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The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age: Pedagogical and Theological Perspectives of Religious Studies Teachers in U.S. Catholic Secondary Schools

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THE U.S. CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS' *DOCTRINAL ELEMENTS OF A CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CATECHETICAL MATERIALS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE OF HIGH SCHOOL AGE*: PEDAGOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES TEACHERS IN U.S. CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Dissertation Abstract

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Doctrinal Elements Of A Curriculum Framework For The Development Of Catechetical Materials For Young People Of High School Age*: Pedagogical And Theological Perspectives of Religious Studies Teachers in U.S. Catholic Secondary Schools

In 2007, the Catholic bishops of the United States unanimously approved a document entitled *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCCB, 2008; hereafter, *Framework*). The promulgation of the *Framework* constituted the first time that the bishops sought to establish a uniform Religious Studies curriculum for all U.S. Catholic secondary schools. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of six Religious Studies teachers regarding their experience of teaching courses based on the USCCB *Framework*; specifically, these teachers' experiences of the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content they teach and on their pedagogy. The researcher conducted two semi-structured, in-depth interviews with each of six participants. She also incorporated elements of Participatory Action Research (PAR) into the research design, attempting to engage the participants in a collaborative process of generating knowledge and considering potential avenues of action rooted in that knowledge.

This study demonstrated that the *Framework* substantially alters the theological content that students learn in their Religious Studies courses. These shifts in curricular content place new demands on teachers, requiring them to navigate a Christocentric, apologetic curriculum that emphasizes advanced, detailed theological and doctrinal

content. The study also revealed that the *Framework* has prompted some teachers to utilize more teacher-centered methodologies and more traditional assessment strategies and to curtail their use of certain pre-*Framework* activities and projects that they had found to be effective. Additionally, teachers routinely supplement the *Framework*'s content, most notably its material on Scripture.

The findings of this study led the researcher to conclude that the U. S. bishops lack awareness of various aspects of the present reality of U.S. Catholic secondary schools and possess only a limited ability to control the Religious Studies curriculum of such schools. Additionally, the many pedagogical challenges presented by the *Framework*'s content manifest the potential to diminish students' interest in Religious Studies, particularly if a teacher possesses limited abilities to meet these challenges. These conclusions carry important implications regarding the future direction of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Carrie J. Schroeder   May 2, 2013

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all of my teachers at the Catholic schools at which I have studied: St. Stephen's Elementary School, Bishop Eustace Preparatory School, the Catholic University of America, the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, and the University of San Francisco. Your faith-filled example nurtured my heart, mind, and spirit, shaping me into a woman of intelligence, prayer, and service. My experiences as your student enabled me to embrace my own vocation: that of a teacher.

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I thank my God every time I remember you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you…It is right that I should think this way about all of you, because I hold you in my heart, you who are all partners with me in grace.
~Philippians 1:3-4, 7a

I am deeply grateful for the encouragement, support, prayers, and wisdom of the many people who have made it possible for me to complete my doctoral degree, and especially this dissertation. Their love enabled me to persevere through the long and arduous process of studying, researching, and writing while working full-time.

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Adrian and I share our home with our dog, Russell, who patiently slept at my feet during countless hours of writing. He learned the recognize the "click" of my laptop closing, a sound which prompted him to crawl into my lap, lick my face, and wag his tail, anticipating the walk that would bring the day's work to an end. How blest I have been

to have with me this wonderful reminder of what is truly important in life: delighting in the presence of those we love.

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CHAPTER I

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

On November 14, 2007, the 221 Catholic bishops of the United States, gathered in

a general assembly for their semi-annual meeting, unanimously approved a document

entitled *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of*

Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age (United States Conference

of Catholic Bishops, USCCB, 2008; hereafter, *Framework*). This document, the product

of approximately 10 years of dialogue, writing, and revision among members of the

USCCB[1], offered "a detailed framework for catechetical instruction for high school

students" (Zapor, 2008, ¶ 1) based on an eight-semester curriculum of six required

courses and two electives, the latter to be chosen from among five approved courses. In

the years since the official promulgation of the *Framework*, each local bishop (inclusive

of archbishops) has decided whether, how, and when to implement it in his respective

diocesan (inclusive of archdiocesan) territory. Each bishop's freedom either to

implement or to ignore the *Framework* has created a situation which Filteau (2010)

characterized as "uneven" (p. 1a). The remarks of a former catechetical official of the

USCCB, who asked not to be identified by name, supported this view in the following

statement: "A number of dioceses have taken the [*Framework*'s doctrinal] elements and

made them their policy. Others have started the process. Others are just ignoring them"

(p. 1a).

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[1] A list of all abbreviations utilized in this dissertation to designate universal and local ecclesial offices appears in Appendix A.

An examination of selected canons from the *Code of Canon Law* (1983), the law which governs the internal affairs of the Catholic Church, sheds light on the role of bishops vis-à-vis Catholic schools in general and the supervision of religious instruction in those schools in particular. The Code states that all religious education, whether occurring in parishes, schools, or other venues, is subject to ecclesiastical authority. National episcopal conferences are responsible "to issue general norms in this area" (c. 804, CIC[2]) and diocesan bishops must "regulate such education and be vigilant over it" (c. 804, CIC). With regard to religious education which occurs in Catholic school settings, regulation may take the form of conducting formal visitations at Catholic schools (c. 806, CIC), ensuring that the education they offer is grounded in Catholic doctrine (c. 803, CIC), and naming or approving Religious Studies teachers (c. 805, CIC), who must "be outstanding for their correct doctrine, their witness of Christian living, and their pedagogical skill" (c. 804, CIC). Despite granting diocesan bishops such wide-ranging authority with regard to Catholic schools, the Code also protects the right of each bishop to govern his ecclesial territory in the manner he perceives to be fitting. With the exception of very limited areas in which the Pope reserves authority to himself—such as certain sacramental and liturgical norms—a bishop enjoys relative autonomy in his diocese, possessing "all the ordinary, proper, and immediate power which is required for the exercise of his pastoral office" (c. 381, CIC). Therefore, with regard to the *Framework*, the unanimous approval of the document by all of the U.S. bishops does not bind any individual bishop to implement it.

Although bishops' responses to the *Framework* have thus far been varied, this situation may change as conformity with the *Framework* becomes one of the criteria by

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[2] *Codex Iuris Canonici*, the Latin title of the *Code of Canon Law*.

which U.S. Catholic secondary schools are accredited. For example, beginning with the

2011-2012 academic year, U.S. Catholic elementary and secondary schools seeking

accreditation by the Western Catholic Educational Association (WCEA) have been

evaluated with a new instrument which includes a "Catholic Identity" factor. This factor

consists of eight standards regarding Catholic identity, one of which is: "The school uses

a Religion curriculum and instruction that is faithful to Roman Catholic Church

teachings, and meets the requirements set forth by the USCCB" (WCEA, 2009, p. 11).

Chief among these requirements are the use of textbooks which the USCCB has declared

to be in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (United States Catholic

Conference, 1994) and adherence to the *Framework* (or, for elementary schools,

adherence to *Doctrinal Elements for Elementary Grades Based on the Catechism of the

Catholic Church*).

The introduction to the *Framework* explicitly states that "this document offers

guidance to catechetical publishers in the creation of instructional material" (USCCB,

2008, p. 1). Therefore, publishers, anticipating a widespread adoption of the *Framework*,

have produced textbooks which are organized around its content. The first of these was

completed within a year of the *Framework*'s promulgation; numerous others have

quickly followed. National catechetical expert, Thomas Groome, commented on the

extent to which the *Framework* has shaped the work of publishers: "Publishers… are not

following this [the *Framework*] as a rough guide; they are definitely determined to follow

it very faithfully, and see it as hazardous not to" (Heffern, 2010, p. 2a). In other words,

if, increasingly, schools must follow the *Framework* and utilize USCCB-approved texts,

publishers must produce such texts in order to continue to survive in a competitive marketplace.

Despite the plethora of recently published textbooks which align with the *Framework*'s content, little has been written about the *Framework* itself: neither analysis, nor critique, nor comment, nor reaction. A search of the literature revealed a single dissertation and very few analytical articles about the *Framework* published since its promulgation. In one such article, O'Malley (2009) characterized the *Framework* as "pedagogically counterproductive …inflexibly 'top down,' preceptive, rigorously certain" (p. 14). In a response to O'Malley's critique, McBride (2009) defended the *Framework*, describing it as

> …a service to our young people, helping them know and love Christ and live according to his truth. In this way, high school age students are able to participate more deeply in the life of the church, and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to reach eternal life with God in heaven. It is a very high ideal; but teenagers are well suited to idealism, and their personal development is related to human and faith-based challenges. (p. 18)

Likewise, Ostasiewski's (2010) dissertation is the only comprehensive analysis of the *Framework* to appear since its promulgation. Her study critiqued the *Framework* from both theological and pedagogical standpoints. Theologically, Ostasiewski evaluated the document from the perspective of tradition, the magisterium, and Scripture. Concerning the first of these, Ostasiewski characterized the release of the *Framework* as a significant departure from the traditional role of the Bishops vis-à-vis Religious Studies curricula. From the mid-19th century, when the U.S. Catholic school system was in its infancy, to the present day, the U.S. bishops have traditionally delegated curriculum development to religious teaching orders and publishers. Therefore, Ostasiewski concluded that the *Framework* represents "the first time the Roman Catholic hierarchy, as

opposed to individual professional religious teaching orders or publishing houses, has felt

the need to step in and produce a nationwide curriculum" (p. 75). On the subject of the

magisterium, the official teaching authority of the Catholic Church, she argued that the

Framework is inconsistent with the vision of Catholic education as expressed in

magisterial documents. Ostasiewski's analysis of six such documents, produced from

1929 to 2005, surfaced several key characteristics of this vision, including the need for

students to participate actively in their own learning, the importance of connecting

instructional material with students' lived reality, and the necessity of incorporating

insights from educational theory and psychology into classroom praxis. In comparing the

Framework with these characteristics, Ostasiewski maintained that

> The Framework is entirely inconsistent with the educational documents produced
> by the Church. In no document does it address educators to look back in time and
> adopt methods used previously; in no document does it tell educators to produce
> standard questions for students. Over and over again, catechists are asked to find
> ways to help students dream of ways to make the Gospel consistent with their
> lives. By deviating from the path laid out by previous documents, there is a real
> possibility that students will only be presented with, quoting the Church,
> "artificial juxtapositions or closed understandings of the truth" or "pre-cast
> conclusions." (pp. 94-95)

Regarding Scripture, Ostasiewski (2010) asserted that neither the content nor

format of the *Framework* follows the prophetic example of Jesus found in Scripture.

Utilizing Brueggemann's (2001) model of the prophetic imagination, she presented Jesus

as a teacher who exercised prophetic ministry in the tradition of the ancient Israelite

prophets, that is, by challenging dominant ideologies, questioning established authority,

working for liberation, and valuing people above rules. Ostasiewski maintained that, in

stark contrast to the example of Jesus, the *Framework* failed to speak a word of hope and

possibility to adolescents, missed the opportunity to help them critique today's

materialistic society, and neglected to invite them into a covenantal relationship with God. She asserted that, like the ancient Israelite kings, who often sparred with the prophets, "the Bishops have 'rationalized reality' and told us the questions and answers. They stifled the free God and programmatized holy Wisdom much like those exercising royal consciousness as described by Brueggemann" (p. 108).

Pedagogically, Ostasiewski (2010) utilized the lens of postmodern curriculum theory, particularly the work of Slattery (2006), to critique the *Framework*'s apologetic approach. Apologetics is the theological discipline which studies, develops, and articulates "the defense of or proofs for Christianity" (Fiorenza, 1987, p. 44). It emphasizes objective truth that both the leaders and members of the Church must faithfully and consistently articulate, transmit, and defend. In contrast, postmodern curriculum theory emphasizes a multiplicity of complex truths, which students have the freedom to discover and explore, and then accept, question, or reject. Ostasiewski asserted that there is an "inherent clash between a postmodern refusal to assume there is absolute authority or truth and the Roman Catholic hierarchy's insistence on the absolute truth that is God and its interpretive right over matters of faith and morals" (p. 116). In her view, a postmodern approach to curriculum and instruction best meets the needs of contemporary adolescent students, who long to think critically, consider multiple viewpoints, and apply abstract principles—including religious values—to real-world problems. Ostasiewski stated that the bishops, in choosing, instead, an apologetic orientation, have risked alienating the very students they had hoped to reach: "Any discouraging of theological self-reflection is counter to the needs of the students. Strict adherence to canonicity and formal catechesis actually reinforces cultural and individual

isolation that the students may find intellectually comfortable but ultimately disturbing"
(p. 137).

Noticeably absent from the literature is any systematic, empirical study of
Religious Studies teachers' experiences of, perceptions of, or attitudes toward the
Framework. Schools located in dioceses which implemented the *Framework* as soon as
possible after its official promulgation have now graduated the first students to complete
all of their secondary school Religious Studies courses within the *Framework*'s structure.
This pivotal moment presented a unique and timely opportunity to explore teachers'
experiences of the ways in which the *Framework* has had an impact on the theological
content that they teach and/or on the pedagogy that they employ. Teachers who have
taught Religious Studies both prior to and after the *Framework*'s implementation offered
particularly salient reflections on this topic.

<div align="center">Background and Need</div>

Investigating the process which gave rise to the *Framework*, from 1985-2007, as
well as subsequent developments since its promulgation, will aid the reader in
understanding the ecclesial context within which the *Framework* was produced and
within which the present study was conducted. When the bishops gathered for the
Extraordinary Synod in 1985 recommended the preparation of a new universal Catechism
of the Catholic Church, they set in motion a series of events which would lead to, among
other things, greater interest on the part of the U.S. bishops in reviewing and approving
catechetical materials, including textbooks in use in the Religious Studies classrooms of
U.S. Catholic secondary schools. The bishops' concerns about both the theological
content and the pedagogy presented in many textbooks that they reviewed contributed to

their desire to develop a standardized Religious Studies curriculum for all U.S. Catholic secondary schools, with accompanying textbooks that they would endorse. After a lengthy process which included two public consultations, the *Framework* was promulgated in November 2007. Since that time, the U.S. bishops have continued their efforts to bring all secondary-level Religious Studies textbooks into alignment with the *Framework*'s content. These efforts may have a considerable impact on the Religious Studies curriculum of U.S. Catholic secondary schools, particularly if the bishop of a given diocese has mandated the implementation of the *Framework* and the exclusive use of textbooks approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

The Call for a New Catechism: Addressing Perceived Religious Illiteracy

In October of 1985, the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, gathered in Rome, recommended the preparation of a new universal Catechism of the Catholic Church. Such a document would serve as a reference point for the preparation of local catechisms throughout the world. The commission of cardinals and bishops appointed by Pope John Paul II to oversee the development of this new catechism began their work in July of 1986. The lengthy process of writing multiple drafts and revising those drafts based on feedback from bishops and consulters around the world would take more than six years.

On February 21, 1990, Archbishop William Levada of Portland, Oregon —the only American among the seven bishops on the committee charged with actually writing the new catechism—issued an overview of the then in-progress document. In it, he expressed a profound concern for the lack of religious literacy among contemporary Catholics and postulated that such a concern motivated the Synod of Bishops to recommend the preparation of a new catechism:

One of the most popular board games of the past Christmas season was an irreverent look at Catholicism called "Is the Pope Catholic?" Despite their irreverence, board games that center on Catholic trivia seem to surface a central and disturbing fact. Families soon discover that anyone born after the 1960's cannot answer the Baltimore catechism questions that many consider part of our Catholic heritage. Neither do they remember many of the events that most of us consider central to our own experience of Catholicism. While few persons consider knowing the mysteries of the rosary recited on Monday essential to salvation, experiences like these are enough to make parents express concern about the religious education of their children.

Concern for the transmission of the faith is not uniquely parental. Nor is it only episcopal. It is an issue that comes to the fore at any national, diocesan or parish meeting of either priests or laity called to surface primary issues of concern. (¶ 1-2)

Later that same year, the entire body of U.S. bishops expressed a similar concern regarding the need to transmit Catholic doctrine accurately through the process of catechesis. In their *Guidelines for Doctrinally Sound Catechetical Materials* (United States Catholic Conference, USCC, 1990), the bishops perceived a potential problem presented by the vast array of catechetical materials available for children, youth, and adults:

Most of these materials advance and enrich the Church's catechetical mission, but their diversity and quantity present a new challenge. The faithful expect the bishops—and we recognize it as our responsibility—to assure them that these materials express the teaching of the Church as faithfully as possible. (p. 3)

In response to this perceived need for clearer guidelines regarding catechetical materials, the bishops articulated the criterion of doctrinal soundness. They described doctrinally sound materials as those which encompass "a complete and correct presentation of Church teaching, with proper attention to its organic unity" (p. 4) and which are clear and readily understandable to the specific group of people to whom they are addressed.

Following the public promulgation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on December 7, 1992, and in anticipation of the document's pending translation into

English, Archbishop Levada hosted a symposium on the new *Catechism* in February

1994. At this event, he acknowledged that, even in the 1970s, Church officials were

aware of the need to ground any renewal of catechesis in sound, accurate doctrine.

However, he maintained that in the intervening years,

> The immense shift in theological vocabulary and emphasis and the voices of
> dissent over church doctrines in morality and even in the meaning of the creed
> tended to undermine both clarity and conviction in the presentation of the
> teachings of the faith. (¶ 19)

In 1994, following the publication of the English translation of the *Catechism*, the

United States Catholic Conference (USCC)[3] formed the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee

the Use of the *Catechism*, chaired by Archbishop Daniel Buechlein of Indianapolis,

Indiana. Among its stated objectives were to oversee the use of the *Catechism* in both the

revision of present catechetical materials and in the development of new materials, that

is, to ensure that catechetical materials would be consistent with the *Catechism*'s themes,

language, and approach to doctrine. To this end, the Ad Hoc Committee developed a

document entitled *Protocol for Assessing the Conformity of Catechetical Materials with

the* Catechism of the Catholic Church (USCC, 1996) and began inviting publishers to

submit materials for review according to this protocol.

Additionally, the Ad Hoc Committee was charged with the task of conducting a

feasibility study and making a recommendation regarding the development of a national

catechetical series that would be utilized in Catholic schools, parishes, and catechetical

programs throughout the country. As a first step toward exploring the question of

whether to pursue the development of such a series, the committee convened a task force

to prepare a national scope and sequence of catechetical material to be taught at each

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[3] In July 2001, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) and the United States Catholic
Conference (USCC) merged to form the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

grade level (kindergarten through grade 12) and in adult education programs. The first segment of this scope and sequence instrument, *Doctrinal Elements for Elementary Grades Based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, would be released in March, 1999.

On June 19, 1997, Archbishop Daniel Buechlein, speaking as chair of the Ad Hoc Committee, offered an oral report on the committee's work to the general assembly of bishops. In it, he invited his audience to "recall that the original inspiration for the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was the perceived need for a common language in service to the unity of the faith and in the global context of cultural diversity and religious illiteracy" (¶ 4). He then reflected on the committee's primary focus over the past year: reviewing catechetical materials to determine the extent of those materials' conformity with the *Catechism*. He remarked that the committee had detected "a relatively consistent trend of doctrinal incompleteness and imprecision" (¶ 14) in the materials that they had reviewed. He identified 10 such imprecisions:

1. "Insufficient attention to the Trinity and the Trinitarian structure of Catholic beliefs and teachings"

2. "An obscured presentation of the centrality of Christ in salvation history and an insufficient emphasis on the divinity of Christ"

3. "An indistinct treatment of the ecclesial context of Catholic beliefs and magisterial teachings"

4. "An inadequate sense of a distinctively Christian anthropology"

5. "A trend that gives insufficient emphasis on God's initiative in the world with a corresponding overemphasis on human action"

6. "An insufficient recognition of the transforming effects of grace"

7. "Inadequate presentation of the sacraments"

8. "Deficiency in the teaching on original sin and sin in general"

9. "A meager exposition of Christian moral life"

10. "An inadequate presentation of eschatology." (¶ 14-24)

In this same report, Buechlein indicated that the Committee was not yet prepared to make a final recommendation regarding the feasibility of developing a national catechetical series.

In November 1997, speaking at the Synod for America in Rome, Archbishop Donald Wuerl of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, offered a short address known as an "intervention." In it, he echoed the concerns of his brother bishops regarding growing religious illiteracy:

> Religious ignorance, or, as some call it, "illiteracy," is a significant part of the culture with which we deal pastorally. Within the United States Catholic Conference, the bishops have attempted, through the implementation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, to address this disquieting phenomenon by strengthening catechetical texts….While we have worked hard to ensure the quality of religious education programs with significant effort to integrate the Catechism of the Catholic Church [*sic*] into all of them, nonetheless, the religious literacy level of our faithful is still a concern and one that needs to continue to be the focus of our pastoral ministry. (¶ 11-12)

He also reiterated some of the doctrinal imprecisions which Buechlein had identified in his address earlier that year, namely, insufficient attention to the Trinity, to Christ's saving work, and to God's action and initiative in the world.

On September 12, 1998, Archbishop Buechlein gave an address at a Pastoral Congress for the Diocese of Salt Lake City. In reiterating the 10 doctrinal deficiencies in catechetical materials that he had presented in his June 1997 address to the bishops, he

characterized these deficiencies as symptoms of the postmodern world, a world unduly

influenced by what Tarsitano (1998) called the principle of plausibility. According to

Buechlein (1998), this principle causes those who teach the Catholic faith to depict that

faith in a way that is inclusive of and sensitive to diverse groups of people. In the

following quote, Buechlein expressed his fear that this desire to portray Catholicism in a

palatable, inoffensive manner may cause teachers to dilute their presentation of the truths

of the Catholic faith:

> Tarsitano's notion of the primacy of plausibility vis-à-vis absolute truth strikes a chord. Make no mistake, the motive of plausibility, the motive not to offend or exclude, is good and important in itself, but not at the expense of the fullness of truth. Authentic inculturation of truth cannot be achieved with plausibility as the presumed first principle. Let me repeat that: Authentic inculturation of truth cannot be achieved with plausibility as the presumed first principle.
>   Surely we agree that evangelizing catechesis or preaching and also worship and prayer should not succumb to the weight of plausibility over doctrine and theology in the practice and life of our Church. Yet, there is some evidence that the fullness of doctrine in the resources we use for catechesis and in preaching has suffered in recent times. (¶ 15-16)

Buechlein (1998) continued by theorizing that each doctrinal deficiency that he

had identified in 1997 could be explained as a symptom of the postmodern world's focus

on the principle of plausibility. For example, he maintained that a postmodern concern

for gender inclusivity may lie at the root of the avoidance of traditional Trinitarian

language, and a postmodern emphasis on community may explain an approach to

ecclesiology which, in his view, overemphasizes the communal nature of the church and

minimizes the role of the magisterium.

The concern expressed by the American bishops as a whole in their 1990

document (*Guidelines for Doctrinally Sound Catechetical Materials*), as well as by

Levada (1990,1994), Buechlein (1997, 1998), and Wuerl (1997)—prominent American

Catholic leaders with deep, official ties to Rome—constitutes the broad background against which the development of the *Framework* is best understood. Both the bishops in general and Levada, Buechlein, and Wuerl in particular clearly articulated a fear that doctrinally unsound or inaccurate catechetical materials would contribute to religious illiteracy among Catholics.

Development of the Framework*: Addressing Ongoing Concerns about Textbooks*

Just four days after Buechlein's (1998) address, Bernard Cardinal Law of Boston, then a member of the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism, presented a report to the bishops' administrative committee regarding the feasibility of developing a national catechetical series to be used in all U.S. Catholic schools and parishes. Due to concern about alienating publishers, who had requested that the bishops not undertake such a project, Law recommended that a definitive decision regarding a national catechetical series be delayed. In the meantime, the Ad Hoc Committee would continue to review materials that publishers voluntarily submitted to them for the conformity review process. In addition, Law recommended that the Ad Hoc Committee "expand the doctrinal elements of a scope and sequence instrument to include grades 9 to 12" in order to "assist the publishers in the development of stronger catechetical materials" ("Catechism Committee Reports," 1998, ¶ 3). With the administrative committee's acceptance of this recommendation, work began on the document that would, almost 10 years later, become the *Framework.*

In February 1999, the Ad Hoc Committee appointed a steering committee to oversee the preparation of a draft scope and sequence instrument for high-school aged students. The steering committee consisted of seven people: six who were at that time

members of the USCC staff and one who was a former member of the USCC staff. Three of the seven members were priests, two were laymen, and two were women. The committee expressed an intent to consult with publishers "in an advisory capacity" and with other "various bodies," who were not specified, during the process of developing the instrument ("Doctrinal Elements," 1999, ¶ 1). Within a month of its inception, the steering committee presented the Ad Hoc Committee with several proposed models for the instrument. The model endorsed by the Ad Hoc Committee was

> …a comprehensive adolescent model structured on the four pillars of the Catechism [*sic*] which would identify doctrinal elements that an adolescent should be expected to know. As this model would be intended to address adolescent catechesis as a whole, it might also contain an appendix which would suggest ways of applying the doctrinal elements in specific situations such as Catholic high schools, parish religious education programs and youth ministry programs. (¶ 3)

On November 15, 1999, Archbishop Daniel Buechlein, chair of the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism, reported to the full body of U.S. bishops gathered in Washington, DC, for their semi-annual meeting. The Ad Hoc Committee had, at that point, been conducting conformity reviews of catechetical materials for three and a half years, and had noted several problematic areas that surfaced repeatedly in such materials. Those areas, which were also communicated to publishers, were:

1. "A systematic avoidance of personal pronouns in reference to God. The practice of avoiding personal pronouns for God often led to an artificial and awkward repetition of the word *God* in sentences or to circumlocutions that tended to depersonalize him. We informed the publishers that this requirement [of using male personal pronouns in reference to God] will help to assure that as much as possible a Trinitarian theology permeates all catechetical materials" (pp. 390-391).

2. The use of the term "Hebrew Scriptures" instead of the term "Old Testament." Buechlein stated that "from a Christian perspective there are two testaments, which have been traditionally referred to as *Old* and *New*" and expressed a desire to preserve "the common language of our faith" (p. 391, emphases original).

3. The use of the abbreviations B.C.E. and C.E., designating, respectively, "Before the Common Era" and "Common Era," rather than the abbreviations B.C. and A.D., designating, respectively, "Before Christ," and "Anno Domini," or, in English, "Year of the Lord." Buechlein asserted that "since the materials involved are catechetical in nature, they should reflect that—for followers of Jesus—even time has a Christological significance" (p. 391). Regarding this issue, as well, he again maintained that B.C. and A.D. are part of "the common language of faith" (p. 391), which must be utilized, taught, and preserved.

