % of total school enrollment) attending 6,400 Catholic schools (National Catholic Education Association, 2017). Reasons for the declining enrollment are varied, but most notably the decline coincided with the abrupt departure of nuns, brothers, and priests from their religious orders during the post-Vatican II era (Hunt, O'Brien, & Walch, 2013). Radical changes in the liturgy along with the evolving role of the laity and clergy borne by Vatican II reforms produced tension and controversy within clerical communities (Bryk et al., 1993). As a result, many clerics, as well as religious sisters and brothers, left their orders.

Since the religious teaching orders provided the bulk of the instructional force for Catholic schools, their dwindling numbers left the schools without the dedicated individuals who taught virtually for free (Marks, 2009). Other reasons for school closures included the departure of Catholic families from the urban areas to the suburbs where they found new public schools in which to enroll their children, and the rise of charter schools that gave parents inexpensive alternatives to parish schools (Hunt et al., 2013).

Currently, Catholic schools continue to close and the economic factors generating the decline remain the same. Catholic leaders continue to propose new models and initiatives to reverse or at least halt the decline. Despite the effort, the issue remains unresolved and the future of Catholic schools is uncertain (Notre Dame Taskforce, 2009; Ospino & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2016a; 2016b).

### **Catholic School Advantage**

Catholic leaders and educators attempted to justify the cost of a Catholic education by emphasizing the academic advantages students gained through Catholic school attendance. Several researchers posed a "common school" hypothesis, the notion that Catholic schools reduced disadvantages based on social background and provided opportunities for all individuals (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Keith & Page, 1985).

Critics of the "Catholic school advantage" hypothesis claimed that researchers had not accounted for the selection bias inherent in Catholic school populations, therefore, exaggerating differences in achievement between the



sectors (Alexander & Pallas, 1982; Willms, 1985). Follow-up studies, however, reaffirmed an advantage and lent further support to the “common school” notion that Catholic schools distributed educational opportunities more equitably than public schools (Hoffer, Greeley, & Coleman, 1985; Jencks, 1985). Sander’s (1996) study also supported the “common school” thesis by showing Catholic elementary students’ superior standardized test scores were not the result of Catholic schools selecting superior students but were driven by the strong achievement of non-Catholic minority students. This suggested that public school alternatives were not as effective for these urban minority students.

Lubienski and Lubienski (2006; 2013) disputed the Catholic advantage by claiming higher math achievement could not be attributed to more effective instruction, but Catholic school students benefited from their more privileged backgrounds and stronger parental support. Rebuttals (Peterson & Llaudet, 2006; Chubb, 2013) to Lubienski and Lubienski (2006) showed that their fourth and eighth grade samples, drawn from NAEP data, over-represented low-income and special education students in the public sample and underrepresented those students in the Catholic sector. After substituting more accurate student background measures and including the results for reading, Peterson and Llaudet (2006) found that Catholic school students outperformed public school students in reading and mathematics in both fourth and eighth grades.

### **Social Advantages**

In addition to academic advantages, a line of research documenting the social impact of a Catholic education produced a series of studies. Work by Kenny et al. (2016); Brinig and Garnet (2012, 2013); and Hoxby (2003) are examples of this research. Kenny et al. (2016) discussed how Cristo Rey schools guided low-income minority students to increase their capacity for positive social interactions and resilient attitudes, despite ongoing life challenges. Brinig and Garnet (2012, 2013) suggested the presence of parish schools in urban neighborhoods contributed to lowered crime rates and increased neighborhood social capital. With the closure of Catholic schools, parents had reduced opportunities for accumulating social capital, thereby suppressing formation of parental networks and negatively affecting neighborhood social cohesion (Brinig & Garnet, 2012, 2013).

Hoxby’s (2003) study demonstrated that the presence of neighborhood Catholic schools positively affected public school educational achievement.

Hoxby conceded there was some evidence that parents with more resources took advantage of school choice policies, but the presence of Catholic and charter schools also served as an incentive for public schools to increase their academic productivity.

In summary, differences between the public and Catholic sector may not be as robust as initially reported, however, there is at least modest support for a sustained Catholic school advantage (Hoffer, 2009). Additionally, the research cited above demonstrated the importance of Catholic schools for resilience, neighborhood stability, community cohesion, and overall educational achievement.

### **Conceptual Framework: A Catholic Social Perspective**

A Catholic social perspective serves as a useful framework for examining the data collected in this study. To develop this framework, I drew from three major sources: The Church's position on social justice (USCCB, 1998), commonly referred to as Catholic Social Teaching (CST); the work of Jacques Maritain (1947, 1968), and the contributions of moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (1988, 2007).

CST is generally considered to be derived from *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII's reflection on the Church's commitment to the poor and vulnerable. Pope Leo XIII wrote: "But, when what necessity demands have been supplied, and one's standing fairly taken... it becomes a duty to give to the indigent out of what remains over" (*Rerum Novarum*, par. 22). Aside from his affirmation of the Gospel's message of love and justice, Pope Leo XIII admonished governments to protect worker rights and make assurances that individuals could have the opportunity to gain access to a living wage and a dignified life (para 22).

Maritain (1947, 1968), inspired by *Rerum Novarum*, mounted a critique of a modernistic society enraptured with technology and materialism. Maritain believed this single-minded preoccupation with materialistic gain was an assault on the human spirit and discouraged individuals from pursuing virtues that would turn them away from a desire to acquire superfluous goods or prevent them from incorporating views compatible with Christian ideals (Wallace, 1999).

Although Maritain's Catholicism shaped his views, his goal was to establish a pluralistic society, not a theocratic community. Maritain promoted a new Christendom, an inclusive populace that advocated for human dignity.

These thoughts defending human rights are prominently featured in the papal documents of John XXIII (*Mater et magistra*); Paul VI (*Gaudium et spes*); and John Paul II (*Fides et ratio*).

The work of moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre provided the third prong in this emerging Catholic social perspective. MacIntyre (1988, 2007) shared Maritain's view that the world seemed to be hurtling toward a morally corrupt abyss, one that was overly concerned with chasing possessions.

Despite the convergence of their beliefs, MacIntyre had disagreements with Maritain's notions on human rights. MacIntyre (2007) thought human rights demands could be misinterpreted by readers as individualistic and self-seeking, leading to the abrogation of a central Catholic tenet, the pursuit of the common good. In his moral framework, a focus on virtue, duty, and the common good corrected Maritain's human rights language (Stibora, 2013; Wallace, 1999).

Maritain and MacIntyre's divergence on human rights language did not interfere with their jointly held convictions regarding community, which they believed was critical for human flourishing and the pursuit of moral excellence. Maritain maintained that moral excellence emerged from the daily lives of individuals as they worked and interacted together in various contexts (e.g., churches, schools). It was these social settings that provided the opportunities for the members to absorb the duties and responsibilities needed for moral development. MacIntyre (2007) later qualified and honed Maritain's views by introducing the concept of "practice." He described practice as a community of teachers and learners, with each individual filling these roles at different times. Through practice, the learner places him or herself under the authority of a teacher/mentor where they agree to accept evaluation of their efforts according to standards set by the community. The rewards the learner receives for attaining expertise are not external, such as riches or glory, but the internal rewards that come with living a virtuous life.

A newly reconfigured Catholic social perspective, therefore, provides an appropriate perspective for examining the "lived experiences" of the participants in the study. The framework incorporates CST's preference for the poor; Maritain's advocacy for human dignity; and MacIntyre's notion of practice, to examine the experiences of the young men who entered Cathedral to be mentored by the Brothers, a group whose own narratives articulated the various duties and responsibilities for becoming virtuous Catholic men.

### Method

I used a phenomenological approach in this study to report the personal experiences of the participants. Van Manen (1990) described phenomenological research as a method for getting insightful descriptions of how individuals view the world. In my questioning, I probed the nature of the graduates' experiences or what was it like to have been a Cathedral student. For the teachers and administrators, I asked them to recall their interactions and experiences with their former students. The probes permitted me to see the deeper significance or the meaning structure of the participants' lived experiences.

### Data Collection

I based this study on 81 interviews collected during 2016-2017. I interviewed 43 Cathedral graduates, 17 retired and current faculty members of Cathedral High, and three current administrators from the De LaSalle Institute. I also conducted interviews with 18 individuals including clergy, administrators, teachers and parents of children attending Catholic schools to provide historical and contextual information on Catholic education. I also collected archival data at the De La Salle Institute to provide additional background information about Cathedral. For the purposes of this article, I emphasized the remembrances of 11 participants (see Table 1).