In addition to noting these areas that the Ad Hoc Committee had identified as problematic, Buechlein also indicated that the steering committee was at work on the scope and sequence instrument for high-school aged students and expected to have an initial draft prepared by the spring of 2000.

On June 15, 2001, Buechlein again reported to the full assembly of U.S. bishops, gathered for their semi-annual meeting in Atlanta, GA. In that report, he expressed dissatisfaction regarding the state of adolescent catechesis in the United States and left open the possibility that the U.S. bishops may yet pursue the development of a single, national catechetical series for use in all U.S. Catholic secondary schools and other programs directed to adolescents:

> We find that the present catechetical situation in this country on the secondary
> level is far from satisfactory. It is a source of concern and frustration to the

Catechism Committee [Ad Hoc Committee] that, to date, the conformity review process has had relatively little effect on the catechetical materials used with a large portion of our high school age students. This is because, so far, few reviews have actually taken place on those materials. The conformity listing that appears in this month's issue of *Catechism Update* contains the names of forty-five texts or series that carry a declaration of conformity. Only seven of these forty-five entries concern material for the secondary level.

Some additional conformity reviews for high school materials have taken place but the results conveyed in reports from those reviews were ignored and the publishing houses involved made the choice to release materials that the Catechism Committee had found unacceptable for a declaration of conformity. These materials had been judged unacceptable because they reflected many of the ten doctrinal deficiencies we had reported finding in our earlier reviews.

The Committee wants to go on record as stating that the possibility exists that at some point in the future it might be advisable for the bishops to undertake the development of a national catechetical series for Catholic high schools and/or religious education programs for older adolescents. (¶ 4-6)

In November of 2002, Archbishop Buechlein was appointed as chair of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) new Committee on Catechesis, which, as part of a larger restructuring of the USCCB, would now function as its own committee instead of as a subcommittee of the Committee on Education. Archbishop Alfred Hughes of New Orleans took Buechlein's place as chair of the Ad Hoc Committee. In that capacity, Hughes made his first report to the full body of U.S. bishops one year later, on November 10, 2003. In the report, titled "The State of High School Catechetical Texts," Hughes (2003) maintained that although some publishers were attempting to cooperate with the Ad Hoc Committee in producing texts in conformity to the *Catechism*, "the working relationship between the committee and some high school publishers has not yet born as much fruit as we had hoped" (pp. 418-419). He stated that between March, 2001 and November, 2003, nearly two-thirds of the conformity reviews of high school materials resulted in a judgment of nonconformity. Moreover, these materials were deemed inadequate for revision, that is, the Committee indicated that they must be

completely rewritten before being resubmitted. Hughes expressed concern and

consternation that "many of the materials found to be inadequate are still in wide use

throughout the country" (p. 419).

Hughes (2003) offered the following list of "deficiencies" (p. 419) identified by

the Ad Hoc Committee in their reviews of materials designed for use in U.S. Catholic

secondary schools:

1. A relativistic approach to the church and to faith which presented the Catholic

Church as but one church among many equals: "Our young people are not learning what

it means to say that the sole church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church" (p. 419).

2. The use of "tentative language," such as "Catholics believe that…" in

presenting doctrine and moral teachings: this phrasing "gives the impression that the

teaching is just one legitimate opinion among others rather than a matter of truth…Our

young people are not learning that what we know and believe is based on objective truth

revealed to us by God" (p. 419).

3. Flawed sacramental theology, in which students are taught "that the

sacraments were instituted over an extended period of time, with the implication that they

can still be changed" (p. 419).   Hughes also maintained that some materials present the

sacraments as a way to celebrate special moments in life rather than as a way to

encounter Christ in a unique and privileged way.

4. Lack of emphasis on the importance of the priesthood: "The distinctive role

of the priest may be sidelined or even ignored" (p. 419).

5. Failure to emphasize Jesus' unique presence in the Eucharistic elements (the

consecrated bread and wine).

6. Failure to affirm the Church's teaching on the restriction of ordination to males: "The teaching about the church's prohibition on the question of the ordination of women is ambiguous or even misleading" (p. 419).

7. Use of language referring to marriage "partners" rather than to man and woman or husband and wife.

8. A perceived reluctance to identify premarital or extramarital sexual intercourse as sinful behavior: Students may be encouraged to abstain from premarital sexual intercourse in order to avoid pregnancy or disease, but not because such actions are sinful.

9. Failure to treat the eschatological dimension of morality: encouraging virtue only to better oneself and the world, rather than to attain heaven or avoid hell.

10. "A studied avoidance of revealed proper names or personal pronouns for the Persons in the Blessed Trinity. This leads to an inaccurate understanding of the divine nature of the Persons of the Trinity as well as their unity with each other and their proper relations. Some of the texts, in trying to avoid masculine titles or pronouns for the Persons of the Trinity, speak of the Father only as God and then speak of Jesus without noting his Sonship or divinity, creating an implication that Jesus is somehow different from God or even somehow less than God" (p. 419).

11. An unbalanced Christology, which overemphasizes Jesus' humanity at the expense of his divinity.

12. An inadequate or flawed treatment of the Holy Spirit, including language which suggests that the Holy Spirit is less than God.

13. A focus on the historical-critical method of interpreting Scripture, with a corresponding failure to utilize "patristic and spiritual interpretation" (p. 419). Hughes maintained that the historical-critical approach obscures God's role in inspiring the writing of the Scriptures and gives the impression that these are "merely human texts" (p. 419).

14. An explanation of some miracles, including some of Jesus' miracles, as ordinary, rather than supernatural, phenomena.

15. An ecclesiology which overemphasizes the role of community and minimizes the role of the hierarchy.

16. A presentation of the social mission of the Church which fails to ground this mission in God's initiative and which fails to relate it to eschatological realities.

Despite this extensive, seemingly exhaustive, list of doctrinal deficiencies, Hughes (2003) stated that "this is merely a sampling of the kinds of problems that have aroused serious concerns for the bishops serving on the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism" (p. 419). Because of these "grave concerns" (p. 420), Hughes urged the bishops to require that all textbooks approved for use in schools and programs of their dioceses carry a declaration of conformity to the *Catechism*. Until the development and approval of national doctrinal guidelines for materials used in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, he pledged that the Ad Hoc Committee would continue to work with publishers to develop materials "that teach the faith accurately and completely" (p. 420).

At this same meeting of the full body of U.S. bishops, Archbishop Buechlein (2003), chair of the new standing Committee on Catechesis, presented the proposed

thematic structure of the document that would become the *Framework*. This structure was organized into eight parts, presumably to correspond to eight semesters of study through a four-year secondary school program. These eight parts were identified as follows:

1. Basic Christology, with a focus on the Incarnation

2. The Paschal Mystery: Jesus' saving mission of redemption

3. The Church: Christ's presence in the world today

4. The Sacraments: expressions of Christ's presence

5. Life in Christ, part 1: Christian identity and personal morality

6. Life in Christ, part 2: communal and social morality

7. Sacraments at the Service of Communion: Vocations

8. To be determined

Buechlein stated that a full draft copy of the doctrinal guidelines would be presented to the bishops for their review and comment in the very near future.

<center>*The Bishops' Growing Concerns about Pedagogy*</center>

On September 9, 2004, the Ad Hoc Committee convened its annual meeting with representatives of publishing companies. At this gathering, the Committee urged publishers "to remind their writers and editors to make sure that catechetical materials on which they are working present the doctrine of the faith in a way that is clear, understandable and also unequivocal" ("Catechism committee holds," 2004, ¶ 5). The Committee reiterated its concern, frequently expressed in other venues, regarding the "tentative manner" (¶ 6) in which texts may present doctrine. For example, the Committee urged publishers to exercise caution in developing discussion questions or

reflection activities: "They [publishers] were cautioned to avoid activities which ask students to agree or disagree with doctrine or Church teaching. It was suggested that instead they ask the students the impact the particular belief or teaching can have on their own lives or the lives of others" (¶ 6).

In the summer of 2006, Archbishop Hughes (2006), chair of the Ad Hoc Committee, presented a lengthy report in *Catechism Update* reflecting on the Committee's work of conducting conformity reviews of textbooks over the past 10 years. In it, he praised the bishops' "direct involvement in the preparation of catechetical materials" (p. 1) and urged that such involvement be permanent and ongoing. He also traced the process by which deficiencies in textbooks, especially those commonly used at the secondary level, were identified, and maintained that "naming these deficiencies proved to be a deciding moment for catechesis in this country" (pp. 1-2). He then discussed a relatively recent shift in the Ad Hoc Committee's thinking regarding the relationship between content and pedagogy in Religious Studies textbooks:

> When the Catechism Committee [Ad Hoc Committee] first began conducting conformity reviews, publishers were told that the review would concern only the doctrinal content and not matters of pedagogy or methodology. Gradually, the Committee recognized more clearly that some pedagogical and methodological approaches actually undermine the authentic presentation of doctrine. (p. 3)

Hughes (2006) continued by identifying two pedagogical approaches that the committee had deemed unacceptable. The first was an approach rooted in a desire to avoid offending or alienating students of other faiths who are enrolled in Catholic schools. Such an approach presented church doctrine or moral teaching in a manner that implied that it was simply one opinion among many legitimate views from which students may choose. Hughes stated that although textbooks espousing this approach

may have explained doctrine and morality accurately, "it was done within a context which made it sound as if the doctrine was a matter of opinion and not based on truths revealed by God" (p. 3). Hughes identified the second approach to which the committee objected as "an anthropological experiential approach to catechesis" (p. 3). Such an approach takes human experience as the starting point for religious education and as the lens through which religious faith and teachings may be presented, understood, and evaluated. According to Hughes, this methodology can lead to a subjective, relativistic presentation of faith, in which "the truth and objective reality of God's Revelation becomes blurred. God's Revelation is not subjective….God has taken the initiative in revealing the truth about himself and his involvement in the history of salvation" (p. 3).

<div align="center">Final Phases in the Framework's Development</div>

On April 1, 2005, the first formal, public consultation process began on the document that now carried the working title *National Doctrinal Guidelines for High School*. This document refined the eight semester program that had been presented to the bishops in November of 2003 into the following eight topics, each of which was to comprise a one-semester course of study:

1. Christ: The eternal word

2. Christ: Who is Jesus?

3. What did Christ accomplish? (the Paschal Mystery)

4. How does Christ's work continue in the world today? (the Church)

5. Sacraments as the principal manifestations of Christ

6. Life in Christ (part I)

7. Life in Christ (part II)

8. Sacraments at the Service of Communion

Each U.S. bishop received a copy of the document, and a copy was sent to each diocesan

office. In the cover letter that accompanied the document, Archbishop Daniel Buechlein,

chair of the USCCB Committee on Catechesis, suggested that "consideration be given to

consulting with high school religion department chairs and teachers" (personal

communication, April 1, 2005). He also affirmed the bishops' freedom to consult with

other personnel, if desired, and requested that feedback from all stakeholders be collated

into a single report from the diocese. All reports were due within three months: by July

1, 2005. The number of dioceses that responded to this appeal is unknown, as is the

number of people who contributed to any individual diocese's response.

The USCCB provided an "amendment form" (Appendix B) for those offering

feedback on the *National Doctrinal Guidelines for High School.* This form asked for

specific words, phrases, or passages that the respondent would propose striking from the

document and for recommended new wording to replace stricken passages. If

respondents wished to suggest an entirely new passage for inclusion, they were asked to

indicate the precise location (page number and line number) at which they believed the

new material should be inserted. Respondents were directed to generate multiple copies

of the amendment form so that each form would contain only one comment about one

specific line item in the document. It is notable that, in this first public consultation

beyond the realm of USCCB staff and consultants, potential respondents were not asked

for reactions to the overall structure, tone, or focus of the document. Indeed, the

configuration of the amendment form did not allow for comments on the eight core

themes selected nor on the document's overall theological stance. Thus, the form seemed

to imply that the basic structure, tone, and theological perspective of the document would remain intact even in any subsequent revised versions.

At their November 2005 and June 2006 semi-annual meetings, the bishops reviewed the comments that had been submitted during the public consultation process. As a result, they revised the *National Doctrinal Guidelines for High School* to encompass six core required semesters and two electives, the latter to be chosen from among five possibilities. The first six topics of the April 2005 version essentially became the six required semesters, with some minor changes in wording; topics seven and eight became electives with three other elective topics added. The six core courses were:

1. The Revelation of Jesus Christ in Scripture (study of both Testaments)

2. Who Is Jesus Christ? (Christology)

3. The Mission of Jesus Christ (the Paschal Mystery)

4. Jesus Christ's Mission Continues in the Church (Ecclesiology)

5. The Sacraments as Privileged Encounters With Jesus Christ (Sacramental Theology)

6. Life in Jesus Christ (Morality)

The five possible elective courses were:

1. Sacred Scripture (study of both Testaments)

2. History of the Catholic Church

3. Living as a Disciple of Jesus Christ in Society (Social Justice)

4. Responding to the Call of Jesus Christ (Vocations)

5. Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues

The document strongly urged that the six core courses be taught in the prescribed order, with the electives offered during the senior year (or, alternatively, one each in the junior and senior years).

In the spring of 2007, the Committee on Catechesis conducted a second consultation process on the document which now bore the title *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*. Unlike the public consultation process of 2005, in which both the bishop and the diocesan office received a copy of the document to be reviewed, this time only the bishop received a copy. Bishops were, as always, free to share that copy in consultation with diocesan and school personnel, but were not obligated to do so. Any comments from the bishop and from those with whom he chose to consult were to be submitted as one report to the USCCB by July 1, 2007.

On November 14, 2007, the full body of U.S. bishops, gathered in Baltimore, MD, for their semi-annual meeting, unanimously approved the *Framework* by a vote of 221-0, with very few revisions to the draft that had been distributed the prior spring. Following this official promulgation, the document was published in print form in July 2008 and made available in electronic form on the USCCB website.

Ongoing Developments Following the Framework's *Promulgation*

With the *Framework's* promulgation, publishers were left in a quandary as they sought to understand the relationship between the *Framework* and the *Protocol for Assessing the Conformity of Catechetical Materials with the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (USCC, 1996). The latter document had, since 1996, been the tool by which all materials submitted by publishers to the Subcommittee on the Catechism had been

evaluated. It remained unclear whether materials intended for use in U.S. Catholic

secondary schools would continue to be evaluated using the *Protocols*, would now be

evaluated with the *Framework*, or if the bishops would develop some new instrument for

the evaluation of such materials. In April 2011, the USCCB dispelled this confusion by

releasing the *Secondary Level (SL) Protocol for Assessing the Conformity of Catechetical*

Materials with the Catechism of the Catholic Church (USCCB, 2011b). This document

was intended to enable the Subcommittee to use the *Framework* as "the principal

instrument for the review of secondary level catechetical texts to determine their

conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*" (p. 2), in effect superseding the

1996 *Protocols*.

In the 2011 document, each of the 11 courses in the *Framework* had its own

rubric by which a textbook intended for use in that course would be evaluated. This

rubric reproduced all of the content that the *Framework* assigned to that particular course

in the form of a chart. For each item in the chart, a reviewer would indicate whether the

textbook was fully or partially in conformity to the *Catechism* (1994) regarding that

particular item or not in conformity at all. In the case of partial conformity, or complete

lack of conformity, the reviewer would indicate what changes would be required in order

for the textbook to receive a declaration of conformity. These charts were lengthy; for

example, the chart for the "Who is Jesus Christ" course contained 113 separate items on

which the reviewer was to render judgment.

The presumed practical effect of the release of the *Secondary Level Protocol* is

that textbooks designed for use in courses that fall outside the *Framework*'s parameters—

such as Bioethics, Women's Spirituality, Ignatian Spirituality, or Religious Themes in

Film—will no longer be reviewed by the subcommittee. If a bishop mandates that all textbooks used in Catholic secondary schools in his diocese carry a declaration of conformity to the *Catechism*, then these schools will no longer be able to offer these types of courses. They will be restricted to offering only the courses of the *Framework*.

In November 2011, the USCCB released *Guidelines for the Treatment and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture in Catechetical Texts* (USCCB, 2011a). With this document, the Subcommittee on the Catechism continued to emphasize its conviction that all Religious Studies courses in U.S. Catholic secondary schools must follow the *Framework*'s structure. In particular, this document directed that textbooks must reflect the "unity" (p. 4) of Scripture by always treating both the Old and New Testaments together, never separately. Presumably, as a result of the policy articulated in this document, the Subcommittee will no longer approve textbooks that treat only the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) or only the Christian Testament (New Testament). Again, if a bishop mandates that schools use only textbooks which carry a declaration of conformity, schools will be required to adjust their curricula to teach both Testaments in one course, perhaps even in one semester.

In May 2012, Pope Benedict XVI addressed a small group of U.S. bishops gathered in Rome for their *ad limina* visit[4]. In remarks focused on "the question of religious education and the faith formation of the next generation of Catholics" (Pope Benedict XVI, 2012, ¶ 1), Pope Benedict praised the bishops' long-standing efforts to ensure that all textbooks used for these purposes conform to the *Catechism*: "Before all else, I would acknowledge the great progress that has been made in recent years in

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[4] The *ad limina apostolorum*—literally, "to the thresholds of the apostles"—refers to the periodic visit that each bishop makes to Rome, generally once every five years.

improving catechesis, reviewing texts and bringing them into conformity with the

Catechism of the Catholic Church" (¶ 2). Although this brief comment does not directly

mention the *Framework* per se, it indicates that official ecclesial endorsement of the U.S.

bishops' increasing involvement in monitoring textbooks—involvement that reached a

milestone with the promulgation of the *Framework*—extended to the very highest

authority of the Church.

<div align="center">

Summary

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The *Framework*'s 2007 promulgation can be traced back to 1985, when the

Extraordinary Synod of Bishops called for the preparation of a new universal Catechism.

The bishops hoped that this document, promulgated in 1992, would help to address what

they perceived to be a crisis of religious illiteracy among Catholics. With the

Catechism's release in English in 1994, the U.S. bishops launched a full-scale effort to

ensure that all catechetical materials used in Catholic parishes, elementary schools,

secondary schools, and other ministries and programs would be in conformity with the

doctrinal content, theological approach, and language of the *Catechism*. To this end, the

USCC formed the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism, which would

later become a permanent body known as the Subcommittee on the Catechism. This

group, entrusted with the task of reviewing textbooks voluntarily submitted by

publishers, found many textbooks commonly in use in U.S. Catholic secondary schools to

be gravely deficient. Partially as a result of concern over these perceived deficiencies,

and partially to parallel the scope and sequence of catechetical material that had been

developed for elementary grades, the USCC began, in early 1999, to develop what would

become the *Framework*. With this document's promulgation in 2007, and with the

subsequent release of the *Secondary Level Protocol* (USCCB, 2011), the USCCB has

sought to exercise increasing control over the Religious Studies curricula of U.S. Catholic

secondary schools. Despite the unprecedented nature of the USCCB's actions, as

documented by Ostasiewski (2010), no study has yet sought to investigate the impact of

the *Framework* on the theological content taught and on the pedagogy employed in the

Religious Studies classrooms of U.S. Catholic secondary schools. The present study

aimed to address this pressing need.

<div align="center">Purpose of the Study</div>

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of six Religious Studies

teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools regarding their experience of teaching

courses based on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB, 2008)

Curriculum Framework. Specifically, the study investigated these teachers' experiences

of the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content they teach and on their pedagogy.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

This study investigated the following research questions:

1.	How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe

their experience of teaching courses based on the *Framework*?

2.	How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe

the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content they teach?

3.	How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe

the *Framework*'s impact on the pedagogical methods they employ?

Theoretical Rationale

This study employed as a theoretical foundation the work of Daniel S. Schipani (1989, 1995), who developed a model of religious education rooted in the theological emphases and pedagogical priorities of liberation theology. Schipani (1995) maintained that liberation theology's "inherent pedagogical orientation and structure" (p. 287) facilitates the task of grounding an approach to Christian religious education in this theological discipline. Two aspects of Schipani's model made it a particularly suitable lens for the researcher to utilize in analyzing the data generated by this study. First, Schipani's model integrates theology and pedagogy, and the present study sought to explore both the theological content taught and the pedagogical methods employed in Religious Studies classes in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. Secondly, Schipani's model of "religious education in a liberation key" (p. 300) relied heavily on the theory and practice of Paolo Freire's (1970, 1974) educational work among the rural poor in Brazil and Chile. The research design of the present study incorporated aspects of participatory action research (PAR), which is also rooted in Freire's work.

Commenting on the relationship between Freire and liberation theology, Schipani (1995) stated that "in articulating his own liberationist vision, which affirms the primacy of commitment and praxis, Freire helped to lay the foundation for the theological method adopted by liberation theologians" (p. 307). In contrast to "prevailing ecclesial and educational practices which foster conformity, passivity, and domestication" (p. 303), Schipani's approach to religious education redefined Christian discipleship as responsible citizenship. He maintained that religious education should empower disciple-citizens to, on the one hand, confront dominant cultural values, such as materialism, individualism,

and consumption, and, on the other hand, to participate actively and courageously in the creation of a more compassionate and caring world (in theological terms, the reign of God). The researcher has identified the following attributes as key characteristics of Schipani's model: a prophetic vision which takes account of the political and eschatological dimensions of the Gospel; a praxis epistemology focused on engaging in concrete acts of justice; critical reflection for personal and societal transformation; and, an emphasis on dialogue in the context of a community of learners.

Liberationist Christology provides the foundation for a prophetic vision which takes account of the political and eschatological dimensions of the Gospel. This Christology emphasizes the extent to which Jesus's teaching and ministry not only critiqued the social, political, and cultural realities of his time but also sought to transform those realities into systems and structures more closely aligned with God's will. Schipani (1989) asserted that, in proclaiming the reign of God, Jesus was not trumpeting "a transcendent, other-worldly reality" (p. 95) that would only be attained in heaven, but, rather, a vision of God's desire for human life on earth. Religious education which takes this vision seriously should, therefore, empower students to work actively for peace, justice, inclusion, freedom, and equality.

A liberationist praxis epistemology challenges classical notions of faith which emphasize intellectual acceptance of a set of beliefs and personal trust in God. Praxis epistemology maintains, instead, that true knowledge of God is manifested in actions which conform to God's will. Schipani (1989) stated this succinctly when he observed that "knowing God is not abstract theoretical knowledge but active obedience to divine

will—obedience *is* our knowledge of God" (p. 121, emphasis original). He further

described this liberationist reinterpretation of faith in the following quote:

> A liberationist redefinition of faith suggests that *faith is the Christian's present mode of participation in the ongoing creative and liberating work of God in the world.* Having faith, or, rather, being faithful, connotes that the reign of God effectively takes hold of persons and operates in them. Being faithful means becoming instruments in the transformational healing and reconciliation of the broken world; it means becoming agents of peace and justice and bearers of the power of God's reign. Therefore, more than intellectual assent and hope in what God will do without us, faith is also a present participation in what God is doing, namely the task of bringing *shalom.* (pp. 133-134, emphases original)

Consequently, religious education must focus less on ensuring that students can elucidate

obtuse theological principles and more on ensuring that students can engage in concrete

actions to transform unjust social structures, such as oppression, war, and poverty.

Rooted in what Freire (1970) termed a process of conscientization, Schipani's

(1995) model is marked by an emphasis on students' critical reflection both on the world

in which they live and on the Word of God, that is, the Scriptures. Regarding the former,

Schipani asserted that "a careful analytical look at the historical situation in which

Christian praxis occurs" (p. 297) allows students to probe the causes of oppression and

injustice, including the social, political, economic, and cultural factors that both create

and perpetuate unjust structures. Regarding the latter, he drew attention to the primacy of

the Scriptures in liberation theology; indeed, "the Word of God is the criterion

liberationists bring to bear on reflection and action" (p. 298). He maintained that

powerful possibilities for transformation result when students bring these two areas into a

critical and creative dialectic. On the one hand, bringing a sharpened awareness of

contemporary instances of injustice to Scripture study can surface new, potentially

liberating meanings in these ancient texts. On the other hand, bringing knowledge of the

socio-cultural contexts out of which the Scriptures developed to present-day efforts to

work for justice can energize, inspire, and invigorate those efforts.

The flourishing of liberation theology in many areas of Central and South

America has been characterized by the growth of base ecclesial communities: groups of

up to 20 families who meet regularly to pray, to study the Scriptures, and to reflect

critically on their present socio-economic situation in the light of Christian faith. This

hallmark of liberation theology provides the rationale for the final attribute of Schipani's

(1989) model of religious education: an emphasis on dialogue in the context of a

community of learners. A learning community which sought to embody this

characteristic of Schipani's model would engage in collaborative learning experiences in

an atmosphere of "equality, respect, and mutuality" (p. 245). Such an atmosphere would

support the growth of all students, affirm their sense of self-worth, celebrate their diverse

and varied gifts, and promote interdependence. The experience of studying in such an

intellectually and spiritually stimulating and nourishing environment would empower

students to be sent forth to transform the world into a more just and peaceful place, for, as

Schipani (1989) stated:

> The experience of mutual support and confidence provided in the base Christian
> community is not an end in itself. In fact, the church is not to become merely a
> refuge in the midst of suffering, or, even less, a ghetto for pious people. On the
> contrary, our foundational discussions emphatically point to the openness,
> outwardness, and service-mission orientation of the Christian vocation. (pp. 248-
> 249)

Significance

The promulgation of the *Framework* by the USCCB in 2007 represented the first

time that the body of U.S. bishops sought to mandate a nationwide Religious Studies

curriculum for use in all Catholic secondary schools. Thus, the promulgation of this

document and its subsequent implementation, now underway in dioceses throughout the country, constitute a watershed event in the history of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. This event has a direct impact on the 574,145 students currently enrolled in the 1,205 Catholic secondary schools of the United States (McDonald & Schulz, 2012, pp. 7-12) because it dictates the content that they will study in their Religious Studies courses. However, despite the potentially wide-ranging effects of the *Framework*, little research has been conducted regarding it. The one dissertation which focused on the *Framework* critiqued the document from pedagogical and theological perspectives but did not solicit teachers' views of the document or explore teachers' experiences of teaching within its parameters. Similarly, articles published on the *Framework* have offered both comment and critique but have not investigated the perspectives of those charged with the day-to-day implementation of the document, that is, Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. Therefore, the present study sought to fill a gap in the literature.