Table 1  
*Participants*

Name	Status	Ethnicity	Year Graduated
Art Caza	Alumnus	Mexican American	1961
Hernan Cuevas	Instructor/alumnus	Mexican American	1970
Gus Fortín	Alumnus	Mexican American	1976
Sid Garcia	Administrator/alumnus	Mexican American	1993
Bernard Hidalgo	Alumnus	Mexican American	1957
Mitch Lidero	Administrator/alumnus	Peruvian American	1985
Brother Jack Meara	Former administrator/alumnus	White	1961
Gerald Rissa	Instructor/alumnus	Italian/Mexican American	1973
Brother Roberto Sandoval	Former instructor/alumnus	Mexican American	1961
Brother Matt Tapfern	Former administrator/instructor	White	N/A

*Note.* All names are pseudonyms

These individuals, who spanned several decades of experiences as graduates, instructors, and administrators, provided particularly insightful perspectives based on their knowledge and understanding of Cathedral High.

The interviews took place at Cathedral or at mutually agreed upon venues such as the participant's house, a coffee shop, or restaurant. In the case of the Christian Brothers administrators, I interviewed them in the offices of the De La Salle Institute. Each of the interviews took one to two hours.

### **The Setting**

Cathedral High School is located near downtown Los Angeles and draws its students primarily from local feeder Catholic schools in south-central and east Los Angeles communities. Most of the students are largely poor or working-class Hispanics. Local census data (34<sup>th</sup> Congressional District) shows that the median family income in the area is \$41,000 compared to the median California household income of \$64,000 (United States Census Bureau, 2017). A school administrator (personal communication, May 18, 2016) reported that current student enrollment was over 750 students with 98% identifying as minority, 80% of whom were Hispanic. He also affirmed that approximately 80% of the students received some form of financial aid.

### **Data Analysis**

In my analytic approach, I began by reading over each of the interview transcripts to get a sense of the whole interview and to provide context for later emerging themes (Hycner, 1984; Van Manen, 1984, 1990). I highlighted relevant statements and applied a code to each data segment. From this exercise, I connected the data to relevant elements of a Catholic social perspective, including CST's preferential option for the poor, Maritain's emphasis on human dignity, and MacIntyre's concept of practice to identify potential themes. I noted especially themes that recurred in the data.

The next analytic phase involved returning to the coded transcripts to make decisions about modifying themes or dropping those that were redundant or irrelevant (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Polkinghorne, 1991). Theme development depended on a recursive process between the raw data and the developing themes that evolved into the basic structure of the narrative (Glaser & Strauss; Polkinghorne, 2005).

In the final phase, confirmation, I shared my findings and interpretations with a subset of six key participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider checking interpretations with a subgroup of participants as crucial in establishing the credibility of findings. The point was to confirm the veracity

of my reporting, challenge my interpretations, and respond to inaccuracies when noted. After the series of analytic phases, I settled on four themes. The themes were: (a) The Brothers; (b) Preferential option for the Poor; (c) Community; and (d) Giving Back.

The product of this phenomenological effort was a narrative that attempted to “see things from the actor’s point of view” (Geertz, 1973, p. 20). Since the construction of a narrative is itself an interpretation of the participants’ reports, I felt it was relevant to provide the reader with full disclosure of my own subjectivities and potential biases. My background as a Cathedral graduate, a practicing Catholic, and my experience growing up in a multi-generational Mexican immigrant home certainly shaped my worldview, but it also gave me insight that I believe was critical for framing the questions and interpreting the participant responses.

In the following sections I present my findings that reflect the “lived experiences” of the participants in the study. I organized these “lived experiences” by using the themes that surfaced from the analysis: The Brothers; Preferential Option for the Poor; Community; and Giving Back. These themes provided a structure for reporting the emerging narrative.

## Findings

### The Brothers

Frank del Olmo (1984), a reporter for the Los Angeles Times, observed that “apparently [the Los Angeles archdiocese] was unaware what Catholic schools like Cathedral have come to mean to the Hispanic families over the last few decades.” Del Olmo suggested that by underestimating the unity and determination of the Cathedral alumni, the archdiocese misguidedly believed they could exert their will to close and sell the school without objection. Hispanics recognized that without Cathedral, their educational options defaulted to underperforming local public schools, hardly the means for social mobility. The boys “were well-taught by the Christian Brothers,” wrote Del Olmo, they were well-prepared and “deeply concerned about public issues concerning the Hispanic community.”

Fortín recalled that the Brothers prepared him well for community involvement. He felt the Brothers supported the students’ efforts and stood “behind [them] when [they] felt strongly about something. Fortín remembered, “for us guys, we always felt that it was us against the world.” The Brothers, he felt, provided encouragement, “they taught us that we counted.”

Former Cathedral teacher, Brother Roberto, agreed that the Brothers took an active role in preparing the young men for political action. He recalled: "When I started as a Brother it was a turbulent time. There were the Watts riots, the farmworker strikes, the Viet Nam war. I believe we taught the boys a sense of justice."

The Brothers' social commitment was deeply rooted in the philosophy of their founder Saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle (Isetti, 1979; Sauvage, 2015). Brother Matt explained that "the Founder was most particular about our mission, what our role was." He went on to say that "we did not lose that focus," but he believed that by the 1960s there was a "need for renewal, to think about our role in the world."

It was not happenstance that the concern with the Brothers' future occurred shortly after the Catholic Church's historic Vatican II assembly. Vatican II's charge, related in *Perfectae Caritatis*, pressed religious orders to review the charism of their founders to encourage re-examination of their roles in a renewed Church and a changing world (Paul VI, 1965). At their 39<sup>th</sup> Chapter meeting in 1967, the Brothers discussed their roles deeply and produced the influential document, *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration (Declaration)*. Brother Matt, a participant at that conference, recalled that the *Declaration* reaffirmed the Founder's original acclamation of the Brothers as "missionaries" dedicated to the needs of the poor, but also redirected the Brothers to become better prepared for "addressing the social problems facing modern youth, [including] drugs, violence, and poverty." Brother Matt added:

The *Declaration* renewed our purpose. We saw it as our apostolic mission, we saw in these boys, the face of God. God put them in our care. It was this deeply held commitment that kept me going. Cathedral was special to us and it became a priority to place our resources there and to assure its success. The needs of the boys were so great...We were involved in the lives of the boys. It was a commitment to protect them, shelter them when necessary.

As Brother Matt recalled, many Brothers felt "transformed and invigorated" by the renewed spirit promulgated in the *Declaration*. The Brothers' dedication was certainly noted by the alumni who related stories to me of the Brothers coming to their aid. A particularly salient example came from Sid Garcia, a graduate, and current teacher:

My brother and I were having problems at home. It was bad and we had to get out but we didn't have any place to go. We didn't live far from the campus so we just came here. Brother Tom saw and asked us what was wrong. He brought us to the Brothers' house and they let us stay there until things could be worked out at home.

By extending their community beyond the walls of the Brothers' House, the Brothers provided protection for those in need. Garcia's experience was one of many examples of the Brothers embracing those who were suffering and needing help. Brother Jack Meara, a former Cathedral administrator, explained: "[We] wanted to serve as models for the young men, and most importantly we wanted to provide the message of living a Christian life. We wanted our message to be clear... to make an impact."

Maintaining a presence on the Cathedral campus has been a priority for the Brothers. It is noteworthy that five Brothers currently teach at Cathedral. Because of the declining number of Brothers, it is rare to find more than one or two brothers assigned to teach at any of the various Christian Brothers' schools. Brother Jack said it was an example of the Brothers' "commitment that Cathedral students receive a high-quality education." Brother Jack also emphasized that the Brothers, as consecrated laymen, were serious about their effort to demonstrate their evangelical commitment for improving the lives of their charges. In the section below, the Brothers and staff show how they embodied the post-Vatican II spirit to follow a *Preferential Option for the Poor*.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Preferential Option for the Poor**

The *Preferential Option for the Poor* was a rallying cry for the Latin American Bishops at their historic 1968 Conference in Medellin, Colombia (Gutierrez, 1988; Medellin Document, 1968). At Medellin, the Bishops reaffirmed John XXIII's call for the Church "to be the church of the poor" (Gutierrez, p. xxvi). That message also resonated with Cathedral's staff to strive for solidarity with the local Hispanic community. Gerald Rissa, Cathedral alumnus and current teacher explained:

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4 The phrase "preferential option for the poor" first appeared in a 1968 letter to the Jesuits from Father Pedro Arrupe, Superior General. The term was popularized by Father Gustavo Gutierrez, a founder of the Liberation Theology movement.