The timing of the present study sought to take advantage of a uniquely critical and pivotal moment in the history of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. If, as the bishops envision, the *Framework* is adopted by dioceses throughout the country, it is possible that within a decade the memory of pre-*Framework* curriculum will be lost. Before that occurs, the present moment offered an opportunity for teachers who had taught both prior to and after the *Framework*'s implementation to reflect on and articulate this document's impact on the theological content they teach and on the pedagogical methods they employ. As early adopters of this new curriculum, their reflections and

insights constituted particularly valuable data that may contribute to an effort to identify the long-term effects of the *Framework*'s implementation.

The intended audience of the present study included Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, who have had few opportunities to offer feedback on or reactions to the *Framework*, as well as administrators in such schools, especially those with responsibility for the development and evaluation of curriculum. Regarding the former, the results of this study may inform these teachers' classroom praxis by offering them a portrait of the *Framework*'s practical impact on both theological content and on pedagogy. In particular, for teachers who face imminent implementation of the *Framework*, the results of this study may prompt them to engage in that process with careful, deliberate attention to the *Framework*'s potential effect on their professional practice. Regarding the latter, the results of this study may shape administrators' school-wide decision-making regarding Religious Studies curricula and enable them to participate in diocesan-level conversations about the *Framework* in an informed manner.

Other potential audiences for the present study include publishers, who may find the data generated by this study to be useful as they make decisions regarding both the content and methodology of textbooks and other supplemental materials for use in the Religious Studies classrooms of U.S. Catholic secondary schools. Diocesan and archdiocesan officials, including superintendents and those who oversee programs of religious instruction and catechesis, may also find the results of this study to be illuminating, thought-provoking, and informative for their ministry. Finally, the U.S. bishops themselves, who may lack access to a convenient venue for seeking feedback from Religious Studies teachers regarding the *Framework*, may consult the present study

to gain some sense of teachers' experiences and perspectives. This initial data could potentially motivate the Bishops to conduct a more comprehensive, nationwide study of their own.

<p style="text-align:center">Definition of Terms</p>

The following terms have been operationally defined for the purpose of this study:

Catechesis: The sharing of the Gospel message with people who desire to receive that message "as a salvific reality" (CCE, 1988, ¶ 68). As such, catechesis presupposes Christian belief, or, at the very least, a desire for belief, on the part of the person participating in catechetical activities. Catechesis occurs throughout one's life in a variety of contexts, but most especially in one's local Church community or parish and within the family.

Conscientization or conscientisation: The English translation of the Portuguese term *conscientização* popularized by Freire (1974). Conscientization is the process of critically exploring the reality of one's personal and social situations with an aim to transforming oppressive structures and promoting personal and societal liberation. It encompasses both reflection and action, for it demands "a historical awareness…a critical insertion into history" (p. 25) as well as "a historical commitment to make changes" (p. 25).

Religious education: A broad term which encompasses the many and varied educational ministries of the Catholic Church, including, but not limited to, elementary schools; secondary schools; colleges and universities; sacramental preparation programs; parish-based educational efforts directed to children, youth, and adults; and youth and young adult ministry programs. Some aspects of these ministries

may be catechetical in nature while other aspects may be primarily directed toward religious instruction.

Religious instruction: A process which aims to assist students to grow in religious knowledge, without presuming that such knowledge will lead to an acceptance of religious faith. Christian religious instruction "tries to convey a sense of the nature of Christianity, and of how Christians are trying to live their lives" (CCE, 1988, ¶ 69). Most religious instruction occurs within a school setting; therefore, the Congregation for the Clergy (1997) urged that religious instruction be presented "as a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines" (¶ 73).

Religious Studies: The academic department of a U.S. Catholic secondary school that offers courses in Scripture, moral theology, Church history, world religions, liturgical theology, social justice, spirituality, and related fields. According to Hudson (2002), schools employ a variety of terms to designate this department; therefore, the researcher will consider this term to be synonymous with "religion" and "theology."

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Restatement of the Problem

The promulgation of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCCB, 2008; hereafter, *Framework*) in November 2007 constituted a watershed event in the history of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. As documented by Ostasiewski (2010), the bishops' approval of the *Framework* represented the first time that they assumed such a direct role in determining Religious Studies curriculum. Although the vote to endorse the *Framework* was unanimous, progress in implementing it nationwide has varied because each bishop enjoys relative autonomy in his own diocesan or archdiocesan territory. This transitional period constituted a unique opportunity to explore the perspectives of Religious Studies teachers who had taught both before and after the *Framework*'s implementation. In particular, such teachers offered valuable reflections and insights regarding the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content they teach and on the pedagogical methods they employ.

Overview

Three fields of literature constitute the broad context in which the present study, which seeks to add to the knowledge base in the field of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, must be understood. First, both universal and local ecclesial documents discuss general principles pertinent to this study, such as the key role that religious instruction and catechesis fulfill in Catholic schools, the distinctions between

these two endeavors, and the pre-eminent role held by Religious Studies teachers in ensuring that Catholic schools faithfully execute their mission. The researcher will examine seven such documents, produced from 1972 to 2005. Secondly, the researcher will explore literature specifically related to Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. The body of this literature is limited to four empirical studies and the writings of several authors, all veteran teachers, who have published their personal reflections based on their many years in the field. Finally, the researcher will turn her attention to literature concerned with the USCCB *Framework*, which includes one dissertation, several newspaper and journal articles, and a workshop presentation. Throughout this review, the researcher will seek to articulate how the present study, in building on this literature, made a unique and necessary contribution to this field.

<div align="center">Ecclesial Documents</div>

The magisterium, or teaching authority, of the Catholic Church has released a variety of statements regarding Catholic education since at least the early 20th century (Ostasiewski, 2010). These documents issue both from the universal Church—that is, either from the Pope or from various offices of the Roman curia—and from regional or national bishops' conferences. These documents constitute an essential foundation for the present study, for they elucidate the general principles that undergird the mission of Catholic elementary and secondary schools. Because the present study focused on Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, the researcher will not present an exhaustive treatment of every ecclesial document that discusses education. Rather, she will limit the scope of her examination to those documents that explicitly examine catechesis or religious instruction in Catholic schools. These documents illuminate the

magisterium's perspectives on these topics; therefore, they provide a useful backdrop for the present study.

In 1972, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) issued *To Teach as Jesus Did: A Pastoral Message on Catholic Education.* In sections devoted to the various educational ministries to which the Catholic Church has historically been committed—including elementary and secondary schools, higher education institutions, adult religious education programs, and youth ministry—the document articulated the three "interlocking dimensions" (¶ 14) that must permeate all such ministries. These dimensions, often identified by their Greek names, are message (*didache*), community or fellowship (*koinonia*), and service to both the Christian community and the wider world (*diakonia*).[5] Regarding Catholic elementary and secondary schools in particular, this document maintained that religious instruction must not only constitute a valued and fully integrated part of the academic program, but must also achieve a kind of primacy vis-à-vis other disciplines: "It [religious instruction] is not one more subject alongside the rest, but instead it is perceived and functions as the underlying reality in which the student's experiences of learning and living achieve their coherence and their deepest meaning" (¶ 103). The document described effective religious instruction as "authentic in doctrine and contemporary in presentation" (¶ 107) and affirmed that Religious Studies teachers must participate regularly in professional development opportunities in order to hone their skills in offering such instruction.

The Vatican's Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (SCCE) released *The Catholic School* in 1977. Written as a companion piece to the Second Vatican Council's

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[5] A subsequent NCCB (1979) document, *Sharing the Light of Faith*, added a fourth element to this list: worship (*leitourgia*).

1965 *Declaration on Christian Education*, which offered a very broad treatment of the

many and varied venues in which Christian education occurs, this document focused

particular attention on the nature and purpose of Catholic schools throughout the world.

The SCCE described the mission of Catholic schools as promoting "the integration of

culture with faith and of faith with living" (¶ 49). Regarding religious instruction in

Catholic schools, the document urged that such instruction be both "explicit" and

"systematic" (¶ 50) and aimed at cultivating "not simply intellectual assent to religious

truths but also a total commitment of one's whole being to the person of Christ" (¶ 50).

Although it acknowledged the home and the parish as the primary venues for catechesis,

it also emphasized the need for catechetical instruction in Catholic schools. It advised

Catholic schools to hire "the best possible qualified teachers of religion" (¶ 52), who

must remain abreast of current scholarship in catechetics, child psychology, and

pedagogy.

On October 16, 1979, Pope John Paul II issued an apostolic exhortation entitled

"On Catechesis in Our Time," or, in Latin, *Catechesi Tradendae*. In this document's

introduction, John Paul II indicated that he intended the exhortation to both reflect on and

affirm the results of the fourth general assembly of the Synod of Bishops, convened by

Pope Paul VI in October 1977 and focused on the catechesis of children and young

people. In his view, catechesis must impart comprehensive content regarding every

aspect of Catholic Christian faith, engage the audience to which it is directed in a

pedagogically suitable fashion, and incorporate an ecumenical dimension that enables

students both to understand and respect the faith of their non-Catholic friends and

neighbors. Although he identified the parish as the "pre-eminent place for catechesis" (¶

67) and the family as an "irreplaceable" (¶ 68) venue for catechetical activity, he also gave attention to Catholic schools, for "the special character of the Catholic school, the underlying reason for it, the reason why Catholic parents should prefer it, is precisely the quality of the religious instruction integrated into the education of the pupils" (¶ 69). Although Catholic schools may distinguish themselves in a variety of academic fields and co-curricular programs, John Paul II maintained that a school would no longer merit the descriptor "Catholic" if it neglected this fundamental duty.

In *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (SCCE, 1982) turned its attention to the many lay people, both men and women, who fulfill various functions as teachers and staff members in Catholic elementary and secondary schools throughout the world. As the number of priests and vowed religious ministering in schools had declined, the importance of the laity's role had increased proportionately: "For it is the lay teachers, and indeed all lay persons, believers or not, who will substantially determine whether or not a school realizes its aims and accomplishes its objectives" (¶ 1). Regarding Religious Studies, this document distinguished between religious instruction and catechesis, maintaining that the former should, ideally, constitute part of the curriculum of every school, for "the purpose of the school is human formation in all of its fundamental dimensions, and the religious dimension is an integral part of this formation" (¶ 56). However, *Lay Catholics in Schools* emphasized that both religious instructors and catechists fulfill a role "of the first importance" (¶ 59); therefore, they must be adequately formed and educated in spirituality, theology, and pedagogy, according to norms promulgated by the local bishop. The document urged bishops to provide such formation and training

opportunities and to engage with teachers in "mutually enlightening" (¶ 66) dialogue about their ministry.

The SCCE (1982) also urged both religious instructors and catechists to respect students who are not Catholic, because "Faith does not admit of violence; it is a free response of the human person to God as He reveals Himself" (¶ 42). Even while presenting Catholic doctrine, teachers must demonstrate openness to dialogue, for "the best testimony that they can give of their own faith is a warm and sincere appreciation for anyone who is honestly seeking God according to his or her own conscience" (¶ 42).

In 1988, the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE, formerly known as the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education) promulgated *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School: Guidelines for Reflection and Renewal.* Like *The Catholic School* and *Lay Catholics in Schools*—issued by this same Vatican office in 1977 and 1982, respectively—this document affirmed the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (1965) regarding Catholic schools, namely, "that what makes a Catholic school distinctive is its religious dimension" (CCE, 1988, ¶ 1). Although this religious dimension should permeate every aspect of the school's climate, culture, and curriculum, it finds unique and particular expression in classes and programs focused on catechesis and religious instruction. In distinguishing between these two endeavors, the CCE defined the former as "the handing on of the Gospel message which…presupposes that the hearer is receiving the Christian message as a salvific reality" (¶ 68), that is, that the hearer is a Christian seeking to strengthen her or his faith commitment. The document described the work of catechesis as encompassing the entirety of the human life cycle. As such, it may occur in a variety of contexts, including home, parish, and school. In

contrast, religious instruction is more limited: it conveys knowledge about faith and most often occurs only in school settings. Although the CCE acknowledged that schools do play a role in the work of catechesis, it recommended that schools focus on religious instruction. In its view, quality religious instruction should make interdisciplinary links with other academic subjects and utilize "the best educational methods available to schools today" (¶ 70).

According to the CCE (1988), religious instruction will attain this high quality only if outstanding teachers are placed in Religious Studies classrooms: "The religion teacher is the key, the vital component, if the educational goals of the school are to be achieved" (¶ 96). The CCE gave attention to two aspects of a quality Religious Studies teacher: academic training and personal characteristics. Regarding the former, because "an unprepared teacher can do a great deal of harm" (¶ 97), the document urged that Religious Studies teachers be "adequately trained" (¶ 97) through programs offered by Catholic formation centers and by Catholic universities. The CCE expressed particular concern for the education of lay teachers, who increasingly fill these positions. The laity must have access to the same caliber of education that priests and vowed religious ordinarily experience in the course of their formation. Regarding the latter, the document asserted that "the effectiveness of religious instruction is closely tied to the personal witness given by the teacher; this witness is what brings the content of the lessons to life" (¶ 96). Therefore, the Religious Studies teacher must model personal qualities and virtues, such as tact, understanding, serenity, affection, wise judgment, patience, and prudence.

In 1997, the Vatican's Congregation for the Clergy released the *General Directory for Catechesis*, a revision of the 1971 *General Catechetical Directory* that sought to take account of various ecclesial documents related to catechesis that had been produced in the intervening years, most notably the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which had been promulgated in 1992. This lengthy publication offered a broad, comprehensive examination of the nature of catechesis, the principles to be employed in catechetical programs, and the means by which catechesis may proceed successfully in diverse social, economic, and cultural contexts. In a brief section titled "Catechesis and Religious Instruction in Schools" (¶ 73-76), the Congregation for the Clergy reiterated the distinction made by earlier Vatican documents between these two activities, describing the relationship between them as "one of distinction and complementarity" (¶ 73). Like the Congregation for Catholic Education's (CCE, 1988) *Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, this document identified the family and the parish as the preeminent realms for catechesis. Although Catholic schools do play a role in catechesis, Religious Studies classes in these schools must focus on delivering religious instruction. Such instruction must attain a challenging academic caliber comparable to that of other disciplines:

> It is necessary, therefore, that religious instruction in schools appear as a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigor as other disciplines. It must present the Christian message and the Christian event with the same seriousness and the same depth with which other disciplines present their knowledge. It should not be an accessory alongside of these disciplines, but rather it should engage in a necessary inter-disciplinary dialogue….Through inter-disciplinary dialogue religious instruction in schools underpins, activates, develops and completes the educational activity of the school. (¶ 73)

The Congregation for the Clergy (1997) maintained that religious instruction in Catholic schools has the capacity to meet the needs of students who are at various stages

of faith development. For students who are committed to their Catholic Christian faith, religious instruction assists them in not only achieving a deeper understanding of that faith, but also in relating it to the great ethical questions and social problems presently facing humankind. For students who are doubting their faith, or searching for a more meaningful experience of faith, religious instruction can prompt self-examination and religious discernment in the context of a spiritual community. Finally, "in the case of students who are non-believers, religious instruction assumes the character of a missionary proclamation of the Gospel" (¶ 75). Such students may, in time, make a decision in favor of faith, "which catechesis, in its turn, will nurture and mature" (¶ 75).

In 2005, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) issued the *National Directory for Catechesis,* a companion volume to the Congregation for the Clergy's (1997) *General Directory for Catechesis*. While the earlier document issued from the Vatican and was directed to the universal church, the USCCB document was specifically directed to the American context. As such, it offered a demographic profile of the U.S. Church and examined the particular challenges presented by proclaiming the Gospel in the United States. Although the USCCB addressed a wide array of topics related to catechesis, including how to present the Christian message authentically, how to integrate media and technology into catechetical programs, how to organize a diocesan office of catechetics, and how to connect the liturgy with catechesis in meaningful ways, it devoted only brief, cursory attention to Catholic schools. Moreover, the document's assertion that catechetical instruction in schools "should be coordinated with the catechetical plan of the parish or parishes to which it is connected" (p. 232), strongly implies a focus on Catholic elementary schools rather than secondary schools. According

to McDonald and Schultz (2012), 84% of U.S. Catholic elementary schools are parish (sponsored by a single parish church community) or inter-parish (sponsored by two or more parishes), while only 18% of U.S. Catholic secondary schools are classified in these ways (p. 10).

As in prior documents issued by the Vatican (SCCE, 1982; CCE, 1988), the USCCB (2005) emphasized the importance of both the Religious Studies curriculum in Catholic schools and the Religious Studies teacher. The bishops stated that "the Catholic school should have a clearly defined religion curriculum with specific goals and objectives… a generous amount of time should be allotted to religious instruction" (p. 263). They maintained that Religious Studies teachers must not only be skilled educators, but also effective role models of faith and virtue, for they "not only teach the Catholic faith as an academic subject but also bear witness to the truth of which they teach" (p. 232). However, unlike prior documents, which clearly delineated between catechesis and religious instruction and maintained that Catholic schools should emphasize the latter rather than the former, the *National Directory for Catechesis* blurred this distinction. The bishops employed terminology interchangeably, without the clear definitions and distinctions offered by earlier documents. For example, they asserted that "the principal and teachers should ensure that a specific part of each day is dedicated to *religious instruction*" (p. 263, emphasis added), yet also described Catholic schools as "center[s] for *evangelization* and *catechesis*" (p. 232, emphases added). They neither defined these various terms, nor clearly indicated that they understood them to be equivalent. Moreover, in direct contradiction to the Congregation for the Clergy (1997), which asserted that Catholic schools, while fulfilling some limited role in catechesis,

should focus on religious instruction, the USCCB (2005) essentially described Religious

Studies teachers as catechists:

> Religion teachers in Catholic schools have the same responsibilities and perform
> many of the same functions of parish catechists. Therefore, they should be
> practicing Catholics with a thorough knowledge of the Christian message and the
> ability to communicate it completely, faithfully, and enthusiastically; they should
> also meet diocesan standards for catechist certification. (pp. 232-233)

These discrepancies between Vatican documents issued during the 1980s and

1990s and the USCCB (2005) may, in part, be explained by the U.S. bishops'

longstanding concerns about religious illiteracy in the U.S. Church, as expressed by

Levada (1990, 1994), Buechlein (1997, 1998), and Wuerl (1997), and their corresponding

efforts to ensure that religious education programs, and written materials utilized in such

programs, present sound Catholic doctrine in a precise manner. In drafting the *National

Directory for Catechesis*, the bishops may have believed that a focus on catechesis in

Catholic schools, in contrast to earlier documents' emphasis on religious instruction, may

have been a more effective means of addressing these concerns.

Considered together, these various ecclesial documents affirm the value of

Catholic schools in general and of Religious Studies in those schools in particular. They

also praise the central role fulfilled by Religious Studies teachers. However, perhaps

because these documents are directed toward wide-ranging, diverse audiences, their

content is necessarily broad rather than specific. Explicit references to Religious Studies

in U.S. Catholic secondary schools are few. For example, these documents do not probe

the distinction between teaching Religious Studies in a secondary school rather than in an

elementary school, nor do they discuss the unique qualifications, skills, or academic

degrees required to teach Religious Studies effectively in a secondary school

environment. They also do not consider the particular challenges faced by Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, who, according to McDonald and Schulz (2012), are teaching in schools with a student population that is, on average, 19% non-Catholic (p. 22). For research and reflections on these and related questions, one must turn to other literature which specifically explores the phenomenon of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools.

<div align="center">Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic Secondary Schools</div>

The literature which examines Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools may be divided into two categories: empirical studies and personal reflections from the field. Regarding the former, four studies may be classified in this way, three of which focused exclusively on Religious Studies and one of which considered Religious Studies as part of a larger project investigating many aspects of U.S. Catholic secondary schools. Regarding the latter, the work of five authors emerged as sources of both enlightening anecdotes and insightful commentary.

<div align="center">*Empirical Studies*</div>

In the only relatively recent, large-scale, empirical study of U.S. Catholic secondary schools, Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993) sought to investigate whether students in these schools are better educated than students in public schools. By combining in-depth field research in seven U.S. Catholic secondary schools with statistical analyses of pre-existing data sets, the researchers found that Catholic high schools typically attain high levels of student learning across various racial and socio-economic groups and tend to garner comparably high levels of teacher commitment. They attributed this success to these schools' core curriculum of a broad, humanistic education; their communal

organization, in which classroom teachers interact with students in a wide variety of venues; their decentralized governance, in which each school enjoys relative autonomy; and, their inspirational ideology, marked by a commitment to Catholic social teachings, especially Christian personalism and subsidiarity.

Regarding Religious Studies curriculum, Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993) sharply contrasted the typical curriculum prior to 1965 with that of the mid-1980s, when this study was conducted. Prior to 1965, the content of Religious Studies courses "emphasized the dogmatic teachings of the Church" (p. 110), such as Jesus' identity as the Son of God and redeemer of humanity, the mystery of the Trinity, the role of Mary in salvation history, the saints, the sacraments, and the hierarchical structure of the Church. Scripture was studied minimally, as a means of validating theological principles. Pedagogically, the researchers maintained that courses of this time period "emphasized rote memorization of Church doctrine and laws….The formation of conscience and the value of personal opinion were subordinated to internalizing the official Church position on a variety of questions" (p. 111).

Byrk, Lee, and Holland (1993) encountered a vastly changed landscape when they visited Religious Studies classes in the mid-1980s. As in the 1960s, all seven schools required students to take a Religious Studies course each semester. However, both the content of those courses, and the pedagogy by which they were taught, had shifted significantly. Regarding content, greater attention was given to Scripture, as well as to the students' own beliefs, struggles, and questions. The presentation of the official Catholic position on moral issues was contextualized by an emphasis on one's personal responsibility to form one's conscience well and then to utilize it in daily decision-

making. In addition, a variety of elective courses—typically offered in the senior year—

offered students the opportunity to explore topics such as the history of religions, prayer

and meditation, death and dying, the Holocaust, and philosophy. The researchers

described the pedagogy which characterized the Religious Studies classrooms of the mid-

1980s in the following quote:

> This type of religious studies program is grounded in the premise that faith is a developmental process, the end state of which can only be achieved through individual free choice. The aim is to develop and nurture personal conscience as a guide to personal action, and as a result, teaching by rote or imposition is seen as distorting the concept of faith. This view contrasts sharply with the pre-Vatican II orientation that Catholics must learn the "mind of the Church." In contemporary religion classes, students are typically asked to analyze and interpret situations and to apply basic principles to complex social and moral problems. From a pedagogical point of view, the development of skills in analysis and synthesis has replaced the former emphasis on memorization, recall, and comprehension. (pp. 112-113)

Given the relative dearth of empirical studies regarding any aspect of U.S.

Catholic secondary schools, Bryk, Lee, and Holland's (1993) study assumes prominence

both for its subject matter and for its comprehensive scope. Their juxtaposition of the

pre-1965 Religious Studies curriculum with that of the mid-1980s raises questions about

how Religious Studies curriculum has evolved in the quarter-century since Bryk, Lee,

and Holland collected their data. Similarly, this study invites investigation into the

impact the *Framework* has had, or will have, on this ongoing evolution.

In her 1998 doctoral dissertation, Kremer researched the role of liberation

theology in the classrooms of four Religious Studies teachers in Catholic secondary

schools of the archdiocese of Chicago. The question guiding her study was "what does

liberation theology look like in these classrooms?" (p. 11). In order to investigate this

question, she employed van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological

methodology to discern and describe the essential characteristics of the work of each of these teachers.

Kremer (1998) identified potential participants for her study by writing a letter to the principals and Religious Studies department chairs of the 48 Catholic secondary schools in the archdiocese of Chicago, requesting the names of Religious Studies teachers whom the principals and/or department chairs believed "consciously employ liberation theology methodologies in their classrooms" (p. 170). She received seven recommendations; from these, she selected four teachers to participate in her study, one from each of grades 9 through 12. Two were women and two were men, with each teaching Religious Studies at a different school. Of these schools, three were all-girls and one was co-educational.

In order to immerse herself in the day-to-day realities of these teachers, their classrooms, and their students, and to gather rich, in-depth data, Kremer (1998) focused her research on just one class section of one course for each participant. For Patricia Lacey, Kremer chose her freshmen Hebrew and Christian Scriptures course; for Paul West, his sophomore Christology course; for Sr. Bernice, her junior Peace and Justice course; and for Michael Longo, his senior Church in the Americas course. During the 1994-1995 academic year, she visited these classes on a regular basis.

Of the potential data sources van Manen (1990) recommended for use in phenomenological research, Kremer (1998) relied most heavily on close observation, interviews, and protocol writing. While observing each of the four selected classes repeatedly over the course of one academic year, Kremer took field notes and, at times, tape recorded entire class sessions or parts of class sessions. Regarding interviews, she

interviewed each of the four teachers in order to solicit their thoughts about liberation

theology's influence on them, both personally and professionally. In each class, she also

asked for several students to volunteer to be interviewed either individually or as a group.

All interviews were recorded. Protocol writing refers to one's first or original writing

about an experience as one lives through it: for Kremer, this took the form of journal

writing. In addition to these three data sources, she also examined textual materials

which both teachers and students gave her, including textbooks, handouts, notebooks, and

written assignments.

In reporting her results, Kremer (1998) discussed each participant separately,

using the same five topics for each: the teacher, the students, the curriculum, the

classroom pedagogy, and the meaning that the students derived from the class. In the

first of these, she wrote a lively profile of each teacher which conveyed information

about her or his personal and professional background. In this narrative, she incorporated

anecdotes from her classroom observations in order to convey a sense of each teacher's

personal style. She devoted particular attention to how the teacher first encountered

liberation theology and became committed to incorporating it into her or his classroom

praxis. In the section discussing the students, Kremer constructed a collective portrait of

the students in the class, supplemented by quotes from interviews with individual

students in order to illustrate particular points. In the curriculum segment, Kremer

conveyed the structure, goals, and objectives of the particular course that she had

observed, often with specific references to one or more lessons in order to explain how

these goals and objectives were realized. The classroom pedagogy section provided the

opportunity for a more in-depth examination of the teacher's methodology as well as her

or his overall demeanor with and attitude toward the students. Finally, in reporting on the meaning of the class for the students, Kremer relied almost exclusively on the interviews she conducted with students. She quoted extensively from these interviews in order to document how the students perceived the teacher, what they had learned from the course, and how the course had changed their views of themselves, the Church, and/or the world.