There's no question that our kids have need. Most of the kids get some form of financial aid. I don't like to say they are poor just because they don't have money. These are kids who will work their brains out to do well here. I would say we are serving our community. We are trying to connect with the kids, getting them through, getting them to go to college.

Mitch Lidero, a graduate, and current Cathedral administrator confirmed the financial need of the current students: "If students can't pay we try to provide aid to make up the difference. We don't turn anyone away because they can't pay."

After the near closure in 1984 and the subsequent Christian Brothers takeover in 1995, Cathedral rose to the top of the list of priorities for the Brothers. Brother Matt explained that "the school, the boys who go there, have special meaning to us." Because of its location and demographics, Brother Matt described Cathedral as the Brothers' "bread and butter school." Brother Matt went on: "[The Cathedral] students are the students our founder had in mind when he started the order. Those students are our lifeblood."

As Del Olmo (1984) reported so many years ago, the school continues to have a special meaning to the Hispanic community. Lidero confirmed that local community continues to hold Cathedral in high regard and agreed that it was "critical for [the school] to remain open." He was concerned because "so many Catholic schools are closing, these are different times." I asked Lidero what kind of effort was necessary to keep the school running. Lidero told me that he "need[ed] to raise over a million and a half dollars a year to meet operational expenses." In his appeal to funders, Lidero tries to convince his audience that Cathedral has special importance to the community. He said:

I let them know that 75% of our kids would qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch programs. I say that maybe 25% of the kids here may be able to find some other kinds of education but if we were to close that would mean that 75% of our kids would not be able to get a Catholic education... It's an effective message.

The special preference for the poor articulated over a century ago in *Re-rum Novarum*, and renewed through Vatican II declarations, Medellin documents, and the *Declaration*, resounds in current Catholic Social Teaching and

in the work of the staff at Cathedral. Rissa clearly expressed his commitment to the poor when he explained why he continues to work at the school. As we sat on the patio with a view of downtown Los Angeles, he reflected on his 39 years as a teacher while pointing to the surrounding neighborhood, “Look out there, we’re doing it, we’re serving this community. And there is still work to be done here. It’s why I never left.”

Rissa’s comments exemplified the commitment of Cathedral’s staff to serve individuals, whose poverty may have interfered with their ability to achieve a fulfilled and dignified life. In what follows I show how the Christian Brothers extended their hands to others and emphasized the building of community through strong relationships with those in need.

### **Community**

The Christian Brothers considered community to be the “soul of the institution.” In Jean-Baptiste de la Salle’s original plan (*Declaration*, 1967, 48:6) he expected the schools “to be like families” to the young men. Since the Brothers assumed responsibility for the students throughout the day, De La Salle envisioned a fraternal relationship between teacher and student. He wanted the Brothers to immerse themselves in the lives of the boys, sharing their interests, their concerns, and their aspirations. Ideally, he would become an “older brother,” helping them to find their way in the world (*Declaration*, 40:4). Rissa recalled that the Brothers were “mentors in the true sense of the word. They were big brothers, mentors, guardian angels.” Rissa remembered Brother Bede in particular:

He was a legend. After the school almost closed, people didn’t know we were still open. We had a real drop in enrollment. The kids we got at that time were rowdier. We had some tough kids. He was at Cathedral in the ‘50s and ‘60s, then he came back in the 90s. When he came back to Cathedral the kids were from some tough neighborhoods, they came with an attitude of defiance. He showed personal interest in each of the kids. He had perfect control of them... When he talked to them in religion class he had a way of getting through to them and they listened to him. Brother Bede really stood out.

Rissa’s memories of Brother Bede called to mind MacIntyre’s (2007) description of a community as the place where teachers and learners gathered together to “practice” or learn the rules, lessons, and responsibilities that

shaped the individual's path toward fulfilling their role in society. Brother Bede's actions depicted the caring, mentoring role assumed by the Brothers as they sought to prepare the boys for entry into adulthood.

A significant part of their "big brother" role was to protect the young men from the dangers and temptations of their troubled neighborhoods. Rissa believed that Cathedral often served as a "refuge" for the boys, providing a place for many to escape danger or difficult home lives. He disclosed to me that the principal opened the school gates early and kept them open until late at night for the boys: "It's a home away from home for many of these kids. We are here for them when they need us or just to provide a safe place for them."

Fortín confirmed that Cathedral became a "second home" to him. Similarly, another Cathedral graduate and current teacher, Hernan Cuevas recalled that: "Cathedral was a lot like home...the discipline, what was expected of me, paying attention in class, it was what I had at home, it was comfortable, I was used to it...[we] quickly learned what [we] could and couldn't do."

Cuevas admitted that the discipline could be "heavy-handed" but Cathedral provided structure and assurance, important features for many of the young men from "broken homes." In Cuevas's view, Cathedral was a place where faculty helped the "students make decisions about what's right." Cathedral's "family" environment, according to Cuevas, "guid[ed] us...[kept] us from getting in trouble"

"Teaching about morality, helping the boys make good decisions was something we stressed" recalled Brother Jack, "It's part of our mission as religious [Brothers] to get the students to treat each other with respect, dignity." Formal instruction in morality and virtues were a mainstay of religious instruction, although methods for imparting doctrine and values were not strictly conventional. Rissa remembered his religious instruction:

Frankly, I was sick of religion when I got here. The nuns at [Rissa's Catholic grammar school], they were Dominicans and they were strict...When I got here it was different. I began to think about my faith and it was much more than just learning the Catechism. We learned to see Jesus in the work that can be done.

What mattered to the Brothers, according to Brother Jack, was "the meaning of the gospel," where "apostolic love, the ethics of giving back [form] the core purpose of our work." Through its teachings, Cathedral

exemplified MacIntyre's (2007) vision of a "local form of community within which civility and moral life can be sustained" (p. 263).

In the next section, I show how Cathedral served as a refuge from modernity. By stressing service and "giving back," Cathedral's staff acted to protect students from a decomposing society comprised of a "collection of strangers, each pursuing his or her own interests under minimal constraints" (MacIntyre, p. 251).

### **Giving Back**

Cuevas returned to teach at Cathedral after a career in law enforcement, including 36 years with the Los Angeles Police Department. While attending a football game at Cathedral, Brother Joe, Cathedral principal, asked Cuevas if he would be interested in starting a criminal justice program for the senior students. Cuevas recalled:

After I retired I really didn't know what I wanted to do. I came to a football game here and Brother Joe saw me and told me he was interested in starting a criminal justice elective for the senior boys. He asked me if I was interested. He said he couldn't pay me much. I told him that didn't matter, I had a pension and I didn't want the money... I asked him if there was any sort of curriculum, he said no it was up to me. I went to Cal State LA where they have a criminal justice program, bought their book for Criminal Justice 101. I brought it back here and got it approved by the social science department. It was up to me to run with it. I thought it was a way for me to give back.

I asked Cuevas to elaborate on what he meant by giving back: "Teaching the boys... they come from the worst neighborhoods... I wanted to share what I know, tell them about the world out there. It is a way for me to show them about what is good and evil in the world."

Rissa's sentiments were similar. After leaving Cathedral, he attended college, graduated, and returned to teach in 1978. He has been there ever since. Rissa said:

The fundamental thing that I learned from the Brothers, and this is primarily from Brother [Jack Meara] and Brother [Roberto Sandoval], 'you've got to give back.' I say that as a fundamental thing because that is what we teach here. When I left here I was determined to figure

out a way to give back... I wasn't a bad kid when I got here but I could have easily gone astray. There were things that attracted me in my neighborhood that were worrisome. I could easily have gone the other way but the Brothers and the other teachers kept me focused. I credit the Brothers and some of the teachers. Brother [Jack], he was a moral compass. When Mr. [Ragazzo] told me something I'd do it or he'd kick my ass. When Brother [Jack] told me something, I knew I'd better do it, not because he'd kick my ass but I knew he was right.

"Giving back" patently emerged as the core of Cathedral's cultural ethos and was clearly articulated by the Brothers, teachers, and graduates. "Giving back" also signified Maritain's (1947) admonition that to achieve virtue it was critical for individuals to serve others by "subordinating [themselves] to the group [as] the group attains its goal only by serving [others]" (para. 19).

Clearly, Cathedral valued its academic successes and proudly advertised its 100% graduation rate and nearly 100% college admission rate for its seniors, but its central focus and source of pride, as reflected in a Catholic social perspective, was the integration of the boys' intellectual and moral virtues, particularly their sense of God's commandment to love one's neighbor, and a commitment to give back to society. Fortín's understanding of "giving back" was central to his lifelong understanding of the value of a Cathedral education:

There's something that happens that keeps me going. I get to know the kids, those that need help...I hear about their situations. We have a ceremony where we give out scholarships, I get so much out of it. I hear from their mothers how grateful they are that their sons are going to [Cathedral]. I see the need out there. This can be a topnotch school even with the disadvantages. You have to give, it can't be about yourself. There are good things that come out of what you do in life...When the school was going to close, we were not going to let them close it.