After reporting the results that pertained to each individual participant according to these five topic areas, Kremer (1998) then gleaned six themes that she maintained were common to all four participants. First, all four had consciously chosen liberation theology as their preferred theological perspective. They possessed worldviews shaped by an acute awareness of oppression in the world, and, to some extent, in their own lives, and they asserted that a spirituality and theology of liberation provided a viable way out of oppressive social structures. All four participants had created a curriculum that they believed responded to their students' unique needs. In these curricula, they relied heavily on Scripture and utilized textbooks only "sparingly" (p. 129). In addition, all four had integrated some form of social action into the curriculum, such as requiring students to complete community service hours, inviting students to contribute financially to charitable organizations, or encouraging students to purchase crafts made by struggling Central American artisans. Finally, Kremer maintained that the participants in this study "share the same basic goal for their students: liberation" (p. 130). They desire that their students grow in the responsible exercise of personal freedom and that their students advocate for the liberation of others, "because people become more free in the very act of helping others become free" (p. 130).

Kremer (1998) concluded by emphatically stating her belief, rooted in the results of her study, that liberation theology constitutes "a viable theological framework for Catholic religious education in the United States for the 1990s and beyond" (p. 139). She offered four reasons to support this belief. Liberation theology is one valid expression of the Catholic Church's social justice tradition. It offers a message of hope and freedom for students in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, especially, but not exclusively, for students of color and students belonging to lower socioeconomic classes. Liberation theology presents a compelling critique of the oppressive structures of society, allowing students to both recognize and challenge social, or systemic, sin. Finally, the methods of liberation theology, such as critical reflection leading to social action, share much in common with current educational theories, including critical pedagogy.

Kremer (1998) tempered her enthusiastic embrace of liberation theology with a realistic assessment of what would need to occur in order for this model to be truly viable for Religious Studies curricula in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. All of these "prerequisites" (p. 142) relate to the Religious Studies teacher. First, the teacher would have to understand the dynamics of oppression; namely, that it is created and maintained by human beings and exerts its influence within social systems and structures. Then, the teacher would have to learn about liberation theology, most likely through formal, university-level coursework, as did three of the four teachers in this study. With this background, the teacher would be equipped to go beyond officially approved textbooks in order to marshal classroom resources for this endeavor. Finally, the teacher would have to be so convinced of the value of liberation theology that he or she would be willing to market it to doubtful or critical administrators, students, and/or parents. In presenting this

assessment, Kremer took no position regarding the number of Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools who would potentially meet these criteria.

This study assumes importance as one of very few empirical studies conducted regarding Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. It highlights the potential for Religious Studies teachers, like this study's four participants, to incorporate liberation theology into their courses in ways that engage students in learning that is explicitly directed toward personal and societal liberation and transformation. Moreover, it carries particular relevance to the present study, which utilized, as a theoretical framework, Schipani's (1988, 1995) model of religious education, which incorporates key themes and insights from liberation theology.

However, aspects of Kremer's (1998) methodology were not clearly articulated. For example, she referred, in passing, to having interviewed the vice-principal of Resurrection High School, the school at which one of her participants, Michael Longo, taught. However, Kremer never discussed this interview in her methodology chapter, nor did she present the questions which guided this interview in an appendix, as she did with the questions to guide the teacher and student interviews. The reader does not know whether she interviewed the vice principal of each of the four schools, or only of Resurrection High School. If some particular circumstance necessitated her interview with the vice principal at Resurrection, Kremer did not state this. In addition, in an appendix, Kremer listed the 20 questions which guided the teacher interviews. Most of these questions contained from one to six related sub-questions. Clearly, Kremer sought to engage her teacher-participants in lengthy, in-depth conversations. However, she gave few details about the logistics of this process, other than the vague observation that "the

interview with each teacher usually took several hours" (p. 39). This lack of specificity in Kremer's research design may preclude another researcher from replicating her study successfully.

Five years after completing her dissertation, Kremer (2003) presented a paper at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in which she analyzed her dissertation data regarding three of her four participants using a different lens: that of multicultural education. Kremer identified four pedagogical strategies which typify multicultural education and which are particularly conducive to the field of Religious Studies. These are the formation of a caring community, direct engagement with the Scriptures, social analysis, and social action.

Kremer (2003) found that all three teachers utilized all four of these strategies. For example, Sr. Bernice, who referred to her classroom as a "holy place" (p. 3), sought to create an atmosphere of trust and openness, in which students could voice concerns, questions, and problems in the context of a supportive and prayerful community. Patricia Lacey encouraged students to see their own experiences and struggles reflected in Biblical stories, in order to understand better these texts' meaning for their ancient audiences and for contemporary readers. Michael Longo led students through a process of critical reflection that was intended to lead them to informed action on behalf of poor, oppressed, and marginalized people. Lastly, all three teachers provided ample opportunities for students to engage in concrete social action, such as participating in an anti-hunger walk, collecting money for a local homeless shelter, or traveling to Appalachia during spring break.

Kremer (2003) concluded that utilizing these strategies of multicultural education in Religious Studies classes generated important benefits for the students, including a sense of self-efficacy and a desire to transform the world into a more just and peaceful place. Moreover, given the shifting demographics of the student populations of U.S. Catholic secondary schools—that is, the growing number of students of color and students from low socio-economic backgrounds—she postulated that multicultural education may constitute a powerful means of affirming the potential of these students to effect positive change in their own lives and in the wider world.

In this paper, Kremer (2003) illustrated the potential to analyze the same set of data using various theoretical lenses: in her case, the lens of liberation theology for her dissertation and the lens of multicultural education for the AERA paper. However, both her paper and her credibility were seriously weakened by her failure to state that she utilized her dissertation data for the paper. She led the reader to believe that she was publishing the results of an entirely new study; however, she relied on a pre-existing data set and gathered no new data. In addition, large sections of the paper were reproduced verbatim from her dissertation.

In her dissertation, Kremer (1998) referred to the USCC's (1996) document, *Protocol for Assessing the Conformity of Catechetical Materials with the* Catechism of the Catholic Church, maintaining that it "would seem to preclude liberation theology from becoming a part of mainstream Catholic religious education in the United States" (p. 6). However, both her 1998 dissertation and her 2003 paper were published well before the *Framework*'s promulgation in 2007 and the release of the *Secondary Level (SL) Protocol for Assessing the Conformity of Catechetical Materials with the* Catechism

of the Catholic Church (USCCB, 2011b) in 2011. The latter ensured that the USCCB

would only review textbooks designed for *Framework*-based courses. Therefore,

Kremer's (1998, 2003) work did not consider the potential impact of the *Framework* on

Religious Studies courses in general or, more specifically, on the potential for

incorporating aspects of liberation theology or multicultural education into those courses

once a school has implemented the *Framework*.

In the summer of 1998, Timothy J. Cook of Creighton University launched a

three-year, survey-based study entitled "The Next Generation: Recruitment, Preparation,

and Retention of Catholic High School Religion Teachers" (Cook, 2001, p. 530). With

funding from the Lily Endowment, the Knights of Columbus, and the Chief

Administrators of Catholic Education (CACE) Department of the National Catholic

Educational Association (NCEA), the study sought to examine the "critical and growing

shortage of credentialed high school religion teachers" (Cook, 2000, p. 115) and to offer

a research-based response to that shortage. The study was announced in *Catholic

Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* (Cook, 2000) with the results published in

a subsequent edition of this journal (Cook, 2001). With 959 respondents (n=959), all of

whom were, at the time they completed the survey, teaching Religious Studies in a U.S.

Catholic secondary school, this project assumes great importance as the only large-scale

study to be undertaken with this population.

Cook (2000) identified the purpose of this research project as the collection of

data "that will provide direction for the recruitment, preparation, and retention of future

high school religion teachers" (p. 116). Five research questions further specified the

parameters of the study:

1. Who are high school religion teachers today?
2. Who will high school religion teachers be in the future?
3. What are the ideal credential and preparation for high school religion teachers?
4. How do we ensure, through recruitment, preparation, and retention, a qualified pool of high school religion teacher candidates for the future?
5. Are there any existing recruitment, preparation, or retention strategies that might   be instructive? (p. 116)

Cook (2001) utilized a computer-generated random sample of 300 schools, which represented approximately 25% of the 1,227 Catholic secondary schools located in the United States during the 1999-2000 academic year. Of these, 200 schools accepted the invitation to participate in the study. Of those 200, 195 followed through with their participation, yielding an overall school participation rate of 65%. At each participating school, an administrator or the Religious Studies department chairperson completed a document entitled "School Information Sheet" (p. 557), which consisted of 19 questions dealing with school characteristics, such as location, governance, enrollment, and Religious Studies teacher recruitment experiences and strategies. Religious Studies teachers at these schools were directed to complete a 70-item survey organized into eight categories: personal background, preparation and experience, philosophy of religious education, rigor of religion courses, teaching responsibilities, motivations for teaching religion, job satisfaction and future plans, and comments.

Within the 195 participating schools, the participation rate for Religious Studies teachers was 88%: Of the 1,089 Religious Studies teachers at those schools, 959 teachers completed the survey. Although Fowler (2009) asserted that "there is no agreed-upon standard for a minimum acceptable response rate" (p. 51) when conducting survey-based research, he also maintained that both private academic survey organizations and the federal government generally seek to achieve a response rate in excess of 70% and, in

some cases, in excess of 80%. Because such rates help to ensure that the survey

respondents are sufficiently similar to the population from which the sample was drawn,

the results of the survey can be credibly generalized to that larger population. Therefore,

the 88% response rate that Cook (2000, 2001) achieved indicates that the results of this

study may be trusted as a reliable indicator of the experiences and views of Religious

Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools at the time the survey was

administered.

In presenting the results of this study, Cook (2001) began by addressing his first

research question: Who are high school religion teachers today? He offered a

comprehensive demographic profile of these teachers, including their personal

characteristics and background and their philosophy of religious education. He found

that women and men were represented equally and that the group was diverse in age and

marital status but not in race and ethnicity: 90% of the respondents identified as

Caucasian. The majority consisted of laypeople, but a "sizable minority" (p. 534) of 22%

were vowed religious (sisters or brothers) or priests.

In order to gather data about respondents' philosophy of religious education,

Cook's (2001) survey presented two forced-choice items. The first asked respondents to

choose the statement that best described their view of the high school Religious Studies

student: as a "seeker" who will actively pursue information and insights or as a "receiver,

an empty vessel waiting to be filled with information/insights" (p. 562). Eighty percent

of respondents chose "seeker" rather than "receiver." The second item invited

respondents to choose the statement that best described their primary role as a Religious

Studies teacher: as one who engages in religious instruction, defined as an academic

study of the Christian tradition that helps students to develop critical thinking skills, or as one who engages in catechesis, defined as "helping students develop a personal faith life" (p. 562).[6] Responses to this item were almost evenly split, with 45% selecting religious instruction as their primary role and 55% selecting catechesis. Cook maintained that these responses indicated a pervasive lack of agreement regarding the goals of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools.

Cook (2001) then turned his attention to the second research question: Who will high school religion teachers be in the future? He used the survey results to argue that U.S. Catholic secondary schools are presently facing a severe shortage of Religious Studies teachers. For example, 86% of administrator respondents reported a dearth of qualified candidates for Religious Studies teacher openings in their geographical area. Cook projected that this situation would worsen in the coming years, as vowed religious and clergy continued to age and retire. Among the 22% of teacher respondents who identified themselves as vowed religious or clergy, 75% indicated that they planned to cease teaching Religious Studies within the next 10 years.

Cook (2001) continued to report his results by presenting data organized around the three foci of this study: recruitment, preparation, and retention. For each of these, he followed his description of the data with concrete recommendations. Regarding recruitment, the survey item which asked "Who encouraged you to become a Catholic high school religion teacher?" (p. 562) was instructive: the single largest response was "no one." Therefore, Cook argued that Catholic educational leaders must seriously, even aggressively, "promote religion teaching as a vocation and as a career option" (p. 542) in

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[6] Cook derived these categories from the 1988 Congregation for Catholic Education document, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School.*

order to address the Religious Studies teacher shortage. In these efforts, he

recommended that they explore previously untapped pools of potential candidates,

including graduates of Catholic volunteer programs, such as the Jesuit Volunteer Corps

and the Mercy Volunteer Corps, and second-career seekers.

Concerning academic preparation for teaching Religious Studies in a U.S.

Catholic secondary school, 26% of respondents indicated that they held an undergraduate

degree in Theology, Religious Studies, or Religious Education; 16% indicated that they

held an undergraduate minor in one of these three fields; and, 41% indicated that they

held an advanced degree (master's or doctorate) in one of these three fields. Cook (2001)

then used inferential statistics to measure the strength of the association between a

Religious Studies teacher holding an advanced degree and the level of her or his

satisfaction with the preparation received for fulfilling the requirements of this position

effectively. He found a statistically significant difference in preparation satisfaction

between teachers with an advanced degree and those without one: 96% of respondents

with an advanced degree agreed or strongly agreed that their coursework had made them

more effective teachers. At the same time, survey respondents without an advanced

degree identified "lack of funds" and "lack of time" as the two greatest barriers to

pursuing one. Therefore, Cook recommended that schools support such teachers in

continuing their education by providing tuition assistance and paid release time.

Finally, Cook (2001) emphasized that recruiting new Religious Studies teachers

to serve in the classrooms of U.S. Catholic secondary schools constitutes only half of the

solution to solving the shortage of such teachers: the retention of existing teachers is the

other half. Given that 60% of lay respondents and 75% of vowed religious and clergy

respondents expressed their intent to leave the profession within 10 years, Cook asserted that "the statistics point to a retention crisis" (p. 550). In seeking to ascertain the roots of this crisis, Cook employed inferential statistics to establish a strong, direct association between these measures of job satisfaction and how long a person planned to continue teaching Religious Studies: salary, enjoyment of the job, opportunities for professional advancement, and opportunities for continued professional and spiritual growth and education. Concerning salary in particular—an area of dissatisfaction identified by 45% of overall respondents, 49% of new teachers, and 56% of teachers under age 30—Cook urged that "in justice, the Catholic community must do what it takes to improve teacher salaries" (p. 554). In addition, in order to make Religious Studies teaching more attractive and viable as a long-term profession, he maintained that benefits must be not only improved, but also broadened to include daycare, school loan payoff, and tuition assistance both for the teachers themselves and for their children attending Catholic schools. Furthermore, in order to address and rectify many of the sources of job dissatisfaction identified by survey respondents, Cook argued for the creation of diocesan, regional, and national associations of Religious Studies teachers, akin to those that exist for other teaching fields. Such associations could advocate for improved salaries and benefits and provide Religious Studies teachers with academic courses, conferences, retreats, and spiritual direction designed to increase their job satisfaction.

This study constituted a significant contribution to the very limited field of empirical research that has been conducted regarding Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. Unlike Bryk and Holland's (1993) study, which examined the phenomenon of U.S. Catholic secondary schools more broadly, Cook's (2000, 2001)

study focused exclusively on Religious Studies. Because it utilized a random sample of schools drawn from a national database and achieved an 88% response rate, the results may be generalized to the larger population from which the sample was drawn, that is, to all Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. This study represented the first time that a researcher successfully gathered data about these teachers, including their personal characteristics, their academic preparation, their sources of motivation, their job satisfaction, and the philosophical beliefs that undergird their daily work. Moreover, Cook utilized the data generated by this study to tell a compelling story. He argued persuasively for the need to recruit new Religious Studies teachers with enthusiasm, to prepare them with care, and to create an environment that encourages good teachers to flourish for many years in this profession.

Because this study was conducted 13 years ago, the time is ripe for follow-up research. For example, readers of this study may speculate about whether the 75% of vowed religious and clergy respondents who indicated, in 2000, that they would leave the Religious Studies teaching profession within the next 10 years have actually left. They may wonder about whether the shortage of qualified Religious Studies teachers has worsened—as Cook (2001) predicted it would—improved, or remained the same. Moreover, the promulgation of the *Framework* has raised many new questions about the topics that this study sought to investigate, such as the impact of the *Framework*'s implementation on efforts to recruit and retain Religious Studies teachers and the extent to which the *Framework* has affected the academic preparation required to teach Religious Studies effectively. Such questions would merit attention in any future version or replication of this study.

Cook and Hudson (2006) utilized the data set produced by *The Next Generation* study (Cook, 2000, 2001) in order to examine the extent to which teaching Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools constitutes a profession, based on seven criteria which scholars have identified as common to all professions. In classifying teaching Religious Studies as a "professional ministry" (p. 402), Cook and Hudson sought to investigate the meaning of the adjective "professional" for a group of people who fulfill a very unique role in Catholic education, a role that has not been extensively examined either in ecclesial documents or in empirical research. They articulated their perception of this role in the following quote:

> A review of Church documents and scholarly writing reveals a large gap in the literature in this regard. The literature that refers to catechists in general is not helpful because high school religion teachers are a distinctive subset of catechists. Unlike other catechists, Catholic high school religion teachers live out their ministry in a setting that has broader academic goals than religious ones. In a sense, high school religion teachers have one foot in ecclesial ministry and one foot in the world of academia. It is inevitable that religion teachers will be compared to their teaching colleagues in terms of teacher professionalism. (pp. 402-403)

As a theoretical framework for their study, Cook and Hudson (2006) gleaned seven criteria or characteristics from the writings of sociologists and other researchers who have investigated the key characteristics that all professions share. Cook and Hudson chose the seven items which have garnered the broadest support among researchers: "essential service to society, motivated by a call to serve, special knowledge and skills, specialized and advanced university training, public trust and status, code of ethics and performance standards, and professional organization" (p. 404). In considering teaching in general with regard to these characteristics, Cook and Hudson maintained that, in recent decades, the field of teaching has done much to professionalize

itself. For example, no one is likely to call into question the essential nature of the service that teachers perform, and few would dispute the idea that teachers must possess particular skill sets and advanced, university training. Moreover, Cook and Hudson asserted that teachers tend to be motivated by intrinsic, altruistic motives, rather than by external motives like salary or status. All of these factors would seem to support the idea that teaching has achieved the rank of a profession. However, two key considerations temper this idea. First, teaching is not self-regulating or self-governing in the way that some other professions are. For example, Cook and Hudson cited Newman (1998) in identifying medicine as a self-regulating profession "with the American Medical Association (AMA) serving as the major gatekeeper" (Cook and Hudson, 2006, p. 408). Secondly, teachers tend to be held in low esteem in public perception and discourse. As Cook and Hudson (2006) succinctly observed, "Without question, teaching has an image problem" (p. 407). Therefore, they described teaching as "an emerging profession" rather than as "a profession in the fullest sense" (p. 409).

Employing these same seven characteristics as a theoretical framework, Cook and Hudson (2006) then turned their attention to an assessment of teaching Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, seeking to answer one overarching research question: "To what extent is religion teaching a profession?" They mined two sources of data to address this question. First, they examined ecclesial documents to investigate how Church authorities have regarded Religious Studies teaching conceptually. Secondly, they utilized data from *The Next Generation* study (Cook, 2000, 2001) to ascertain how Religious Studies teaching is regarded operationally.

Cook and Hudson (2006) found that teaching Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools may be viewed as a profession with regard to only two of the seven characteristics that comprised their theoretical framework: essential service to society and motivated by a call to serve. Regarding the former, Cook and Hudson noted that ecclesial documents, such as *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (Congregation for Catholic Education, CCE, 1982) and the *General Directory of Catechesis* (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997), have drawn attention to the essential role that teachers in Catholic schools play in enabling those schools to accomplish their mission of evangelization. Within this broad function that all Catholic school teachers are called to fulfill, Religious Studies teachers play a role "of first importance" (CCE, 1982, ¶ 59). Regarding the latter, although ecclesial documents have described all teaching in Catholic schools as a call or vocation, "The sense of vocation and service is even more pronounced when documents speak about catechists, which include religion teachers" (Cook and Hudson, 2006, p. 410). *The Next Generation* (Cook, 2000, 2001) survey data confirmed that "faith and other intrinsic values do indeed serve as the primary motivators for teaching religion" (p. 411).

Concerning the remaining five criteria, Cook and Hudson (2006) determined that teaching Religious Studies in a U.S. Catholic secondary school cannot be properly characterized as a profession. Regarding the "special knowledge and skills" criterion, a list of special knowledge and skills that Religious Studies teachers should possess does not exist; indeed, ecclesial documents provide little guidance in this matter, treating the topic only minimally and vaguely. Moreover, Religious Studies teachers themselves appear to lack consensus about what knowledge and skills they need to be effective. For

example, in *The Next Generation* (Cook, 2000, 2001) survey, participants (n=959) were

asked to describe their primary role as religious instruction (academic study) or

catechesis (faith formation). Responses were very closely divided, with 45% selecting

religious instruction and 55% selecting catechesis. Cook and Hudson (2006) also pointed

to the different names that schools assign to the department responsible for religious

instruction as another indication of "lack of consensus about religion program goals, and

therefore requisite knowledge and skills of religion teachers" (p. 412). Hudson (2002)

reported that 58% of U.S. Catholic secondary schools name this department "religion."

The remaining 42% name it "theology," "religious studies," "faith formation," or

"spiritual formation." These various terms may, in Cook and Hudson's (2006) view,

reflect divergent emphases on the cognitive and affective dimensions of this field of

study.

On the topic of "specialized and advanced university training," Cook and Hudson

(2006) stated that ecclesial documents do mention "university-based preparation" (p.

412) for Religious Studies teachers, but do not specify that such preparation result in a

degree: "There is almost no mention of university degrees in Church documents, let

alone advanced degrees, in relation to religion teachers" (p. 413). However, these

documents do imply that Religious Studies teachers should attain credentials that are

consistent with the standards for all teachers in their country. Therefore, Cook and

Hudson highlighted the standards put forth in the 2001 federal No Child Left Behind

legislation, which defined highly qualified teachers as those who have earned an

undergraduate or graduate degree in their field, as well as state certification. According

to *The Next Generation* study (Cook, 2000, 2001), 57.1% of Religious Studies teachers in

U.S. Catholic secondary schools had earned an undergraduate or graduate degree in theology, religious studies, or religious education. The 41% of full-time Religious Studies teachers who held a master's degree or doctorate in theology, religious studies, or religious education represented a decline from the 57% who held such a degree in 1985 (Yeager, Benson, Guerra, & Manno, 1985). Using state certification as a standard presents problems, since Nebraska is the only state that certifies Religious Studies teachers. However, *The Next Generation* data indicated that only 46.7% of Religious Studies teachers were certified in any subject. Therefore, if the No Child Left Behind standards were to be applied to Religious Studies teachers, less than half would be classified as highly qualified.

Concerning the criterion of "public trust and status," Cook and Hudson (2006) drew attention to the positive view of teaching in general, and teaching Religious Studies in particular, contained in ecclesial documents (CCE, 1982, 1988; Congregation for the Clergy, 1997; NCCB, 1979; Vatican Council II, 1965). In addition to addressing the status of the Religious Studies teacher, these documents also discuss "the status of the religion curriculum within the Catholic school's overall educational program" (Cook & Hudson, 2006, p. 415). Specifically, the documents direct that Religious Studies must be allocated time within the school day or week that is comparable to that allotted for other subjects. Religious Studies must also be presented as a fully academic discipline, with rigor and depth akin to that of other fields. Cook and Hudson then brought the perspective of these Church documents into dialogue with *The Next Generation* (Cook, 2000, 2001) data, seeking to determine whether the status of Religious Studies teachers

and the status of the Religious Studies curriculum were as high as the documents stated

that they should be. Regarding teachers, Cook and Hudson (2006) asserted that

> Qualitative data from *The Next Generation* respondents suggest that a number of
> religion teachers perceive religion teaching to be undervalued both as a vocation
> and as a profession….Many respondent comments reflected a perception that
> colleagues and administrators often do not consider religion teachers
> professionals…Teachers often remarked about the need for more respect, support,
> affirmation, and appreciation for the work that they do….According to
> respondents, there seems to be a pervasive perception that anyone can teach
> religion, which impacts the profession's credibility and morale. (p. 415)

Regarding the curriculum, 39.3% of respondents considered Religious Studies courses to

be less academically rigorous than other courses at their school. Moreover, many

respondents expressed concern about their department's marginalization vis-à-vis other

academic departments and other school programs, such as athletics.

Regarding the remaining two criteria that characterize professions, neither a code

of ethics and performance standards for Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic

secondary schools nor a professional association of such teachers exists. Concerning the

former, Cook and Hudson (2006) attributed this lacuna to the decentralization of the

Catholic school system. Out of respect for the authority of bishops, who enjoy relative

autonomy in their respective diocesan or archdiocesan territories, neither the USCCB

Department of Education nor the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA)

have developed certification requirements, licensing schemes, or performance standards

for Religious Studies teachers. Concerning the latter, although NCEA had, as early as

2002, taken steps to establish a professional association for Religious Studies teachers

and campus ministers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools called the Emmaus Guild, Cook

and Hudson characterized this organization as existing "in name only" (p. 420).

Based on the findings of this study, Cook and Hudson (2006) maintained that teaching Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools is less professionalized than teaching in general. They identified three implications that arose from this finding. First, lack of professionalization likely contributes to teacher shortages in this field. Cook and Hudson suggested that further research may investigate "the relationship between the professional status of religion teaching and religion teacher retention" (p. 418). Secondly, because Religious Studies teachers work in an academic environment in which they must interact with students, parents, colleagues, and other constituents, the lack of professionalization reduces the credibility of these teachers. Lastly, Cook and Hudson asserted that "the preeminent implication of these findings is that lower professionalization of religion teachers jeopardizes student learning and formation and ultimately the religious mission of Catholic high schools" (p. 419). In other words, the stakes are high: if Religious Studies teaching does not progress in attaining the rank of a profession, the core identity and mission of U.S. Catholic secondary schools is in peril.

Cook and Hudson (2006) concluded by offering three recommendations for advancing the professionalization of Religious Studies teachers. They urged that the Emmaus Guild be developed as a professional association for Religious Studies teachers.[7] They proposed the development of standards for Religious Studies teachers, including "core academic knowledge in the form of a degree that is conferred by formal educational institutions and pedagogical skills necessary to effectively engage students in the learning process" (p. 420). Finally, given the improbability that other states will follow Nebraska's lead and certify Religious Studies teachers, they recommended that dioceses

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[7] As of this writing, this has not occurred. The Emmaus Guild published an online journal, *The Emmaus Journal*, three times a year from the fall of 2002 to the spring of 2010. This constituted the extent of the Guild's activities.

implement a certification or licensing scheme. This would ensure that only qualified people teach Religious Studies and improve the professional status of these teachers.

Cook and Hudson's article was published in June, 2006, about a year and a half prior to the *Framework*'s promulgation. Moreover, it relied heavily on data generated by *The Next Generation* study (Cook, 2000, 2001), the results of which were published in 2001, long before even the basic thematic structure of the *Framework* was developed by the USCCB. Therefore, the omission of any mention of the *Framework* in this article is, to some extent, unsurprising. However, given that the first public consultation on the *Framework* occurred in the spring of 2005, it seems that Cook and Hudson (2006) should have, at minimum, reflected on the impact the *Framework*'s implementation may have on the professionalization of Religious Studies teachers. For example, they may have hypothesized about the extent to which teaching *Framework*-based courses would enhance or detract from Religious Studies teachers' professional status. By investigating teachers' experiences with the *Framework*—specifically, the impact of its implementation on the theological content that they teach and on their pedagogy—the present study produced data that contribute to the evolving understanding of the unique "professional ministry" (p. 421) of teaching Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools.

Personal Reflections from the Field

In the summer of 1995, the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) sponsored a conference of Religious Studies teachers and Campus Ministers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools that convened at the University of Dayton. NCEA subsequently published a book, *Patterns and Possibilities: Exploring Religious*

Education in the Catholic Secondary School, which contained the text of several addresses and presentations offered at that gathering, as well as other articles and reflections. In his keynote address, Heft (1997) observed that teaching Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools constitutes a relatively new field, since Catholic secondary schools are themselves relatively new. Although Catholic elementary schools were established rapidly following the 1884 Third Council of Baltimore, which directed all Catholic parishes to establish an elementary school within two years, secondary schools emerged much more slowly. He cautioned patience, urging his listeners "to realize that we are all relative novices at this [teaching Religious Studies in secondary schools], not only as individuals, but as a Church" (p. 2). He maintained that Religious Studies teachers struggle in an atmosphere that demands that they compete for time and funding with other, state-mandated courses and with other departments, such as athletics. Heft argued that Religious Studies would be strengthened if it were integrated with Campus Ministry, with these two departments collaborating in their work of educating and forming students in faith. He also advocated for an equal place for Religious Studies alongside other academic departments, in order to counter the common misconception that some departments, such as Science, teach real, marketable knowledge, while Religious Studies teaches the "soft stuff" (p. 14).

Groome (1997) offered a presentation at this event in which he proposed teaching Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools through conversation. He based this proposal on the Latin root *conversari*, which means "to come together, to share community, to share life" (p. 34). He maintained that such an approach, in shifting away from didactic teaching and towards engaging pedagogy, would enable students to grow

both academically and spiritually: to "go beyond knowledge without leaving it behind" (p. 25). Groome identified the steps of such a conversation as the following: engaging students around issues of genuine interest to them; inviting varied personal expressions about those issues, which may include writing, music, dance, or art; encouraging critical reflection; giving access to Scripture and tradition; encouraging personal appropriation; and, inviting decisions in the form of intellectual, affective, or behavioral commitments. Throughout this process, Groome advised that teachers urge their students to ask questions, for "this great faith tradition of ours, Catholic Christianity, can stand up under scrutiny…questioning can, in fact, help to deepen one's appreciation for it" (p. 29).

This book concluded with an essay by Lund (1997), which he developed following his participation in the summer 1995 NCEA event. In it, he articulated a vision for the mission of Religious Studies in Catholic secondary schools and the roles played by effective Religious Studies teachers. Regarding the former, Lund engaged in a lengthy exploration of whether Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools is best characterized as catechesis or as religious education.[8] He described catechesis as primarily directed toward the affective experience of the believer. Catechists provide instruction for people who have already been baptized and made a Christian faith commitment. They attempt to deepen students' Christian faith through personal reflection, faith-sharing, and community building, as well as through input from Scripture and tradition. Those who favor this approach in Catholic secondary schools emphasize that they "are not teaching a *what* but a *who*….The main topic of religion class is Almighty God who, as loving Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, is the ultimate origin,

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[8] Lund (1997) employed the term "religious education" in the way in which the researcher is using the term "religious instruction."

destiny, and meaning of human existence" (pp. 43-44, emphases original). In contrast, religious education is primarily directed toward the cognitive understanding of the learner. Religious educators focus on content as they "help students examine the phenomena of Christian thought from a more cognitive or academic standpoint" (p. 43). Those who favor this approach emphasize that if Religious Studies classes are to have any credibility, they must be as intellectually rigorous as other academic disciplines and consistently challenge students to think deeply and critically.

Although this debate about the nature of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools has continued for a long time without a definitive resolution, Lund (1997) maintained that the increasing diversity of students in Catholic schools, with students hailing from a wide variety of religious and non-religious backgrounds, has raised this issue in a new and pressing way. He commented on this situation and offered his proposal for resolving the impasse in the following quote:

> Given this heterogeneous make-up of our students, secondary religion teachers are called to be *both* catechists and religious educators. They are called to be catechists for those students for whom religion class is an opportunity to deepen their Faith [*sic*]. For those students who are seeking (or are being requested by graduation requirements to seek) an accurate intellectual understanding of the Catholic faith, their teachers are called to be religious educators. (pp. 44-45)

Therefore, Lund urged that Religious Studies teachers employ a balance of affective and cognitive teaching strategies, as they attempt to fulfill the distinct demands of their dual roles as catechists and religious educators.

Turning his attention to an in-depth exploration of the varied roles played by effective Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, Lund (1997) identified five such roles: missionaries, theological thinkers/reflectors, cultivators, catalysts, and mentors. As missionaries, these teachers must affirm what is good and life-

giving in contemporary teenage culture and "challenge and transform what is unhealthy and death-dealing" (p. 49). As theological thinkers and reflectors, Religious Studies teachers must be well-prepared to field the many questions that students pose to them about theological issues. In order to think deeply and in a scholarly manner about these questions, and to respond to students accurately, Lund maintained that teachers must possess a solid foundation in Scripture, Christology, ecclesiology, sacraments and the liturgical year, church history, moral theology, Catholic social teaching, spirituality and prayer, eschatology, adolescent development (including psychology, spirituality, and moral development), and methods and principles of religious education and catechesis. Although thoroughly equipping teachers in both theological disciplines and in pedagogical praxis may appear to be a daunting task, Lund argued that financial and human resources must be directed toward it, for "the credibility of Catholic secondary religious education depends in no small way on the theological training and pedagogical ability of religion teachers" (p. 52).

In discussing Religious Studies teachers as cultivators, Lund (1997) again highlighted the religious diversity of students currently populating U.S. Catholic secondary schools. He stressed that even in schools in which a large percentage of students identify as Catholic, many of those students are relatively "unchurched" (p. 53), that is, they do not regularly participate in Eucharistic liturgies or celebrate the other sacraments. According to Lund, for these students, "religion classes can be a 'turn-off.' This is exacerbated when they have to read religion textbooks which utilize a devotional language which assumes the reader is a practicing Catholic" (p. 53). The dynamic in the Religious Studies classroom is further complicated by the presence of students from other

branches of Christianity and from other religious traditions of the world, as well as students with no religious affiliation. In order to cultivate the minds, hearts, and spirits of all of these students, Lund advised Religious Studies teachers to practice pedagogy that engages students' imaginations and challenges them to think critically about their experiences and about world events in light of Gospel values and Catholic wisdom. Similarly, as catalysts who seek to ignite creativity and passion in their students, Lund maintained that teachers must carefully limit their use of teacher-centered or content-centered methods. Rather, they must employ a wide variety of student-centered teaching strategies that have the capacity to prompt both intellectual and spiritual growth in their students.

Finally, Lund (1997) emphasized that Religious Studies teachers, as mature people of faith, function as mentors or role models for their students. They are called to accompany students on their journeys of faith, offering support and wisdom when needed. However, Lund cautioned that any guidance offered to students must be given in a manner faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Moreover, he advised Religious Studies teachers to keep their subjective perspectives and personal opinions regarding those teachings to themselves. Pastoral sensitivity, although important, must not eclipse teachers' responsibility to help students to understand clearly what the Church teaches and why the Church holds those views, "so that these young persons may be able to see for themselves the redemptive power of the Gospel and the full meaning of the Catholic faith" (p. 46).

Considered together, the work of Heft (1997), Groome (1997), and Lund (1997) effectively highlighted the many challenges faced by Religious Studies teachers. These

include balancing what Lund described as their dual roles as catechists and religious educators, negotiating their status vis-à-vis other campus departments, discerning how best to serve diverse student bodies, gaining adequate academic preparation, and determining how to present with both precision and sensitivity the teachings of the Catholic Church, some of which may be unpopular or controversial. The content of these articles may stimulate thinking in readers, particularly in those who are Religious Studies teachers. For example, Groome's model of teaching Religious Studies through conversation may prompt readers to attempt to utilize this model in their classrooms. Similarly, Lund's construct of the varied roles fulfilled by effective Religious Studies teachers may prompt readers to consider which roles they fulfill efficaciously and which require improvement. The chief weakness of this volume is its lack of empirical research. Although the personal impressions and theoretical musings of expert thinkers can fulfill important purposes, they cannot substitute for the value of rigorous research that produces valid and reliable quantitative or qualitative data. The present study endeavored to generate such data, which, when analyzed, yielded insights to inform both theory and praxis in the field of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools.

Additionally, because this volume was published 10 years prior to the *Framework*'s promulgation, it did not consider the potential impact of the *Framework*'s implementation on the mission of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools or on the roles fulfilled by effective Religious Studies teachers. However, it raised questions that merit investigation. For example, Lund's (1997) pointed discussion of how textbooks that utilize devotional language may alienate unchurched students invites exploration of the *Framework*'s impact on such students, particularly because the

Framework's catechetical approach presumes Christian faith on the part of the students. As the introduction to the *Framework* stated:

> The Christological centrality of this framework is designed to form the content of instruction as well as to be a vehicle for growth in one's relationship with the Lord so that each may come to know him and live according to the truth he has given to us. (USCCB, 2008, p. 1)

Because the participants in the present study were teachers who have taught Religious Studies both prior to and following the *Framework*'s implementation, they were able to offer insights that shed light on this question.

In a speech given at an event honoring his 33 years of teaching Religious Studies at Jesuit secondary schools, which was subsequently published in *Origins*, Longtin (2003) focused on the theological content he taught and the pedagogical methods he employed in a 12th grade systematic theology course. Longtin utilized seminar-style teaching, with a heavy emphasis on in-depth discussion designed to teach students to think theologically. His students explored such topics as the nature of religion, the problem of evil, creation and evolution, the identity of Jesus, the credibility of the Church, and the call to Christian disciples to join in the struggle against injustice. Longtin maintained that "Even if they [his students] do not fully master all the questions and theories and come to the right answers, they come away, I think, with some sense that the Christian tradition is not foolish, and that there is a depth to it that they may someday want to study further" (p. 240).

James DiGiacomo (1989, 2004), a veteran teacher of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, authored two volumes in which he shared his personal impressions and professional wisdom gleaned from many years in the field. In the first of these, written as part of the NCEA Keynote Series, which offers preservice and inservice

materials for teachers in Catholic schools, DiGiacomo (1989) discussed his perceptions of the purposes of Religious Studies courses in Catholic secondary schools. Such courses enable students to reflect on broad questions of the meaning and purpose of their lives, offer opportunities for moral development, and support students in integrating their academic knowledge of religion with prayer and service. Against this backdrop of the broad purposes of Religious Studies, DiGiacomo gave attention to practical matters that both beginning and veteran teachers would likely find helpful, such as developing a Religious Studies curriculum, selecting textbooks and other classroom materials, navigating controversial issues in classroom discussions, and assessing students' learning.

Although many of DiGiacomo's (1989) insights, such as his cogent presentation of the purposes of Religious Studies courses in Catholic secondary schools, remain relevant, other aspects of this publication may be considered to be outdated. For example, his discussion of how to utilize a variety of materials in teaching is bound by the technology available in 1989. Additionally, his pedagogical material does not take account of recent changes and advances in the theory and praxis of the design and delivery of curriculum. In addition, the book is limited to DiGiacomo's own perspective, formed over his 30 years of teaching Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. Although this perspective is valuable, he did not test his ideas empirically or include the views of other professionals in this field.

In his 2004 volume *Mission Possible*, DiGiacomo reflected on his 53 years of teaching Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools by writing a history of this field's evolution from the 1950s through the early 2000s. In chapters organized by

decade, the author discussed the social and cultural forces that shaped religious education in various eras and offered classroom anecdotes to illustrate how theological content and pedagogy have changed over the years. In the book's introduction, DiGiacomo acknowledged the limitations of the project he had undertaken. For example, he characterized his work as "anecdotal history, with all the limitations of that genre" (p. xi). He also stated that although he taught thousands of students over the course of his long career, most of them were boys, middle-class, and white. In his estimation, they were also "more talented academically" and "more articulate" (p. xi) than most of their peers. Therefore, DiGiacomo's reflections, although steeped in wisdom accrued over decades in the classroom, must not be generalized to other, more heterogeneous populations.

DiGiacomo (2004) began his career in the 1950s, during an era when the Baltimore Catechism "and its spin-offs" (p. 9) were widely used for religious instruction in U.S. Catholic elementary and secondary schools. These catechisms followed a question-and-answer format, and teachers typically required students to memorize the answers to several questions each day. Precise memorization was key: "It was important to give back not just the sense of the answer but to recite each answer word for word. Any deviation might lead to heresy" (p. 9). Such a "clear, simple, and orthodox" (p. 9) approach was manageable for teachers who were, in many cases, not professional religious educators. No particular education or specialized training was required to check the accuracy of students' verbatim responses. In DiGiacomo's view, Religious Studies curricula of the 1950s were also characterized by an emphasis on individual virtue, rather than on social justice, and by an attitude toward people of other religious traditions that kept them "at arm's length" (p. 16). The latter, he maintained, stemmed not only from

narrowness or exclusivity, but also from a fear of indifferentism: the idea that one religion is as good as another. Emphasizing the unique doctrinal claims of Catholicism would, in theory, serve to counteract this idea.

DiGiacomo (2004) asserted that in the 1960s, Religious Studies classrooms in U.S. Catholic secondary schools could no longer remain insular; rather, social trends, political events, and ecclesial conflicts all had a significant impact on both the content taught and the pedagogy utilized in those classrooms. In particular, he drew attention to secularism and the death of God movement, the widespread feeling of alienation and desire for rebellion among adolescents and young adults, the civil rights movement, the peace movement, and the struggle between conscience and authority in the Catholic Church, as exemplified in the magisterium's condemnation of artificial birth control in 1968. He depicted the Religious Studies classroom of this time period as "a kind of battleground, where strong feelings came to the surface. Class was stimulating and wearing at the same time" (p. 26). Discussions centered on the civil rights movement, in particular, challenged students intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually: "Suddenly Catholicism was not just about pious abstractions but about meat-and-potatoes concerns that challenged a whole way of life. The classrooms in which these arguments raged were noisy, illogical, and messy, but they were *alive*" (p. 39, emphasis original). With this shift in content—from the narrow focus on doctrine in the 1950s to a broader examination of religion in the social and political sphere in the 1960s—came a corresponding shift in pedagogy. DiGiacomo stated that many Religious Studies teachers structured learning opportunities more creatively, with many employing "student-

centered, open-ended presentations…what they lost in structure and clarity, they gained in spontaneity and involvement" (p. 47).

According to DiGiacomo (2004), in the 1970s, Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools reaped the benefits of the burgeoning field of developmental psychology, especially the work of Kohlberg (1976) in moral development and Fowler (1981) in faith development. These stage theories of human development provided the grounding for a new focus on the learner in religious education: "Not only the message, but the hearers and learners of the message were now looked at more closely and taken more seriously" (p. 63). In this milieu, many teachers favored discussion-based learning: open, respectful, and critical interactions in which students truly dialogued with one another, with adult facilitation. DiGiacomo reflected on the Religious Studies teacher's role in such exchanges in the following quote:

> Such conversations do not always lead to orthodox conclusions, and the teacher has a responsibility to speak up for the tradition. The teacher's interjection need not stifle honesty, as long as it is offered with respect for the students' needs for free inquiry. (p. 56)

DiGiacomo also stated that by the 1970s, Religious Studies teaching at the secondary level had attained a certain degree of professionalism, as many positions were filled by teachers with degrees in relevant fields, such as Theology, Religious Studies, or Religious Education. He contrasted this with the situation on the elementary school level, in which "good will and generosity did not make up for a lack of academic preparation and training" (p. 73).

The Religious Studies classrooms of the 1980s were shaped by two landmark pastoral letters issued by the U.S. bishops: *The Challenge of Peace*, which addressed the nuclear crisis and the arms race, issued in 1983, and *Economic Justice for All*, which

addressed Catholic social teaching and the U.S. economy, issued in 1986. DiGiacomo

(2004) emphasized not only the extent to which these documents influenced curricula,

teaching materials, and day-to-day classroom instruction, but also the opportunity they

presented to teach students about ecclesiology. In teaching these documents, he

highlighted the way in which they were produced, that is, in a bottom-up rather than a

top-down fashion, as emblematic of the way in which church teaching should be

generated. He contrasted this approach with the more common way in which church

teaching tends to be formulated (top-down), aiming to help students understand how

divergent these approaches are:

> Thoughtful young Catholics should be told not only what Church leaders teach
> but also how they arrive at their positions. In Rome, decisions are made about
> controversial issues like women priests, clerical celibacy, and homosexuality by
> people who are working from a particular mindset that thinks in top-down terms
> about the locus and exercise of authority. This approach is acceptable to many
> adult Catholics, and students have a right to embrace it. But many other adults,
> clerical and lay, think otherwise, and the young should be helped to understand
> why. Ignoring or papering over such disagreements in the name of a pretended
> unanimity is futile and ultimately dishonest. (p. 77)

Other issues which DiGiacomo addressed in the Religious Studies classrooms of the

1980s included consumerism and greed, teenaged sexual mores, and religious and moral

individualism.

DiGiacomo (2004) characterized the 1990s and the early 2000s, until his

retirement in 2003, as hopeful years for Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary

schools. He maintained that departments "were making serious efforts to construct

curricula that were intellectually respectable, pastorally oriented, and adapted to young

people's needs and capacities for religious and moral growth" (p. 101). Many of these

curricula highlighted social justice. Although DiGiacomo welcomed this new emphasis,

he cautioned against neglecting issues of personal morality:

> In the fifties, no one focused very much on social issues. By the nineties, I had
> seen places where the pendulum had swung to the other extreme, and some young
> experts on globalization and care of the environment were cheating their way
> through school and robbing the cafeteria blind. A nice balance is the ideal. (p.
> 111)

The other notable challenge that DiGiacomo faced during this time period involved

helping students to navigate the complexities of the many controversial issues facing the

Church, such as birth control, homosexuality, clerical celibacy, and women's ecclesial

roles—issues which, both then and now, tend to foment division even among faithful

Catholics. He explained his approach to such topics in the following quote:

> The safe course for high school religion departments to follow is simply to pass
> on the authoritative teaching of the Magisterium as stated in the Catechism of the
> Catholic Church. An atmosphere of repression and fear, which grew during this
> decade, encouraged such simplification, and publishers of teaching materials
> exhibited this same kind of caution in order to get the desired imprimateurs. But
> to tread this "safe" course is to sell our students short….There is more than one
> way of being a good Catholic, and teenagers have a right to know their options.
> True, trying to explain the concept of loyal opposition is tricky and there is a risk
> of being misunderstood, but life is full of risks. (pp. 112-113)

In his mostly positive assessment of the 1990s and early 2000s, DiGiacomo

claimed that by this decade Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools

had gained respect as professionals: "The bad old days when some administrators thought

that 'anybody could teach religion' were so remote that hardly anyone could remember

them" (p. 101). He also maintained that job openings in Religious Studies departments

attracted numerous qualified applicants. It is illuminating to compare DiGiacomo's

personal reflections with the empirical research conducted by Cook (2000, 2001) and by

Cook and Hudson (2006). Cook's (2000, 2001) nationwide study revealed that

administrators, when attempting to fill Religious Studies openings, faced a severe shortage of qualified applicants: 50% of the participating schools (n=195) reported having zero to two qualified applicants for their most recent Religious Studies teacher opening, and 86% indicated that there were too few qualified Religious Studies teacher candidates in their geographical area. In addition, Cook and Hudson's (2006) assessment of Religious Studies teaching as a profession found that it fulfilled only two of the seven characteristics which scholars generally recognized as common to all professions. The extent to which the findings of this empirical research contrast with DiGiacomo's (2004) reflections serves to remind readers that this book was, as DiGiacomo himself had admitted, only anecdotal and not supported by the rigors of social scientific inquiry. This contrast also accentuates the need for additional empirical research exploring various aspects of the field of Religious Studies teaching in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, a need toward which the present study aimed to make a contribution.

In considering the rather limited body of literature regarding Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools produced within the past two decades, one notes that the most recent study published regarding this topic was that of Cook and Hudson (2006). Therefore, none of this literature takes account of the *Framework*, which was promulgated in November 2007. Since that time, the *Framework* has received some attention in journals, newspapers, and professional workshops, as well as thorough, focused consideration in one dissertation. A careful examination of this *Framework*-related literature will continue to clarify the research context for the present study.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) *Framework*

In one of the few published critiques of the *Framework*, O'Malley (2009) maintained that this "pedagogically counterproductive" document does not promote authentic, holistic learning (p. 14). A 45-year veteran teacher of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, O'Malley described students in these schools as lacking a personally appropriated Christian faith. Because their faith may be based almost exclusively on the beliefs and practices of their parents or other family members, it may lack depth or commitment. According to him, such students are unlikely to feel engaged by the *Framework*, which he characterized as focused almost exclusively on the cognitive, to the neglect of the affective: "Despite excellent material to help students know about God, one finds not a flicker of inducement to intimacy, unless one can be 'intimate' with a total abstraction" (p. 15). He suggested addressing this imbalance by adding content that would encourage teachers to foster their students' appreciation for God's presence in nature; to introduce the practice of centering prayer; to use novels, films, legends, and myths in their classroom instruction; and, to teach media literacy in order to counteract "the insidious influence of media brainwashing" (p. 16). Such shifts both in content and in pedagogy would, in O'Malley's view, be more consistent with the needs of contemporary adolescents, with the way in which Jesus taught—most notably through narrative—and with the Church's own historical praxis of teaching theology only after first teaching humanities and philosophy.

In a response to O'Malley's critique, McBride (2009), who served as a consultant to the USCCB committee that produced the *Framework*, asserted that the document "gives coherence, order, and structure" to "the grandest narrative in all of history" (p.

16): the story of God's involvement in the world from creation until the end of time. He

maintained that the *Framework* expresses in an orderly, systematic way the story of

God's revelation to humanity, a story that reaches its apex in the life, death, and

resurrection of Jesus. In this way, the *Framework* enables students both to communicate

and to defend the tenets of Catholic Christianity. McBride also emphasized the need for

academic rigor in Religious Studies courses:

> Real learning is tough. Genuine education is rigorous. We accept that fact for
> math, English, physics, computer science, but some educators become "soft" in
> teaching the faith….We should be no less demanding in our expectations for
> students studying their faith than we are when they study other subject areas. (p.
> 17)

In maintaining that the *Framework* will empower educators to offer Religious Studies

courses with academically rigorous content, McBride took no position on whether

courses without a basis in the *Framework* are inherently academically lax in their

approach. Therefore, whether he intended to imply that educators who teach Religious

Studies courses outside of the *Framework's* purview are, by definition, "soft" in their

content and/or in their pedagogy remains unclear. Finally, McBride refuted O'Malley's

claim that a great gap exists between the *Framework's* approach and the needs of

contemporary adolescents, maintaining instead that

> The *Framework* is a service to our young people, helping them know and love
> Christ and live according to his truth. In this way high school age students are
> enabled to participate more deeply in the life of the church, and, with the help of
> the Holy Spirit, to reach eternal life with God in heaven. It is a very high ideal;
> but teenagers are well suited to idealism, and their personal development is
> related to human and faith-based challenges. (p. 18)

Ostasiewski's (2010) doctoral dissertation offered a sweeping theological and

pedagogical critique of the *Framework*. Regarding theology, she evaluated the document

from the perspective of tradition, the magisterium, and Scripture. Concerning the first of

these, she maintained that the bishops' intimate involvement in producing the *Framework* was inconsistent with ecclesial tradition. Even in the mid-19th century, when the U.S. Catholic Church was still in its infancy, the bishops did not involve themselves in the production, endorsement, or oversight of a national Religious Studies curriculum for any level of schooling. Rather, they entrusted this task to religious orders, whose members were professional educators, or to publishing houses. Therefore, the promulgation of the *Framework* was truly a milestone, for it represented the first time that the U.S. bishops have produced a curriculum designed for use in every Catholic secondary school in the country.

On the subject of the magisterium, Ostasiewski (2010) examined both local and universal ecclesial documents issued from 1929 to 2005. From this body of documents, Ostasiewski extracted several key characteristics of a Catholic approach to education, including the active cooperation and participation of students in their own learning; a commitment to understanding and responding to students' concerns and struggles; a conscious effort to connect topics under study to real-life situations; and, the prudent use of insights from other relevant fields, such as psychology. She asserted that the *Framework* violates many of these principles by designating the content that students must study but not encouraging their creative appropriation of it; by failing to help students relate curricular content to their lives in meaningful ways; and, by neglecting to enlist the expertise of educators, especially experts in pedagogy, to design this document.

In discussing Scripture, the final element of her theological critique, Ostasiewski (2010) utilized Brueggemann's (2001) model of the prophetic imagination to uphold Jesus as the quintessential "prophet-teacher" (p. 109). As such, he shared meals and table

fellowship with people marginalized by society, healed people both physically and spiritually, invited women to join his circle of disciples as equals, and embodied a consistent commitment to justice and compassion. These priorities, oriented toward the realization of the Kingdom of God, posed a concrete threat to people in positions of political or religious authority. Ostasiewski asserted that neither the content nor the format of the *Framework* accurately reflects Jesus' ministry:

> We cannot expect memorizing questions and answers will build the skills our students need to imagine a world closer to the "Kingdom of God" that Jesus taught and that we educators teach he has ushered in….and we cannot expect these questions and answers would be recognized as proper pedagogy by Jesus the prophet-teacher whose message this system is supposed to convey. (pp. 108-109)

The *Framework's* emphasis on apologetics provided the basis for Ostasiewski's (2010) pedagogical critique of the document. The theological discipline of apologetics focuses on developing and studying "the defense of or proofs for Christianity" (Fiorenza, 1987, p. 44). The introduction to the *Framework* drew attention to the apologetical component of its curriculum, which appears at the conclusion of each course as a series of questions and answers titled "challenges." The bishops directed publishers, teachers, and catechists to utilize these "challenges" as the basis for "a catechetical instruction and formation that is imbued with an apologetical approach" (USCCB, 2008, p. 1).