Fortín reflected Maritain's (1947) philosophical outlook and MacIntyre's views of practice by demonstrating how he found value by seeking good in doing good for others, without any need for glory or personal aggrandizement. Fortín's efforts, seemingly never-ending because of the financial demands for keeping Cathedral afloat, go deeper than the preservation of one small Catholic school in the Los Angeles urban sprawl. Schools such as Ca-

thedral, though fewer in number than there were a few decades ago, continue to fill an important need in society by educating the urban poor, but even more importantly play a significant role in the development of future generations of young people with an idea of what it means to live a virtuous life.

### Conclusion

With the threat of closure, the Cathedral community did not sit idly by while the archdiocese completed its transactions for the sale of the school. Much to the archdiocese's surprise, the impending sale inspired Cathedral supporters to produce a unified effort to challenge and overturn the decision to sell the property. This remarkable effort addressed the initial question posed in this study: why should Catholic schools serving working class Hispanics remain open? In the assemblage of memories presented above, the participants clearly stated their case for preserving these institutions. It became apparent in the struggle to save Cathedral that this small Catholic boys' school, in the heart of Los Angeles' vast Hispanic community, had meaning beyond providing an educational alternative for the community. Archdiocesan officials either missed or ignored the fact that Cathedral's significance resided in the hope it engendered to generations of Hispanics who entered Cathedral seeking a pathway to social mobility. Since 1925, young men graduated from Cathedral, went on to attend college, and returned to the city prepared to enter various professions, but more significantly, making commitments to serve their communities.

In the study I examined the role Cathedral played in the moral and ethical development of the graduates. The recollections of the men, viewed through a Catholic social perspective, allowed them to demonstrate that Cathedral not only provided a high quality education, but was also successful in transmitting to its graduates a strong sense of Catholic virtues, including a commitment toward social justice for the poor (Pope Leo XIII, 1897; Maritain, 1947; 1951; 1968); a desire to sustain a sense of brotherhood or community (*Declaration*, 1967; MacIntyre (2007)); and a realization of the importance of giving back to society (*Declaration*; USCCB, 1998 ).

The cultural ethos of giving back, a repeated refrain in Cathedral's narrative, was sustained through the work of the faculty and the Brothers who adhered closely to the message of the founder, Saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle. De La Salle's dictum for helping young men in need and providing them with opportunity for the integration of intellectual and spiritual development, pushed the Cathedral community to think beyond its personal needs.

Cathedral, as a small cohesive community, embodies MacIntyre's (1988; 2007) hope for transforming society. MacIntyre believed that by promoting small communities, dedicated to upholding moral virtue and civility in society, the possibility exists for making inroads for reforming a self-seeking, materialistic world. Small communities, steeped in virtue, each with their own histories and culture can potentially connect individuals with the past by articulating the nature and importance of a virtuous life. Future faculty and students, relying on a narrative emphasizing the value in achieving good by giving back to others, are positioned to uphold this message to generations of Cathedral students. It is through following the commitment for "achieving good," that individuals will find inspiration for penetrating current individualistic and acquisitive attitudes that dominate modern society.

### Implications

It is an unfortunate likelihood that Catholic schools will continue to close, especially those in low-income neighborhoods where the schools have demonstrated success in educating the neediest of children. Society, including dioceses and governmental entities, must decide whether the benefit provided by these institutions is worth preserving and to what degree they will support Catholic schools, whether through foundational support, individual donations or through tax credits and tuition vouchers. Providing people living in poverty with choices for education seems a critical social justice position. Privileged groups in society can choose from well-funded suburban public schools, charters, magnets, or top-rated private schools. Limiting the educational choices of those with less privilege magnifies the divide between rich and poor in society.

It is critical that we heed Ospino and Weitzel- O'Neill's (2016) warning that the future of U.S. Catholicism may be dependent on preserving Catholic schools. Remaining on the sidelines while these schools continue to close only serves as an injustice to marginalized youth who stand to gain so much from these institutions.

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