Ostasiewski (2010) utilized postmodern curriculum theory as the lens for critiquing the *Framework's* emphasis on apologetics. She maintained that contemporary students—heavily influenced by the media, enamored with technology, and stressed by both academic and social pressures—no longer instinctively trust authority. Rather, they may react to claims of authority—whether issued by the Church, by their parents, or by a teacher—with skepticism or even suspicion. Such students refuse to be docile consumers

of curricular content delivered by a teacher; rather, they demand to be "directors of their own studies" (p. 140). They wish to engage and dialogue with the curriculum in meaningful ways, thinking critically about the societal forces and political factors that have shaped the world in which they live. Ostasiewski asserted that a postmodern approach to curriculum and instruction meets the needs of these students by emphasizing inquiry-based, interdisciplinary, and student-centered learning. Such an approach "does not see a value in memorization of a list of unrelated facts;" rather, it "promotes holistic understanding" (p. 123).

Ostasiewski (2010) perceived a direct contradiction between the *Framework's* emphasis on apologetics and a postmodern approach to curriculum and instruction. The former emphasizes objective truth that must be faithfully articulated and defended against its detractors; the latter emphasizes subjectivity, a multiplicity of interpretations, and personal engagement. The former may stymie students' intellectual and spiritual growth: "Any discouraging of theological self-reflection is counter to the needs of the students. Strict adherence to canonicity and formal catechesis actually reinforces cultural and individual isolation" (p. 137). In contrast, the latter may reach students in meaningful and potentially transformative ways: "Because the students are not simply required to memorize a string of disconnected facts, their engagement deepens and meaning-making takes place" (p. 140). Ostasiewski observed that the bishops' choice of an apologetical approach for the *Framework* rather than a postmodern approach reflected the magisterium's suspicion of and reluctance to embrace postmodernity:

> The Roman Catholic Church is opposed to any notion of postmodernity. It would certainly not entertain curriculum based on this seemingly freewheeling preoccupation with the challenge of authority. The Catholic Church equates

postmodern philosophy with relativism, which it sees as capricious, groundless, self centered and self serving. (p. 141)

Ostasiewski's (2010) critique of the *Framework* was thorough and multi-dimensional, encompassing both theological and pedagogical factors. She clearly marshaled her formidable knowledge of various theological disciplines—including Scripture, Church history, and systematic theology—and of educational and pedagogical theory in order to document the *Framework*'s deficiencies. However, Ostasiewski's work was philosophical and theoretical; it lacked the scientific methodology of an empirical study. It was also limited to her own perception and analysis of the *Framework*'s inadequacies. As a Religious Studies teacher in a school that has fully implemented the *Framework*, she certainly brought a valuable perspective to the literature regarding this topic. The present study expanded on her efforts by soliciting and analyzing the in-depth perspectives of six Religious Studies teachers who have made the transition to teaching the *Framework*. This study represents the first time that the viewpoints of teachers in this position have been documented.

In April of 2010, a pair of articles in the *National Catholic Reporter* described the status of the *Framework* two years after its promulgation by the USCCB. In the first of these, Filteau (2010) characterized progress as "uneven" (p. 1a), with some dioceses moving quickly toward implementation and others ignoring the *Framework* entirely. Filteau documented the perspective of a former USCCB catechetical official who now conducts workshops on the *Framework*. This official, who asked not to be identified by name, stated that teachers initially

> …are afraid of the *Framework*. They see it as an attack on their integrity, as if the bishops put it out because they didn't trust the high school faculty

members…Once I've settled their fears, most teachers are fine with the *Framework*. (p. 3a)

However, this person also maintained that teachers often do not wish to adjust the scope and sequence of their curricula, which may not match the *Framework*'s sequence, and that they object to the placement of social justice as an elective.

In a companion article to Filteau's (2010) piece, Heffern (2010) interviewed renowned catechetical expert Thomas Groome regarding his views of the *Framework*. Groome spoke positively of the *Framework*'s presentation of the "whole story account of the Catholic faith" (p. 2a) that ensures that all students in U.S. Catholic secondary schools will engage in this material in a consistent, if not uniform, fashion. He characterized this as an improvement over the present situation, in which U.S. Catholic secondary schools enjoy relative independence in developing their Religious Studies curricula. In his critical comments, he drew attention to the *Framework*'s disproportionate attention to the Christ of faith and relatively little emphasis on the Jesus of history, that is, the real human person who walked the roads of Galilee, who developed friendships, who nurtured disciples, and who challenged many societal norms of his day. Groome also critiqued the *Framework*'s placement of social justice as an elective, rather than as "a constitutive aspect of the curriculum" (p. 2a). Although he maintained that skillful teachers may use their theological background and pedagogical skills to enhance, enrich, and deepen the material presented in the *Framework*, he remarked that publishers, in contrast, must follow the *Framework* very faithfully and precisely as they develop books and other materials that they hope the USCCB will approve.

In a workshop presented on March 19, 2010, at the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress in Anaheim, CA, Groome (2010) offered a more in-depth

perspective on the *Framework* than was possible to share in the brief piece written by

Heffern (2010).[9] In this workshop, Groome expressed hope that the *Framework* may be

integrated with his own model of religious education: shared Christian praxis. This

model seeks to engage students in the process of bringing the issues, concerns, struggles,

and joys of their lives into creative, collaborative, and meaningful dialogue with Christian

faith tradition. He stated that he is presently writing a textbook series which attempts to

accomplish this. However, he characterized the *Framework* as "an extraordinarily

conservative statement" (track 15) that presents "a very defensive kind of apologetic, and

somewhat of a coercive apologetic" (track 13).

Groome (2010) critiqued several key aspects of the *Framework*, including its

approach to Scripture, which dictates that "the Bible is to be read entirely in the context

of Catholic doctrine" (track 15), and its operative Christology, which overemphasizes

Jesus' divinity to the point of virtually excluding his humanity. He also drew attention to

the document's focus on ordained ministry and consecrated life without comparable

attention to lay ministry: "I couldn't find, maybe it's there, but I've been through this

document many times, and I've yet to find a reference to lay ministry, which is surely a

dated attitude, to put it mildly, in our time" (track 15). Groome reserved his strongest

criticism for the *Framework*'s approach to other religions, particularly as detailed in the

elective course titled "Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues." He remarked that

> The interreligious issues is a particularly difficult one…It basically begins by
> saying "look, the Catholic Church is the one true faith, now if you'd like to talk to
> us after that, we'd be happy to talk with you, but let's get things straight before
> we go any further." I'm not caricaturing, really: the weakest of all the 11 books
> outlined is the one on interreligious dialogue. The inadequacy of other traditions
> and so on. I have no problem at all in heralding the great truths, dogmas,

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[9] The researcher attended this workshop and subsequently obtained an official recording of it on Compact
Disc. She transcribed relevant portions of the recording for the purpose of this study.

doctrines, and practices of my beloved faith, but I don't need to disparage other people in order to cherish my own faith. (Track 16)

Rather than this approach to other religions, Groome recommended that Catholic schools, which often serve significant numbers of students from other faith traditions, consider how to evangelize students within those traditions: for example, how to help Jewish students become better Jews, Muslim students to become better Muslims, and so forth.

In discussing the approach he is taking in writing a series of textbooks based on the *Framework*, Groome (2010) explained that he intends to add material to these books that is not explicitly contained in the *Framework*, because "If they [authors and publishers] just take this *Framework* and literally teach only what is there, I think they'll have done an enormous disservice to the faith of our young people" (Track 25). For example, he intended to focus on Mary Magdalene as the first witness of Jesus' resurrection "in a way that is empowering of young women in our church" (Track 19). He also anticipated treating the topic of lay ministry. Groome offered compelling arguments for the need to include these and other topics in any curriculum produced for U.S. Catholic secondary schools. However, he did not address the question of whether the USCCB Subcommittee on the Catechism (formerly known as the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism) would approve a textbook that enhanced the *Framework*'s content in these or similar ways, or whether he intended to include this additional material in the teaching manuals, which do not have to be approved by the Subcommittee.

In a brief article published in *Emmaus*, an online journal sponsored by the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) for Religious Studies teachers, Campus Ministers, and Service Directors in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, Tamberino

(2010) expressed strong opposition to the placement of social justice as an elective in the

Framework:

> A solid introduction to the Church's work for justice and peace and its preferential option for the poor should not be relegated to an elective during junior or senior year. Furthermore, it is unrealistic that such comprehensive teaching could somehow be included in campus or youth ministry service programs. (p. 3)

He also emphasized the need for educational ministries that serve young people, including those curricula and programs that utilize the *Framework*'s content and structure, to be rich in concrete, practical experiences that engage students' minds, hearts, and imaginations. Teachers must not simply present the Church's teachings; rather, they must "stir the waters…allow the questions…[and] provide an opportunity for the struggle" (p. 3).

In the fall of 2010, *Momentum*, the official journal of the NCEA, published two articles designed to assist teachers and other school and diocesan personnel facing imminent implementation of the *Framework*. In the first of these, Raiche (2010), the Executive Director of the NCEA's Department of Religious Education, indicated that her office had fielded numerous inquiries regarding the *Framework* from the staff of both Catholic secondary schools and parish-based religious education programs. Therefore, she intended the article to convey basic information about the *Framework* and to address educators' questions, concerns, and fears. After summarizing both the content of the *Framework* and the history of its development, she explained its "Christological organizing principle" and "catechetical perspective" (p. 30). The former means that a thorough study of Jesus infuses all aspects of the curriculum; indeed, no topic is considered independently of Jesus. For example, sacraments are studied as "privileged

encounters with Jesus Christ" (USCCB, 2008, p. 20) and morality is considered as "life in Jesus Christ" (p. 27). The latter means that the *Framework* is directed toward helping students to grow and live as committed and faithful Catholic Christians. In addressing readers who may feel uncertain about how quickly they must implement the *Framework* or about the relationship between the *Framework* and diocesan curriculum guidelines, she cautioned patience and prudence. The process of implementing the *Framework* nationally will likely encompass years; therefore, she urged readers to think strategically, systematically, and deliberately as they proceed.

In the second *Momentum* article, billed as "a view from the field" (Tiernan, 2010, p. 33), Tiernan also advised Religious Studies departments in U.S. Catholic secondary schools not to rush toward implementation of the *Framework* without first undertaking a systematic examination and evaluation of their current curricula. If schools proceed in this fashion, Tiernan maintained that the *Framework* may serve as a valuable and needed opportunity for dialogue regarding what is most essential in theological instruction for adolescents. In commenting on the *Framework*'s apologetical approach, Tiernan argued that other approaches, such as a contextual approach or a standards-based approach, may be pedagogically more effective for high school students' learning. He maintained that a contextual approach, which takes account of students' social location and cultural milieu, would empower the students to take greater ownership of their learning, even to the point of creating their own learning experiences. A standards-based approach would establish specific outcomes and then develop curriculum which leads students toward achieving them. Such approaches would "enable a more holistic vision of catechesis" (p. 34) than is possible with the apologetical approach promoted by the bishops.

In the March 2012 issue of *Catholic Education*, Manning (2012) sought to offer

pedagogical advice and guidance to Religious Studies teachers as they implement the

Framework. He rooted this guidance in two sets of sources. First, directed teachers to

utilize elements of teaching methodology that are mentioned in the *General Directory for

Catechesis* (1997) and the *National Directory for Catechesis* (2005). Such elements that

Manning identified included inductive and deductive methods, the interpretation of

human experience, memorization, and activities that build a sense of community. Then,

Manning proposed "five pedagogical characteristics that predominate across ancient and

modern educational texts" (p. 163), characteristics that, in his view, "have traditionally

defined Catholic pedagogy" (p. 163). Such pedagogy must be Scripturally based,

teacher-dependent, student-centered, holistic, and humble.

Manning (2012) proceeded to evaluate the *Framework* with regard to each of

these pedagogical characteristics. Concerning Scripture, he praised the *Framework*'s

focus on "the narrative of salvation history contained in Scripture" (p. 171) as well as the

fact that the document "makes some provision for training students how to interpret

Scripture responsibly" (p. 171). However, he also asserted that "the *Framework* in itself

is insufficient to guarantee a robust formation in Scripture" (p. 171) because it lacks

adequate treatment of Scripture within its required courses. He maintained that the

material on the Old Testament is especially paltry, to students' great detriment: "To

neglect treatment of the Old Testament is to risk eclipsing the narrative of how God

prepared His people for salvation and presenting students with an abridged version of

salvation history" (p. 171). Manning expressed fear that if teachers do not supplement

the *Framework*'s Scriptural content, and/or reclassify its elective Scripture course as

required, then "We risk producing a generation of students likely to perpetuate the stereotype of Catholics as ignorant of Scripture" (p. 172).

Manning (2012) next addressed the criteria of "teacher-dependent" (p. 172) and "student-centered" (p. 173). Concerning the former, he maintained that "successful implementation of the *Framework*, like that of any learning tool, will depend heavily upon the quality of educators using it" (p. 172). He urged that resources be allocated to both the recruitment and training of teachers who possess the ability to "facilitate students' meaningful integration of the *Framework*'s content" (p. 172). Concerning the latter, Manning acknowledged both O'Malley's (2009) strong critique of the *Framework*'s approach as well as McBride's (2009) response to that critique. In articulating his own view, he appeared to seek a middle ground, asserting that, "While not particularly congenial to student-centered pedagogy, the *Framework* not only leaves open the possibility for the development of better pedagogy but explicitly calls for it" (p. 174).

In discussing the fourth characteristic that he believes to be constitutive of authentically Catholic pedagogy—that such pedagogy be holistic—Manning (2012) conceded that the *Framework* "appeals most naturally to the cognitive dimension" (p. 174). Therefore, he maintained that successful implementation in a holistic manner will depend largely on the skill and efforts of teachers and school administrators. Finally, Manning asserted that the bishops, in producing a *Framework* that encompasses only theological content and not pedagogy, have managed to exemplify the fifth and final characteristic, that of humility: "The bishops recognize the limits of the *Framework* by

requesting the help of educational specialists in further development of the curriculum"
(p. 175).

Manning's (2012) work assumes importance as one of very few academic journal
articles regarding the *Framework* that have appeared since the document's promulgation.
His central thesis, that valid and helpful pedagogical guidance is embedded in many
ancient and modern Catholic texts, merits both serious consideration and further
investigation. However, Manning failed to explicate the methodology by which he
arrived at the five characteristics of Catholic pedagogy that formed the centerpiece of his
article. For each characteristic, he cited a variety of sources, both ancient, such as
Clement of Alexandria, Augustine of Hippo, and Gregory of Nyssa, and modern, such as
Jacques Maritain, Bernard Lonergan, and Thomas Groome. Yet, the rationale
undergirding his selection of these five particular characteristics remains unclear.
Moreover, in maintaining, with regard to the characteristic of humility, that the bishops
sought "the help of educational specialists in further development of the curriculum" (p.
175), Manning neglected to support this assertion by indicating the manner or venue in
which the bishops had solicited this assistance.

Given that only six years have elapsed since the *Framework*'s promulgation, one
may be encouraged that some literature regarding it has already appeared. The articles in
America, the *National Catholic Reporter*, the *Emmaus Journal*, *Momentum*, and *Catholic
Education* were intended for a broad audience of professional educators, ecclesial
ministers, and interested Catholics. In addition, Ostasiewski's (2010) dissertation offered
a comprehensive critique of the *Framework* that was richly informative for its theological
and pedagogical perspectives. However, the lack of empirical research regarding the

Framework constitutes the chief limitation of this body of literature. Neither the musings of veteran teachers and catechetical experts, nor the careful advice of USCCB consultants and NCEA officials, nor the meticulous, philosophical writing of Ostasiewski (2010) can substitute for research grounded in the rigors of social scientific inquiry. The present study has sought to be the first of its kind, in documenting the experiences and perspectives of Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools who have taught both before and after the *Framework'*s implementation.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

The present study may be understood against the broad backdrop of three bodies of literature: universal and local ecclesial documents, literature examining Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, and literature related to the USCCB *Framework*. Regarding the first of these, ecclesial documents offered many insights pertinent to Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, including the distinction between religious instruction and catechesis, the importance of Religious Studies curricula in Catholic schools, and the essential role fulfilled by Religious Studies teachers. However, these insights were offered in the context of a general examination of Catholic schools, with few specific references to the unique challenges faced by Religious Studies teachers in secondary school environments.

The literature that more specifically addressed Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools was limited to four empirical studies as well as the work of several authors who have published their personal reflections gleaned from their many years of experience in this field. This literature indicated that Religious Studies courses in U.S. Catholic secondary schools shifted both theologically and pedagogically after the Second

Vatican Council (1961-1965). Regarding theology, the content of such courses broadened to encompass a wider body of knowledge than only Catholic doctrine. Regarding pedagogy, such courses tended to be taught with less lectures and memorization and more student-centered discussions and activities. This literature also drew attention to the shortage of qualified Religious Studies teachers and the corresponding needs to recruit and retain such teachers and to professionalize this ministry in order to boost its appeal. Finally, this literature revealed the lively debate among both researchers and practitioners regarding the primary purpose of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. Some authors, as well as participants in empirical studies, articulated that purpose as primarily one of catechesis and others as primarily one of religious instruction, without a clear consensus emerging.

The paucity of literature regarding the *Framework* may, at least partially, be understood as a function of the limited time that potential researchers and writers have had with this document. The six years that have elapsed since its promulgation have seen the appearance of several articles directed toward various audiences and one dissertation, but no empirical research. The present study has added to the knowledge base regarding the field of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, and, more specifically, regarding the *Framework*, at this pivotal time in which the theological and pedagogical perspectives of Religious Studies teachers who have taught both before and after the *Framework*'s implementation may be accurately documented.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of six Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools regarding their experience of teaching courses based on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB, 2008) *Curriculum Framework*[10]. Specifically, the study investigated these teachers' experiences of the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content they teach and on their pedagogy.

Research Design

The researcher utilized qualitative methodology to conduct semi-structured research interviews with six participants. Employing Kvale's (1996) and Brinkman and Kvale's (2009) approaches to research interviews, in which the interview is neither a standardized questionnaire nor a completely open, nondirective conversation, the researcher focused the interviews on particular themes with relevance to the research questions driving the study. Within these themes, the participants were permitted great latitude to express their thoughts, feelings, concerns, and questions.

In addition, this study was philosophically grounded in the principles of participatory action research (hereafter, PAR). In this methodology, the researcher seeks to engage in a true partnership with study participants in a shared effort to explore perspectives, generate meaning, and take action directed toward personal and societal

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[10] The full title of this document, published in 2008 by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), is *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*.

liberation and transformation (Maguire, 1987; Park, 1993). PAR dovetails with the theoretical rationale on which this study is based, for both PAR and Schipani's (1988, 1995) model of religious education are rooted in the work of the South American educator and activist Paolo Freire (1970, 1974). The researcher's philosophical commitment to PAR was expressed in three key aspects of the research design.

First, although the researcher prepared the questions to guide the first interview, these were posed as springboards for discussion. The researcher explicitly expressed openness to discussing other topics, within the general focus area, that the participants believed to be important. Secondly, unlike traditional research, which typically involves "researchers from the academy doing research *on* people," (McTaggart, 1997, emphasis original), PAR is a collaborative, communal process that seeks, to the extent possible, to dissolve the conventional boundaries between researcher and participants. Therefore, in the present study the participants were given the opportunity to work collaboratively in generating the questions to guide the second interview. In addition, the researcher sent, via email, the transcripts of both interviews to each participant to solicit her or his feedback, comments, and corrections. Appropriate adjustments were made in the reporting of the data based upon the feedback that the participants offered. Finally, a research study utilizing PAR does not end with the generation of knowledge; rather, it explicitly seeks to direct that knowledge towards meaningful action and social change, for PAR is an "action-oriented, advocacy means of inquiry" (Creswell, 2008). Therefore, following the completion of both interviews, the researcher invited the participants to consider possible avenues of collective action that would enable them to address any areas of concern that surfaced during the interviews.

This hybrid methodology, seeking to blend the technical aspects of qualitative interviewing with the philosophical approach of PAR, enabled the researcher to engage in substantive exchanges with the participants and enabled the participants to reflect deeply on their experiences. Such in-depth exploration yielded rich, meaningful data to address the research questions as well as some initial ideas directed toward a plan of action grounded in the findings of this study.

<div align="center">Population</div>

In order to explore the perspectives of early adopters of the USCCB's *Framework*, the researcher sought a purposeful sample of participants who met two criteria. First, they had taught within the past two academic years at least one *Framework*-based Religious Studies course in a U.S. Catholic secondary school. Secondly, they had taught within the past two academic years at least one non-*Framework* Religious Studies course in a U.S. Catholic secondary school. Because the researcher aimed to investigate teachers' experiences of the impact of the *Framework* on the theological content that they teach and on their pedagogy, participants in this study must have had relatively recent experience in teaching both *Framework*-based and non-*Framework* Religious Studies courses. The sample utilized for this study was also a convenience sample, to the extent that the researcher selected teachers to whom she could readily gain access, given her constraints of time and financial resources related to travel.

The researcher began to identify and recruit potential participants through informal professional networks. For example, the researcher utilized her connections to several Catholic religious communities who sponsor secondary schools, such as the De La Salle Christian Brothers, the Salesians of St. John Bosco, the Sisters of Mercy, and the

Society of Jesus. As a student at the Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership, she contacted both current students (including those who come to San Francisco for the summer session) and alumnae/i who teach Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. She also communicated with former colleagues who were teaching in schools that had implemented the *Framework*. Because use of these networks did not yield six willing, available participants who met the criteria for inclusion in the study, the researcher then focused on Catholic secondary schools in two dioceses in Southern California, both of which had mandated implementation of the *Framework* beginning with the 2011-2012 academic year. She contacted Religious Studies teachers at these schools via email (Appendix C) in order to solicit their participation in this study. Teachers who did not respond to this initial email within one week received a follow-up phone call. Teachers who did not respond to this phone call within one week received a second email (Appendix D), at which point contact with them ceased. The sampling process ended when six willing participants had been identified.

All potential participants who expressed strong interest in the study received, via email, a copy of the participants' informed consent form (Appendix E). This form detailed the procedures that would occur if the individual agreed to participate in the study. In particular, it indicated that participation would involve engaging in two face-to-face interviews with the researcher, reviewing the transcripts of those interviews, and, if desired, developing and/or implementing an action plan rooted in the study's findings. Those individuals who expressed an unwillingness or inability to engage in this process received no further communication from the researcher. Those individuals who

continued to express strong interest in participating in the study were directed to bring a signed copy of the informed consent form to the first interview.

<div align="center">Interviews</div>

In conducting the first interview, which lasted approximately 70 to 105 minutes, the researcher was guided by an interview protocol (Appendix F). As detailed in this protocol, she began by collecting the signed informed consent form from the participant and by inviting her or him to select a pseudonym by which s/he would identified in the written report of the study and a pseudonym by which her or his school would be identified. The researcher reminded the participant that neither her or his actual name, nor the actual name of the school at which s/he teaches, would appear in any written documentation related to this study. Then, the researcher asked the participant to state basic demographic data about her/himself, including her or his educational background, the number of years s/he had taught Religious Studies in a U.S. Catholic secondary school, and the courses s/he taught within the past two academic years, distinguishing between *Framework* and non-*Framework* courses. After these preliminary matters were settled, the interview was guided by the following questions, each of which correlated with a research question.

Interview questions one and two sought to address research question one: How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe their experience of teaching courses based on the *Framework*?

1.   Please tell me about your experience of making the transition to teaching courses based on the USCCB *Framework*. What has been positive about the transition? What has been challenging?

2.   In implementing the *Framework* in your school, what do you think has been gained—for yourself, for your students, and/or for the wider mission and identity of your school? What do you think has been lost?

Interview questions three and four sought to address research question two: How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content they teach?

3.   Please tell me more specifically about the impact the *Framework* has had on the theological content that you teach. For example, what content did you formerly teach in non-*Framework* courses that you now do not teach? In contrast, what content are you now teaching that you did not teach prior to the *Framework*'s implementation? What do you think, and how do you feel, about these changes in the theological content you teach?

4.   If you could change anything about the *Framework*'s content—such as adding something, deleting something, or altering the placement of a course as required or as an elective—what, if any, changes would you make?

Interview question five sought to address research question three: How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe the *Framework*'s impact on the pedagogical methods they employ?

5.   Please tell me about the impact the *Framework* has had on the pedagogy you utilize in the classroom. In comparing the way in which you teach *Framework* courses and the way in which you teach, or have taught, non-*Framework* courses, what is different?   What do you think, and how do you feel, about these differences?

Interview question six sought to offer participants an open-ended opportunity to share their perspectives regarding any aspect of the *Framework* that they had not yet had the opportunity to discuss.

6.   What else would you like to say about your experience of teaching both *Framework* courses and non-*Framework* courses that we have not yet had a chance to discuss?

All six of these questions were addressed in the first interview. In order to focus the interview immediately on the participants' professional expertise as Religious Studies teachers, the interview questions were posed in the following order. The interview began with questions three and five, followed by questions four, one, and two, and ended with question six. Beginning the interview with the questions that were more narrowly focused on theology and pedagogy and only later posing the more open-ended questions helped to ensure that the interview generated data relevant to the research questions and did not become mired in tangential issues.

Following the first interview, the researcher sent the participants, via email, the transcript of that interview. In the email that accompanied the transcript (Appendix I), the researcher sought participants' feedback, comments, and corrections on the transcript and their suggestions for questions and topics to pursue in the second interview. This collaborative process of determining the agenda for the second interview sought to integrate the "interactive and dialectical" (Park, 1993) nature of PAR by giving participants a meaningful role in determining the parameters of the second interview. However, the participants did not respond to this request: no one suggested questions and topics to pursue in the second interview. Therefore, the researcher simply proceeded,

on her own, to study the transcripts from the first interviews and to generate the six sets

of questions to guide the second interviews; that is, a unique set of questions for each

participant. Unlike traditional research, in which data-gathering instruments, such as

interview protocols, must be standardized across all participants, PAR allows for greater

flexibility in tailoring an instrument to the needs and situations of each participant.

Therefore, integrating PAR into this aspect of the research design allowed the researcher

and the participant to discuss, during the second interview, topics unique to each

participant's situation. Moreover, although participants did not respond to the

researcher's emailed request for suggested questions prior to the second interview, they

did demonstrate a willingness, during the second interview, to pose questions and raise

topics other than those presented by the researcher.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

Data collection occurred in two phases. Once the participants were identified, the

researcher scheduled the first interview with each of them. Not less than one week prior

to this interview, she sent the participant an email (Appendix G) which addressed four

key items. First, it included the questions to guide the interview (Appendix H), in order

to enable the participant to give thoughtful consideration to the questions prior to the

interview. Secondly, it included, again, the participants' informed consent form, with a

reminder to the participant to read it, to email the researcher with any questions or

concerns regarding it, and to bring a signed copy of it to the first interview. Third, the

researcher invited the participant to consider a pseudonym by which s/he would be

identified during the course of his/her participation in this study and a pseudonym by

which his/her school would be identified. Finally, the email included a link to the full

text of the *Framework*, available online, so that the participant could, if s/he desired, access the document prior to the interview.

During the week prior to each interview, the researcher spent approximately 60 to 90 minutes perusing the participant's school's website. This enabled the researcher to learn some basic demographic information about the school community that, in some cases, proved to be useful during the interview. Moreover, the researcher gained some sense of the intangible ethos and culture that characterize the school and that, directly or indirectly, shape its approach to curriculum, including Religious Studies.

The researcher brought a paper copy of the full text of the *Framework* to the interview, so that both she and the participant could refer to it easily, if needed. During the approximately 70 to 105 minute interview, the researcher took brief notes regarding any topics or questions that she believed merited further attention, either later in the first interview or in the second interview. As soon as possible following the interview, the researcher recorded notes in a field journal documenting general observations, overall impressions, and any special circumstances which would not be evident in the audio recording. These observations subsequently helped to shape and inform the researcher's analysis of the written transcript. The interview was digitally recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. The researcher sent the transcript of the interview, via email, to the participant. In this email (Appendix I), the researcher invited the participant to offer feedback, comments, clarifications, and corrections regarding the transcript and, if desired, any further thoughts or reflections regarding the content of the transcript or the interview process. She also solicited suggested questions to be explored in the second interview.

The second interview occurred approximately two to six weeks following the first interview. Once the interview was scheduled, and not less than one week before it took place, the researcher sent the participant, via email, the unique set of questions to guide that particular interview. These questions, generated by the researcher based on her careful review of the transcript from the first interview, appear in Appendices J, K, L, M, N, and O, for the participants whose pseudonym was Grace, Julia, Lanie, Marshall, Rosa, and Therese, respectively. The second interview, which lasted approximately 50 to 105 minutes, gave both the participant and the researcher an opportunity to revisit any potentially fruitful avenues of conversation that surfaced, but were not adequately explored, in the first interview. The researcher again brought a paper copy of the *Framework* to this interview so that the document was readily accessible, if needed. During the second interview, the researcher again took brief notes regarding any topics or questions that she wished to ensure would be addressed before the interview concluded. Following it, she again recorded notes in a field journal in order to document general observations, overall impressions, and special circumstances. The researcher sent the participant the transcript of the second interview via email and invited her or his feedback, comments, clarifications, and corrections, and, if desired, further thoughts and reflections.

Because the researcher sought a rich, in-depth description of the participants' own perspectives and experiences, the participants were not considered to be speaking in any official capacity vis-à-vis their schools. Therefore, both interviews occurred in a setting in which the participants were able to speak freely and without reservation, that is, not at

the school sites at which they were employed. This setting was the participant's home, a room at a local university, or a café.

<p style="text-align:center">Validity and Reliability</p>

The criteria of validity and reliability hold unique meanings in qualitative research in general and in PAR in particular. Regarding qualitative research as a whole, Creswell (2007) asserted that

> I consider "validation" in qualitative research to be an attempt to assess the "accuracy" of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants…I also view validation as a distinct strength of qualitative research in that the account made through extensive time spent in the field, the detailed thick description, and the closeness of the researcher to participants in the study all add to the value or accuracy of a study. (pp. 206-207)

Regarding PAR, Park (1993) commented on the extent to which PAR has been criticized as ineffective in producing valid data: "The gist of the criticism is that not maintaining a proper distance between the researcher and the researched, as is the policy in participatory research, seriously compromises the objectivity of the data, thus destroying its validity" (pp. 16-17). Park asserted that this criticism is rooted in a positivistic view of knowledge. According to this view, valid knowledge can only be produced by keeping the researcher and the object of research separated, carefully controlling for all factors which may contaminate this objective distance. In contrast, PAR flows from a more complex, multi-faceted understanding of knowledge, which maintains that distinctions between the subject and the object of research are artificial and counterproductive, particularly given PAR's explicit goal: personal and societal liberation and transformation.

The present study sought to take account of the ways in which validity and reliability are understood in qualitative research in general and in PAR in particular.

Most notably, validity and reliability were established through the researcher's efforts to remain in regular contact, via email, with the participants, seeking their confirmation of the data generated by the study. Following each of the two interviews, the researcher asked the participants to comment on the extent to which the transcript reflected what they wished to share during the interview. They were invited to offer corrections, clarifications, and additions.

Although the results of qualitative studies are not intended to be generalizable to any larger population, having six individuals participate in this study also provided a means to validate the study's findings. In many instances, multiple participants expressed similar perspectives, described their experiences in similar ways, or offered similar critiques. Such congruencies may indicate that that particular perspective, experience, or critique does not simply represent one person's idiosyncratic view, but, rather, may constitute a characteristic shared by other members of this population. Future studies that investigate these shared characteristics through both quantitative and qualitative methodologies may yield fruitful results.

<center>Pilot Study</center>

Prior to launching this study, the researcher conducted a pilot study with one participant, with whom she conducted both a first and a second interview. As a result of the pilot study, she developed an interview protocol (Appendix F) to assist her in proceeding through the first interview in a well-organized manner and to ensure that she would not overlook important details or neglect important sub-questions. In addition, although the pilot study participant met the criteria for participation in this study, his knowledge of the *Framework* was limited to the one *Framework*-based course that he

was then teaching. Therefore, the researcher recognized that it would be helpful to have

a paper copy of the *Framework* available for reference during the interviews, if needed.

She also decided to email the participants a link to the full text of the *Framework*,

available online, prior to the first interview, so that they could, if desired, access and

review the document if they were not already very familiar with it. This may have

enabled the participants to offer more salient reflections during the interviews, yielding

richer, more meaningful data to address the research questions guiding this study.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

The researcher commenced the data analysis and coding process following the

completion and transcription of all interviews. First, she merged all of the interview

transcripts into one Microsoft Word document, titled *Interview Transcript* (C.J.

Schroeder, 2013). Then, she began phase one of the coding process. This phase involved

reading through this entire transcript four times, seeking units of text—that is, words,

phrases, sentences, or paragraphs—that addressed each of the three research questions as

well as ancillary findings. Utilizing Microsoft Word's electronic highlighting feature,

units of text that addressed research question one were highlighted in red; those that

addressed research question two, in yellow; those that addressed research question three,

in pink. Ancillary findings were highlighted in blue. The researcher then cut and pasted

all of this coded material into four new Microsoft Word documents, one for each research

question and one for ancillary findings. Each unit of text that was cut and pasted into

these new documents was identified by its page number in the *Interview Transcript* so

that the unit of text could be easily found and re-read in its original context, if needed.

The researcher then began phase two of the coding process: coding within each research question. She carefully studied the four documents in order to identify the themes and sub-themes that would address each research question, as well as ancillary findings. She classified every extracted unit of text into either a theme or sub-theme. Some themes or sub-themes were supported by only one unit of text; others were supported by numerous units of text. The researcher then organized the list of themes and subthemes that addressed each research question, as well as ancillary findings, into one document titled "Preliminary Findings" (Appendix P).

Action Plan

Maguire (1987) asserted that "the direct link between research and action is perhaps the most unique aspect of participatory research" (p. 29). Rather than seeking merely to generate knowledge, PAR explicitly aims to utilize that knowledge to effect personal change and radical social transformation. Because this study was philosophically grounded in the principles of PAR, its final phase was to attempt to engage the participants in dialogue regarding a potential action plan rooted in the study's findings. Because the participants were geographically dispersed, it was not possible for them to meet in person to engage in this conversation. Therefore, following the completion of both the data collection and data analysis phases of this study, the researcher sent the participants, via email, this study's preliminary findings; that is, the list of all of the themes and subthemes that addressed each research question, as well as ancillary findings (Appendix P). In the email that accompanied this document (Appendix Q), the researcher invited the participants to comment on the preliminary findings, to identify perceived needs that emerged from the preliminary findings, and to suggest avenues of action that could potentially address some of these identified needs. She also

asked the participants if they were willing to have their email address revealed to the other participants in order to facilitate their engagement in a shared online conversation regarding a potential action plan. Those willing to have their email address revealed were asked which email address they wanted the researcher to utilize in further communication with the group. Those unwilling to have their email address revealed were assured that they could still participate in dialogue regarding an action plan: they were directed to email their thoughts to the researcher, who would, if they agreed, share those thoughts, anonymously, with the other participants.

Approximately two weeks after the researcher had emailed the preliminary findings to the participants, she had received only a brief acknowledgment from one participant. Therefore, she sent a follow-up email (Appendix R), asking participants to confirm receipt of the preliminary findings and to verify that their email addresses were still active. Approximately one month later, she sent one final email (Appendix S) to the participants who had not yet shared any ideas for an action plan asking for their input. In this email, the researcher indicated that participants who did not respond to this final request would not be contacted again until the completion of this study, at which time the researcher would inquire as to whether they would like to receive an electronic copy of the final dissertation in PDF format.

Of the six participants, only Lanie responded to the researcher's questions that had been posed in the original email (Appendix Q) that accompanied the preliminary findings, offered concrete ideas for action, expressed a willingness to engage in online dialogue regarding such action, and indicated what email address the researcher should utilize for further communication. Julia responded to the questions and offered

suggestions for action, but, citing time constraints, did not wish to participate in dialogue regarding an action plan. She also did not want her responses to the questions or ideas for action shared with the other participants: "I don't think I want you to share my comments, they were not very 'academic' and detailed" (personal communication, January 28, 2013). Grace and Rosa offered brief responses to the researcher's questions, but did not state whether or not they wished to participate in an online conversation. They also did not indicate what email address the researcher should utilize for future communication. Marshall stated that he had no comments regarding the preliminary findings and no ideas for action; however, he did express willingness to engage in dialogue with the other participants and shared an email address to use for this purpose. Lastly, Therese did not respond at all, other than to acknowledge receipt of the preliminary findings.

Because of these rather uneven responses from participants, the shared online conversation regarding an action plan rooted in the study's findings that the researcher had originally envisioned as the final phase of this study did not occur. However, the thoughts and ideas that some participants did share are documented in chapter five. The researcher hopes that the participants, perhaps especially, but not exclusively, those who agree to receive a copy of this dissertation, may at some future time be motivated and empowered to take action on their own in a manner that is appropriate for their local context.

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

The results of this qualitative study cannot be generalized to the larger population of all Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. First, the researcher

sought as participants only those Religious Studies teachers who had taught both

Framework-based and non-*Framework* Religious Studies courses within the past two

academic years. Secondly, the researcher contacted only teachers to whom she could

conveniently gain access, given her financial constraints and limited time for travel.

These constraints resulted in a geographically homogenous sample: one participant from

northern California, four from southern California, and one from Texas. Thirdly, the

researcher explained clearly to potential participants the considerable time commitment

involved in this study, that is, two interview sessions, additional time for reviewing the

written transcripts of those sessions, and, if desired, additional time for developing and

implementing an action plan grounded in the results of the study. From this eligible,

readily accessible, and willing population, the researcher selected only six participants

who shared rich, descriptive data over the course of two interview sessions.

The teachers willing to participate in this study may have differed from the

general population of Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools.

Teachers with strong views on the *Framework*—whether favorable or unfavorable—were

perhaps more likely to participate in a study that offered them the opportunity to express

those views. Teachers who felt neutral or apathetic toward the *Framework* may have

been less motivated to participate; therefore, this study lacked an exploration of their

views.

Participant fear may have also constituted a limitation of this study. In her

dissertation on the *Framework*, Ostasiewski (2010) stated that, "Those of us who teach

Theology classes in Catholic schools are under ever increasing scrutiny by the hierarchy

of the Church….Most of us fear losing our jobs. All of us struggle with our authenticity

in the classroom" (pp. 1–2). Because of the pressures that Ostasiewski identified, it is important to consider that some participants in this study may not have answered all questions with complete honesty. Despite the researcher's assurances of confidentiality, fear of reprisals may have caused participants to censor their responses.

Lastly, three participants, without prompting from the researcher, identified the fact that data collection occurred during the summer as a potential limitation of this study. Two participants sought to explain, in the course of their interviews, why they were experiencing difficulty in summoning a response to a particular question. Their brief remarks indicated that, in the summer months, teachers are relaxing and enjoying the vacation: they are not immersed in the daily realities of the classroom. Therefore, it was, perhaps, more difficult for them to think clearly and concretely regarding questions related to their teaching. A third participant conveyed a similar sentiment to the researcher in a text message sent just prior to her second interview: "Your follow up questions were tough. My mushy summer brain had to get in gear for those questions" (personal communication, July 22, 2012). However, having acknowledged this, the summer months were, realistically, the only timeframe in which data collection could have occurred, given that the researcher was herself employed as a full-time teacher at the time the study was conducted.

Ethical Issues

The researcher obtained approval for this study from the University of San Francisco's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) (Appendix T). She complied with all the protocols that the IRBPHS required, including obtaining written, informed consent from the participants. The researcher clearly

articulated to the participants the time commitment that involvement in this study would demand: approximately 90 to 135 minutes of cumulative interview time over two interview sessions,[11] plus additional time to review and comment on the transcripts, and, if desired, additional time to develop and/or implement an action plan. She also clearly stated that their participation was strictly voluntary; that is, they may have withdrawn from the study at any time without penalty.

The researcher fully informed the participants of the benefits and risks of their participation. Regarding the former, the chief benefits were the knowledge that they had contributed to research, the opportunity to reflect deeply and critically on their experiences regarding the *Framework*, and the chance to consider possibilities for collective, transformative action. The participants did not receive any financial or material compensation for their efforts, nor were they reimbursed for any expenses they may have incurred as a result of their participation, such as transportation costs. Regarding the latter, potential risks to participants were minimal. The experiences and perspectives that they were invited to share were limited to their professional lives as Religious Studies teachers. However, participants who held strong views regarding the *Framework*—particularly if those views were negative—may have found it unsettling or upsetting to articulate those views. The researcher hoped that her presence as an empathic listener, who sought a deep, multi-faceted understanding of the participants' views, may have mitigated any potentially troubling emotions which surfaced during the interviews.

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[11] The Participants' Informed Consent Letter (Appendix E) originally stated that the first interview would last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and that the second interview would last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. However, in actuality, the length of many of the first interviews and all of the second interviews exceeded this estimation. The first interviews lasted from 73 minutes to 108 minutes; the second interviews lasted from 52 minutes to 109 minutes.

The researcher maintained the confidentiality of the identities of the participants and the identities of the schools at which they teach. In all written documentation related to this study, both the participants and the schools were referred to by pseudonyms. The location of the schools was referenced only generally; that is, "northern California," "southern California," and "Texas."

All digital recordings and digital copies of written transcripts have been kept in password-protected computer files to which only the researcher has access. Paper copies of the written transcripts have been stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home.

Researcher as the Instrument: Qualifications of the Researcher

In qualitative methodologies, the researcher is considered to be the primary research instrument (Creswell, 2007; Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2006). The researcher brings a unique perspective, including personal biases and professional expertise, to the tasks of collecting and analyzing data. Because the researcher is the lens through which interpretations of the data are proposed, it is important for the reader to be familiar with her or his background and qualifications.

Having taught Religious Studies in U. S. Catholic secondary schools for 16 years, the researcher who conducted the present study is currently employed in this capacity at Mercy High School, an all-girls Catholic secondary school in San Francisco sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy. She holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in Religious Education and Divinity, respectively. Religious Studies courses that she has taught during her career in U.S. Catholic secondary schools include Christian Lifestyles, Christian Morality, Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, Introduction to Religious Studies, Religious Themes in Literature and Film, and Women in Scripture. Because the

archdiocese in which she works has not implemented the *Framework*, she has not taught

courses based on it. However, she has authored one student textbook for a *Framework*

course and has co-authored two teaching manuals for *Framework* courses. Her extensive

experience in teaching Religious Studies in Catholic secondary school settings and her

intimate familiarity with the *Framework* qualify her to conduct the present study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of six Religious Studies

teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools regarding their experience of teaching

courses based on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB, 2008)

Curriculum Framework.[12] Specifically, the study investigated these teachers'

experiences of the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content they teach and on their

pedagogy.

This study investigated the following research questions:

1.   How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe

their experience of teaching courses based on the *Framework*?

2.   How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe

the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content they teach?

3.   How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe

the *Framework*'s impact on the pedagogical methods they employ?

Overview

This chapter will begin with a description of the six Religious Studies teachers

who participated in this study. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants'

identities to the greatest extent possible, this description will take the form of a group

profile rather than individual profiles. Following this, the researcher will report findings

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[12] The full title of this document, published in 2008 by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), is *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*.

which address each research question, as well as ancillary findings. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the study's findings.

Throughout this chapter, participants will be identified only by their pseudonyms: Rosa, Lanie, Grace, Julia, Therese, and Marshall. The names of the schools at which they teach are also pseudonymous: Rosa teaches at Ascension High School; Lanie at St. John's High School; Grace at St. Ann's Academy; Julia at St. Catherine of Siena High School; Therese at St. Martin de Porres High School; and Marshall at St. Michael's High School.

<div align="center">Group Profile of Participants</div>

The six individuals who participated in this study—five women and one man—represented 79 years of collective experience teaching Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. Their individual experience ranged from two years to 32 years. At the time the study was conducted, three were currently teaching at diocesan secondary schools and three at secondary schools sponsored by Catholic religious orders. Of these schools, three are co-educational, two are all-girls, and one is all-boys. Four of these schools are located in southern California, one in northern California, and one in Texas.

The participants' educational background, and, in particular, their theological background, varied greatly. Two held only a bachelor's degree (of those, one in Theology); three held one master's degree (of those, two in Theology); one held two master's degrees (neither in Theology); and one had completed some doctoral-level coursework in Education. Of the three participants who held no degree (neither bachelor's nor master's) in Theology, two were certified as master catechists by their

diocese. One participant held a state teaching credential, and one held a certificate in Catholic school administration.

All six participants were laypeople; that is, they were neither ordained nor vowed members of Catholic religious communities. At the time the study was conducted, three were serving as the Religious Studies department chairperson at their respective schools.

<div align="center">Research Question #1: Findings</div>

Research Question #1: How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe their experience of teaching courses based on the *Framework*?

In describing their experience of teaching courses based on the *Framework*, this study's participants gave voice to a wide range of observations, emotions, concerns, questions, and analyses. In reporting the findings that address this research question, the researcher will begin by presenting participants' thoughts regarding the impact of the *Framework*, both positive and negative, on schools, teachers, and students. Then, she will proceed to report other themes and subthemes which illuminate the participants' rich variety of experiences and perspectives.

<div align="center">*Positive Impact of the* Framework</div>

Positive Impact on Schools and Teachers

Participants identified a number of ways in which implementation of the *Framework* has had a positive impact on their schools, their departments, and on themselves as teachers. Three participants—Rosa, Therese, and Lanie—identified the standardization of the Religious Studies curriculum at their schools as a positive impact of the *Framework*. The *Framework*'s implementation has made it more likely that

students who are taking the same course, but with a different teacher, are learning similar

content and engaging in similar learning experiences. When, due to a class schedule

change, a student moves into the class of a different Religious Studies teacher, this

transition occurs more smoothly than it had in pre-*Framework* years. Therese

commented on this phenomenon in the following quote:

> What I think will be a gain, is having more commonality in the student learning experience…this happened to me when I was teaching Scripture. I would get kids from a teacher who was very meditative, the monk, and I couldn't rely on them to really know much of anything except that God loved them. (p. 226)[13]

In contrast, now that the *Framework* has been implemented, Therese expressed that "the

commonality is good" (p. 226) for student learning. She observed that the tenth grade

students, who had all completed the ninth grade *Framework* curriculum the prior year,

experienced "a certain comfort level" (p. 226) as they began tenth grade Religious

Studies, knowing that they had all shared a common background and had all learned

similar content.

Lanie, who serves as her school's Religious Studies department chairperson,

expressed similar sentiments in describing how she took the opportunity that

implementing the *Framework* presented to provide a more consistent experience for

students regardless of which teacher they may have for a particular Religious Studies

course:

> I have 10 people in my department. Some of them only teach one course…they're in varying degrees of qualifications to teaching that and what I was finding is there was not a continuity across the board: not all freshmen were getting the same thing, not all sophomores were getting the same thing…. moving to the *Framework*, in that respect, I felt would give a certain continuity that everyone would be doing the same, the same thing. We'd be all starting fresh, so maybe some of the stuff you did before might fit, but we're not just gonna do

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[13] Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations in chapter 4 are taken from the following document: Schroeder, C.J. (2013) *Interview Transcript*.

what we did before. We're going with this. So, the intention was to get freshmen, sophomore teachers more on the same page. (p. 62)

Therefore, Lanie identified as a clear benefit of the *Framework*'s implementation

…that all students are getting the same education.…You can ask any student a question from freshmen Religion, and they should all have the same response, so that's a good thing.…it's the same message.…before the *Framework*, that would not have happened. (p. 69)

Her hope is that the students at her school will "gain a continuity or a clarity of Catholicism.…overall at the end of the four years I think they will have a certain clarity of what it means to be a Catholic" (p. 68).

Another positive impact of the *Framework*, identified by Rosa, has been imbuing the Religious Studies curriculum with greater legitimacy than it had prior to the *Framework*'s implementation. Rosa commented that parents, students, and colleagues in other academic departments often hold an inaccurate view of the Religious Studies department: "people think we don't teach anything, that we're just all touchy-feely and huggy-lovey" (p. 3). She maintained that the *Framework* has the potential to give Religious Studies "general legitimacy as a core class" (p. 3): legitimacy in the eyes of various constituencies, including colleagues, parents, and students. For students, in particular, she maintained that the *Framework* has helped to "develop more respect for Religion as a viable class, not just something you blow off and decide how much you're going to study for the final based on what grade you want" (p. 22).

Lastly, both Julia and Therese, who serve as Religious Studies department chairpersons at their respective schools, credited the *Framework* with bringing greater collaboration and discussion among the members of their department. Julia, of St. Catherine of Siena High School, commented on this phenomenon at length in the following quote:

One of the gains that comes to mind isn't so much driven by the content, itself, of the *Framework*….it's driven by the opportunity we have as a department to now have to sit down and really with a magnifying glass look at what are we teaching, why, how are we gonna do it and how is that gonna carry throughout the four years. Where I think we got into some comfortable places and it hasn't been challenged for a while. So, you know, there's a value to that….our own, I think, faith, and our own pedagogy and our own philosophies within our school and in our classrooms are up for discussion. They're up for challenge, and it's causing us to re-evaluate what is important, how we're gonna teach it, how it's gonna affect the students. We're watching much more closely on assessment, what are they learning, and that's all because the bishops brought in the *Framework*. So it causes us to re-examine and reconsider and reconvene, which, that's what education is about. It's about forward motion. (p. 138)

Therese's school, St. Martin de Porres, utilizes professional learning communities (PLC's) as a means of fostering collaboration among teachers. When St. Martin's implemented the *Framework*, she used the PLC time block to work with her department on *Framework*-related matters. For example, teachers discussed challenges they were encountering in teaching a *Framework*-based course for the first time; shared ideas for pedagogical strategies to teach *Framework* content effectively; and engaged in "really substantive discussions" (p. 225), both practical and philosophical, regarding the *Framework*. Therese contrasted this situation with the prevailing ethos which characterized her department members' interactions with one another prior to the *Framework*'s implementation: "We tended to be a lot of individual teachers who loved spending time with each other and talking about this idea or another but not being very intentional about it as teams. It was more informal collegiality" (p. 225). She credited the *Framework* with bringing the "huge gain" (p. 226) of "forcing the collegiality to be much more intentional" (p. 226).

Perceived Positive Impact on Students

Participants in this study identified a number of ways in which they believe that the *Framework* has had a positive impact on their students. For example, both Grace and

Rosa maintained that the *Framework* fosters students' religious literacy. As Grace, of St.

Ann Academy, remarked, "It does give them a structured understanding of true Church

teaching and how to use the right language" (p. 105). In enabling her students to

converse intelligently about theological doctrine, she expressed hope that the *Framework*

may help her students "to know what they say they believe in, [to] the highest level" (p.

90). Similarly, Rosa commented that the *Framework* provides students with "a working

vocabulary…like Catholic literacy" (p. 23), so that they are able to read, intelligently,

publications like *America* magazine or *U.S. Catholic*. She maintained that this literacy

will serve them well in the future whether or not they continue to practice the Catholic

faith:

> If they want to stay Catholic, it helps them understand what it is they believe in
> and if they're gonna decide to be something else, they know why. And I think
> that's equally important, instead of just saying, oh, I'm gonna become Christian
> [join another Christian denomination], because it looks more fun. They know
> what they don't like about being Catholic. (p. 23)

Both Marshall and Therese praised the positive impact of the *Framework*'s

Christocentric focus. Marshall, of St. Michael's School, has experienced the

Framework's Christocentrism as a vital counterbalance to what he described as a "new

age mentality" (p. 173) that he believes presents Jesus as a thinker, a philosopher, and a

teacher, but not as divine. In his first year of teaching *Framework*-based courses,

Marshall found that many of his students experienced profound discomfort when they

first encountered this Christocentric curriculum:

> I think at the freshmen level it's difficult for them, at first. They are struggling
> greatly with this concept. Everything within them, everything that they've been
> taught socially and within their culture tells them to rebel against this. To fight
> this, to fight these urges to accept an absolute claim about Christ being not just
> Jesus of Nazareth, but being Christ, and to accept that claim, and everything that
> they've been taught challenges this, and so they push against it. So when I teach
> this, and when I teach it to them, there's a lot of like, oh, you see the looks on

> their faces, that they're pushing against it, that their initial feeling is that of discomfort. I think they've been used to a lot of room for wiggle in that ever-changing globalized society. When you try to speak with any sort of rigidity, that there's a tendency to be viewed as that rigid, uncompromising, un-understanding, uninclusive, and so, you know, it's awkward to them, because they want to do the whole peace, love, happiness. Why does it have to be just him, why can't it just be all, you know, coexisting or whatever you want to call those things. So they fight against it, initially. (p. 177)

However, Marshall expressed confidence that, in the long run, the *Framework*'s

Christocentrism will have a positive impact on students:

> I hope if this study were to be done five, six, seven, eight to ten years from now that you would see that initial backpush that I'm seeing with some of the guys, some of the students, by the time they reach their senior year, will become a comfort zone. And that it will through their own maturity and questioning and all this stuff, become more of a real, true personality, or spirituality, in connection with Christ, with their faith…. I think it has very real potential for that. (p. 177)

> Therese also asserted that if the *Framework* is "not just implemented on a head

basis" (p. 226), its Christocentrism will help students to develop a relationship with

Christ and to "get an appreciation for how Christ is really at the center of our faith" (p.

226). She maintained that this immersion in the person of Christ benefits both Catholic

students and students of other faiths. For Catholics, it provides the accurate information

about Catholic beliefs that one would expect to learn in a Catholic school setting, all in

the context of "a very definite inclusive message" (p. 243). For students of other faiths,

especially students who belong to other Christian denominations, it helps to clarify that

Catholics are, in fact, Christian:

> Leading kids to a deeper understanding of how Christocentric a lot of what the Church believes is kind of an awakening point for many of our kids who are non-Catholic, 'cause they view us as non-Christocentric. And so I think that's kind of a great message. (p. 217)

> Participants identified several other ways in which they believe the *Framework*

has had a positive impact on their students. Marshall noted the opportunity the

Framework provides for students to satisfy their curiosity about matters of Catholic Church policy, governance, and organization. Therese commented on students' growing ability to navigate the books, chapters, and verses of the Bible. In addition, Lanie utilized the implementation of the *Framework* as an occasion for allowing students to experience firsthand the way in which a Religious Studies course develops. She invited representatives from the company which publishes her school's Religious Studies textbooks to visit her classes and talk with her students, in order to hear their feedback on the *Framework* in general and on the textbooks in particular. She maintained that it is "good that the students are feeling like they have a part in their education, that they can comment on the information we're learning" (p. 59).

<div align="center">

Negative Impact of the Framework

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Negative Impact on Schools and Teachers

Five of this study's six participants offered in-depth reflections on the ways in which the *Framework* has had a negative impact on their schools, their departments, and on themselves as teachers. Lanie expressed disappointment with having to let go of certain aspects of a curriculum that she and her colleagues had enjoyed teaching and that they believed enabled their students to learn: "We were not doing a bad job before….It wasn't broke, and the curriculums that we had developed were working. The students were learning. So that's been hard to kind of let go of that" (p. 64). Over the many years of her teaching career, Lanie had developed a vast quantity of resources and materials, much of which she can no longer use: "That's hard to let go of….I put a lot of work into these, and so all of a sudden it's like, oh well" (p. 74). Similarly, Therese discussed her experience, as department chairperson, of trying to manage her department members'

responses to the *Framework*, many of whom asked her directly, "Why is somebody telling me what to do? Why can't I do what I did before?" (p. 228). She remarked that many of her teachers had enjoyed teaching a year-long Scripture course and a year-long Morality and Social Justice course, both of which had been required in the prior curriculum but which do not exist in the *Framework*. Therese observed that these teachers feel a profound sense of loss: "For people who are really passionate about that, [it] leaves them feeling like they lost something. And if they feel they lost something, that loss translates to their students" (p. 228).

Grace, Julia, and Lanie all identified the loss of creativity in the classroom as an impact of the *Framework*; Julia and Lanie also remarked on the loss of autonomy in the classroom. As department chairperson in the years prior to the *Framework*'s implementation, Lanie had enjoyed relative autonomy not only in her own classroom, but also in determining the four-year Religious Studies scope and sequence at her school. The implementation of the *Framework* necessitated that she relinquish some control, and she expressed sadness at the "lack of ownership" (p. 65) she feels as a result.

Lanie asserted that her ability to engage in questions about course content and curriculum planning has "kind of been taken away" (p. 66) since the *Framework* has been implemented. Prior to the *Framework*, she empowered her teachers to develop courses about which they were passionate, such as a senior elective called "Spiritual Journey." Due to the *Framework*, the content of this elective has significantly changed, and Lanie remarked that the teachers who developed that course experience this change as a loss. Moreover, she knows that some of her teachers are not at all passionate about some of the

Framework courses, and she expressed concern about the impact that those teachers' lack of passion may have on students:

> I have one teacher who says "I don't know if I can teach the Church. You know, with what's going on in the Church right now, I don't know if I can stand up there and be positive about the Church." And, you see, the students can pick up on that when you're not coming from your heart, so that's gonna be…a big change for people. (p. 65)

She further remarked that "when you're teaching something that your heart's not really into it, it comes across to the students very easily, and they will make it much harder for you to teach it to them" (p. 87).

In articulating what they perceive to be the *Framework*'s negative impact on themselves as teachers, two participants—Rosa and Lanie—spoke quite personally about their own fears, concerns, and frustrations. Rosa expressed concern about her job security if her students do not learn the *Framework*'s content thoroughly enough to score well on the ACRE[14] test. Her school, Ascension High School, adopted the ACRE test during the 2011-2012 academic year, in conjunction with their implementation of the *Framework* at the ninth grade level. All ninth graders took the test that year as a baseline. Rosa explained that her principal shared the results of the test at a faculty meeting, reviewing student responses to each question. Because these same students will take the test again during their junior year, Rosa fears repercussions for herself and her colleague if the students do not score well:

> When they do it again it will be a reflection of Ms. X and I, because Ms. X and I teach freshmen and sophomores. So what they do junior year is going to reflect back on us. I really don't like that. (p. 9)

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[14]Assessment of Catechesis/Religious Education, published by the National Catholic Educational Association. The current secondary-level version addresses 80% of the *Framework*'s content; the revised version, which will debut in September, 2013, will "align fully" (Schmitt, 2012, p. 1) with the *Framework*.

Rosa stated quite bluntly that "I sure as heck am not losing my job over this" (p. 9) and that, in the interest of protecting her job, she is "darn well gonna teach this book. Make sure I teach everything, and they're gonna learn it, even if it means nothing to them" (p. 31).

Rosa also fears the influence of conservative parents, who could potentially endanger her job if they do not believe her to be teaching the *Framework* in accordance with their expectations. She described her concerns about these parents in the following quote:

> We're getting more and more of the home-schoolers that are the very fundamental Catholic who are only coming back because of this whole new slant, you know, that they want them in an all-girls, but they want a very strict, very Catholic [education]….you better be toeing the line. So I don't want anybody coming back and saying they didn't teach this, or they didn't do this, definitely. I have a lot of years of tuition to pay [for her own children]. (pp. 31-32)

In considering the way in which the *Framework* has been implemented in her diocese, Lanie reflected, at length, on how she has experienced this process as disrespectful of both her personal integrity and her professional "expertise in teaching teenagers" (p. 79). First, she stated her belief that the bishops made little to no effort to consult "those of us who are in the trenches" (p. 61) as they developed the *Framework*. She situated this belief in the context of her many years of experience in Catholic secondary schools, years that have been characterized by little to no contact with diocesan leadership:

> I currently have a bishop that has not spoken to me, a superintendent of schools that has not spoken to me, and I've been working in this diocese for 24 years, and I've been department chair that entire time. Not a phone call, nothing. (p. 61)

Then, she expressed openness to dialogue with the bishop regarding the Religious Studies curriculum at St. John's if he were to visit the school and indicate a willingness to engage in such dialogue. She envisioned this scenario in the following quote:

> Had…a bishop, or had the superintendent of schools, come to visit St. John's and really examined our Religion curriculum and [said], you know what, this is not working, you're not covering this, and you're not covering that, and, you know, this is just not what we expect to be taught in a Catholic high school. OK, then I'm fine with, let's change it then. (p. 73)

Lanie then proceeded to contrast this scenario with the reality that she has experienced, reflecting on her emotions, her spirituality, and her self-understanding with regard to her vocation:

> He [the bishop] has not visited our school. He has not come into our classrooms. He has not talked to our students. So I don't know how he can say that, you know, this is appropriate, this works. It just…I would never have that kind of presumption to just go to a school and say, oh, I think you should be implementing this and this and this and this and this—I don't want to talk to your kids, I don't want to talk to you, whatever, just—I know. That kind of arrogance, it's just, to me it's arrogance. So, yes, I do feel quite disrespected. Like my, and it's not just being disrespected. Teaching Religious Studies, for me, is a vocation, it's a calling. It is very connected to my own religious life, my own spirituality, and so to kind of "dis" that is more, I guess, upsetting, than if it were something that wasn't so connected to my identity and my soul. I think that's what makes it even more difficult. It's as though, like, this, like they're looking at this, like maybe this is just a little job I do on the side, like I'm not coming at it with the same commitment and passion that they have, that have called them to be a bishop or a priest or to serve in the Church. To me, it's the same calling, it's the same God, and my vocation should be equally respected as their vocation is. And probably if it were just a job, like when I was working at the bank, and someone was criticizing, you know, how I kept my drawer, or whatever, well, OK. It's not gonna hit me personally, but this is what I've devoted my life to. So I guess I take it a little bit more personally….Like somehow they're the only ones who have the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, like somehow because I'm a woman and I'm not a religious, the Holy Spirit can't penetrate this secular….I guess that's really what is getting me. That somehow because it is all, it's all from the same God, it's all the same, it's the same revelation, and to presume that, that they somehow have more of a connection to the Holy Spirit—I just, I don't believe that's true…. I think I'll stop there. I think I could go on and on. I feel strongly about that, yes. So it's not done well for uplifting the people that are serving in the Church, especially in religious education. (p. 80)

Finally, Lanie stated that "I don't think that the way in which this *Framework*

came about, and the way in which it's being implemented in some dioceses, is the way in

which Jesus would do it" (p. 80). When asked by the researcher how she believes Jesus

would have implemented the *Framework*, she offered the following reflection, grounded

in her understanding of Jesus's ministry as recorded in the Gospels:

> I think Jesus was, just from my experience in my life and in reading
> Scripture…he was much more kind of aware of and present to those that were
> with him, like the 12. I mean, he talked to them, he included them, you know,
> three of them got to go up to the mountain with him for the
> Transfiguration….Certainly Jesus respected where people were coming from, he
> respected people's sufferings. I think of the, just the Gospel two Sundays ago
> about the woman touching Jesus' cloak, and her being, you know, when she
> realized what had happened, of being fearful. And at first it sounds like Jesus
> saying "Who touched me?" upset—and then it's this, you know, kind of, no, he
> wanted to know because he wanted to, to see this woman. He wanted to have a
> conversation, you know, to say, "You're healed, your faith has healed you." I
> mean to me that is a perfect example. Here is this woman who's a nobody--she's
> not one of the 12, she's not one of the disciples, she's not even really part of this
> whole crowd. She's there hoping to be healed, and Jesus responds to her. So,
> when I say, I don't think they're doing it the way Jesus would, that's what I'm
> talking about. I think Jesus would've come down and said, "Lanie, let's talk
> about religious education at St. John's." Rather than just giving some directive
> from a chair in [name of diocese]. (p. 81)

Because the *Framework* is in its very early years of implementation, Julia

expressed concern that whatever negative impact the *Framework* may have on her

school, her department, and herself may not yet be evident. She stated that the

Framework has detracted from her department's ability to tailor curriculum to their

students' specific needs and speculated that this shift may result in as yet undetermined

losses:

> It's definitely one of our concerns. Are we losing something? Because we were
> able to identify where the kids were and what they needed according to our socio-
> economic class, according to our different parishes that feed into our school, you
> know, we had a sense of that and we could just decide and define what we did as
> a school in the Religious Studies department for them. And now we can't. And
> so, you know, it's a concern. Where is the *Framework* taking us, where are we

gonna end up, are we gonna like it, is it gonna be valuable, are there gonna be gaps and holes, are they gonna be further from their faith than where they are, or are they gonna be closer? Those are definite concerns, and we can't even begin to answer those now. But, we have articulated them many times, and mostly that articulation ends with "we'll just keep an eye on it." We'll keep assessing and evaluating and seeing where we are. (p. 137)

Perceived Negative Impact on Students

In discussing their perceptions of the *Framework*'s negative impact on their students, four of this study's participants offered reflections on the ways in which they believe that the *Framework* fails to meet adolescents' developmental needs, both intellectual needs and spiritual/religious needs. Two participants theorized that the *Framework* may actually be counterproductive, impeding students' growth in faith. In addition, three participants each identified one additional way in which they perceive that the *Framework* has had a negative impact on their students.

The Framework *does not meet adolescents' developmental needs.*

Four participants commented on the *Framework*'s high academic standards and speculated that these standards may be too high for many or most of their students. Rosa compared the move from Religion courses in the elementary grades, which she described as "I love Jesus, Jesus loves me" (p. 8), to the ninth grade *Framework*-based courses as "kind of like if you were to take them from Pre-Algebra and throw them into Honors Algebra II" (p. 3). She stated that her students struggle to comprehend very basic historical concepts, such as the fact that Jesus was not born until after all of the events that the Old Testament[15] narrates, and yet the *Framework*, which she characterized as "written at an Honors or AP level" (p. 26), asks them to be conversant with fairly

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[15] The researcher recognizes that, in academia, the term "Hebrew Scriptures" is generally preferred over "Old Testament." However, in order to minimize confusion by maintaining consistency with the language of the *Framework*, she has opted to utilize "Old Testament" throughout this dissertation.

advanced theological vocabulary, such as magisterium, kenosis, theotokos, religious truth, and hypostatic union. Regarding students' ability to learn this material, she maintained that "They're too young. They're just starting abstract thinking. They have a 14-year-old brain. And we're asking them to do this deep, abstract—really understanding the Trinity….I don't think physically a lot of them can do it" (p. 5). She also stated that many of her students are not yet able to think logically.

Rosa discussed her efforts to educate students, parents, and colleagues about the *Framework*'s academic demands, especially as compared to those of Ascension High School's prior curriculum. Regarding students, she expressed a desire for them to understand that Religious Studies is "not gonna be the easy A….you have to study this, the same as you do every other subject….they need to understand this isn't 'oh, let's pray, let's meditate,' kind of thing. It's stuff they've gotta know to pass" (pp. 8-9). Regarding parents, Rosa remarked that:

> We need to explain to the parents that this is a core subject. This is the same as Honors Algebra. I mean I had a mother who wanted to know if her daughter could be taken out of Honors Religion. We don't have Honors Religion. This is just basic Religion. But, because it is so difficult and it's just….too big of a jump. (p. 8)

Lastly, regarding her colleagues, Rosa explained that she had to "justify" (p. 26) herself to her school's counseling staff, who asked her why so many of her students, at various points during the year, were failing. She stated that she and other Religious Studies teachers, who teach the entire student body in mixed-ability classes, "jump[ed] through hoops" (p. 8) in order for students not to fail the *Framework*-based courses and experienced stress when students did not do well.

Lanie expressed particular concern about the *Framework*'s placement of Scripture in the ninth grade year, which, in St. John's prior curriculum, had been taught in the tenth grade. Lanie described her school's prior curriculum as "more age-appropriate" (p. 65) than the *Framework*, and she asserted that neither she nor her department members are "convinced that freshmen are intellectually at a place that they can understand exegesis or Biblical interpretation" (p. 56). In recounting her colleagues' experience, she stated that:

> They felt that many of the concepts were beyond the students' intellectual abilities at that time, where they are freshmen year….That's a concern—how do you teach the Catholic understanding of Scripture to students who are still very much in a literal mindset? And, so, that…I would say is my biggest issue about it not maybe being age-appropriate in the sense of that intellectual development. (p. 77)

Other *Framework* content that Lanie believes to be beyond the reach of her ninth grade students' intellectual abilities includes questions related to the phenomenon of human suffering: why there is suffering, and the extent to which God is involved in causing and/or preventing suffering. Although she maintained that "there are simplistic answers that you can give to that" (p. 77), which a ninth grade student could grasp, she believes that such issues are better addressed in the junior or senior year, when students are more capable of fully exploring ambiguous and complex topics.

At three different points during her first interview, Therese described the *Framework* as "heady" (p. 213, p. 214, p. 217), especially for 14 and 15 year olds. She further stated that the *Framework* is "just like bullet point, bullet point, bullet point" (p. 217). Both her students and her colleagues in her department have struggled to adjust to this new reality. Teachers, in particular, had to resist the urge to supplement the *Framework*'s content with non-*Framework* material that they had been accustomed to teaching in prior years, because to do so would have made the curriculum even more

overwhelming for students: "So that was a challenge….getting over that so that the kids didn't suffer, because I think it's a heady enough curriculum for 14 and 15 year olds without us getting our own stuff in on top of it" (p. 214).

Both Rosa and Therese expressed particular concern regarding the extent to which the *Framework*'s first semester is beyond the academic and intellectual reach of students who are just beginning their secondary school career. Rosa suggested that "they need to make the first semester easier or shorter" (p. 13), and Therese, who described the first semester as "heavy-duty" (p. 232) and "packed" (p. 254), maintained that "it would've been great if everything just got bumped forward a semester" (p. 216). Therese did, however, express confidence that as students continue to progress through the curriculum into sophomore and junior years, that they will be developmentally capable of accessing the *Framework*'s content.

Although Julia did not share the views of Rosa, Lanie, and Therese regarding the extent to which the *Framework* may not match students' intellectual abilities, she did express concern about the extent to which the *Framework* may not meet students' spiritual or religious needs. She stated that she has experienced frustration in attempting to utilize the *Framework* as a means of cultivating in-depth formation in her students. In particular, she articulated a sense of unease regarding the *Framework*'s dogmatic approach:

> I don't want that to be a negative thing. Dogma is dogma….but for freshmen, it's tough….it's hard to identify that with where they are in their life and what they need to hear and where they need to be in their spirituality. (p. 128)

She described the *Framework* as a "valuable tool" (p. 140), but a tool that teachers have to learn how to make appropriate for their students, and that, at least to some extent, does not offer students what they need in order to grow in their faith. Moreover, Julia drew

attention to Religious Studies teachers' responsibility to support students in their faith

development, even if that support must come at the expense of, or even in spite of, the

Framework:

> I really don't like the idea of using the *Framework* as an excuse for our kids not to
> get what we think they need in their faith and in their faith walk, because I think
> it's our responsibility to work it in there. It doesn't matter what they give us to
> teach. That's what we need to do. (p. 140)

In both of her interviews, Julia also expressed skepticism about the bishops' grasp of

adolescent faith development. In the first interview, she stated that "I think they [the

bishops] just don't understand where today's adolescents are and what they need in order

to grow in their Catholic faith" (p. 134). Near the very end of the second interview, she

returned to this same point: "I just want to emphasize one more time that when I look at

the *Framework*, it's not evident to me that the bishops understand where the students are

and what they need" (p. 154).

   The Framework *may be counterproductive.*

   Rosa raised questions regarding the extent to which the *Framework*'s

Christocentrism and "dry" (p. 52) approach may actually impede students' growth in

faith. She articulated these questions in the following exchange with the researcher:

> Rosa: I mean, they know a lot about Jesus by the time they're done, and I
>   think…the only thing is, are they over it? Does it foster it, or does it
>   hinder it? Because does it get to be that you talk about it so much they
>   start to become numb to it and don't listen, or…
> Carrie: Is that a concern of yours, that that could happen?
> Rosa: Yes, I think so because they joke about it already, that, oh, you know,
>   again? So that's where you have to make it applicable to what they're
>   doing, because otherwise… if you just stick with this [gesturing to the
>   *Framework*], it's not enough. Because they're just gonna turn you off, it's
>   just like—didn't we already talk about this? (p. 40)

Rosa also speculated that the bishops may have promulgated such a Christocentric

curriculum in an effort to staunch the flow of young people who are converting from

Catholicism to other branches of Christianity. If this theory is correct, she maintained

that the bishops had strategized poorly, for "they think by making it more Jesus, they're

gonna accomplish that. But, I don't think they're going about it the right way, cause I

think they're just making it so dry" (p. 52).

Julia's experience with the *Framework* revealed a fundamental contradiction

between her perception of the bishops' goals in producing this document and the lived

reality of her teaching. Despite the *Framework*'s strongly Christocentric content—and

the bishops' concomitant desire that students grow closer to the person of Christ—Julia

has struggled, in teaching the *Framework*, to maintain Christ-centeredness in her

classroom. She explained this dilemma in the following exchange:

> Julia: This is kind of the, the paradox I guess, if that's the right word, is that I
> think they want it to, they want it to be much more Christ-centered.
> Carrie: They being, the bishops?
> Julia: Yes, the bishops, thank you for clarifying. The authors, the bishops, they
> want it to be Christ-centered, but with everything else that goes into
> teaching this *Framework*, I think it gets a little lost.
> Carrie: It being, Christ?
> Julia: Yes.
> Carrie: That is a paradox. That is the right word. (p. 135)

Julia expressed appreciation for the *Framework*'s Christ-centeredness, asserting that "I

think our youth need it" (p. 141), but, like Rosa, she believes that the bishops may have

miscalculated in determining how best to attain their goals:

> I don't think it's [Christ-centeredness] in here in a manner that is going to have
> the kind of formation that the bishops were looking for….that's my impression, is
> that that was one of their goals. It is in here, but it's not written in the *Framework*
> in a way that's going to translate into the students having….a stronger Christ-
> centered faith than what they came in with or what they were getting in years past.
> (p. 141)

Other features of the *Framework* that Julia feared may impede students' growth in faith

included the amount of content it contains and its lack of a logical, linear progression

through that content. She maintained that all of these factors, combined, may cause students' faith development to regress: "I think they're losing a stronghold, which they really didn't have, on Bible, and, even some of…their basic spirituality that they've come in with, when we have to start teaching the *Framework* (p. 129).

Other perceived negative impacts on students.

Three participants each identified one additional way in which they perceive that the *Framework* has had a negative impact on their students. Lanie expressed reservations about the *Framework*'s effectiveness, as compared to her school's prior curriculum, in bringing students to a relationship with God or with Christ; Julia has experienced the structure of the *Framework*'s content as non-linear and therefore confusing, both for herself and for students; and, Rosa reflected on the particular difficulties of teaching *Framework*-based courses in an all-girls environment. The researcher will present data relevant to each of these, in turn.

Lanie expressed confidence in the effectiveness of St. John's pre-*Framework* curriculum in helping students to grow in their relationship with God. She cited the following evidence as the basis for this confidence:

> We've had a number of students convert to Catholicism, because of our program. We've had students enter religious life. We have many students that are working for the Church, that have gone into teaching in Catholic schools. So, I mean, to me, it's like the fruits of your labor. You look and see, well, what are our graduates doing? And then, those that have converted to Catholicism because of their experience at St. John's—that says something. So that's why I think our, the curriculum we were using was built over many years of people using their expertise to formulate a curriculum that was effective. (p. 73)

In contrast, she conveyed a sense of caution and hesitancy regarding the relative value of the *Framework*: "I'm not convinced that it's effective…I'm open, they may be right, but, you know, something in my 32 years' experience is saying 'mmm….I don't know'" (pp.

72-73). Lanie concluded by quantifying her own internal stance with regard to the *Framework* as 60% favorable toward the *Framework*, feeling cautiously optimistic about its potential to lead students to a deeper relationship with God, and 40% uncertain about the *Framework*, wondering whether it will be as effective for her students as the school's prior curriculum had been.

Julia characterized the structure of the *Framework*'s content as "bouncy" (p. 124) and "jumpy" (p. 125). She explained that concepts are introduced, then abandoned, and then returned to at various points, creating a situation in which "it doesn't feel smooth, it doesn't feel congruent…. it really doesn't layer and build on itself" (p. 125). When asked by the researcher if she meant that the *Framework* lacked a linear progression, Julia responded affirmatively. Because she finds her ninth graders, in particular, to be "very concrete learners" (p. 125), Julia has observed that they cannot synthesize these many discrete pieces of information about a particular topic or concept—presented at different points in the curriculum—into a coherent understanding. As she moves through the curriculum, she also struggles to assess, with accuracy, the extent to which her students are moving with her:

> The curriculum itself does a lot of forward and back….not only are you kind of moving forward and then coming back and then retouching on issues as you go throughout the two courses in the freshman year, you're also not quite sure who's come how far forward with you. It's very tricky. (p. 124)

Rosa identified a number of moral issues about which her students, who are all girls, frequently ask her questions. These include the rights of gay and lesbian people, including the right to marry; abortion; rape; divorce; in vitro fertilization; and contraception, including emergency contraception. Although Rosa expressed her firm commitment to present accurately the Catholic Church's official teachings on these and

other matters, she maintained that the *Framework* provides little help or guidance for her

in navigating these complex, contemporary topics: "As far as the *Framework* goes, they

don't even go there" (p. 40). Regarding the issue of abortion in particular, Rosa posed

these questions: "If a girl chooses that, how do we help her?...So the Church says she's

excommunicated. What does that mean? What does forgiveness mean?" (p. 16). Rosa

stated that in an all-girls environment, these are the types of issues and questions that

surface in a Religious Studies classroom and, in failing to address these questions in a

helpful and meaningful manner, the *Framework* manifests a lack of attention to girls'

needs and concerns. As indicated in the following exchange with the researcher, she

attributed this lacuna to the *Framework*'s roots in the all-male leadership of the Church:

> Rosa: I just think because men write it, men run it…
> Carrie: What's the "it"? Men write…
> Rosa: They write, they wrote the curriculum. They think they know everything.
> They have to look at it from a male perspective, 'cause they really, they're
> not even married. They don't have any experience at all with the
> experience of women. (p. 52)

In reflecting on Ascension High School's mission, which includes empowering

girls to respect themselves and to exercise leadership in a moral and ethical manner, Rosa

further stated that "the main thing that it's [the *Framework*] missing is respect for

women. I don't think there's anything in there, there's like, our good Catholic, honoring

the body, but there's not respect for women, for women to respect themselves" (p. 25).

Therefore, she maintained that the *Framework* does not help her department or her school

to attain this aspect of their mission. She imagined that the situation might be different if

one were teaching the *Framework* in an all-boys environment: "I don't know what it's

like at an all-boys school, but I think they feel, the boys feel very empowered, because

everything, they're in an all-boys environment, learning about a Church that's pretty

much a male-dominated Church" (pp. 51-52). Rosa also expressed a desire that the *Framework* focus less on the magisterium or hierarchy of the Church—which she described as "not always the greatest thing" (p. 16)—and more on women's roles in the Church.

<div align="center">*Too Much Content, Not Enough Time*</div>

Four of the study's participants experienced teaching *Framework*-based courses as a rush to cover a large amount of content within a very limited timeframe. Rosa, who described herself and her colleague as "panicked" (p. 13) over the amount of content the *Framework* presented, stated that "I just feel like you have to just keep moving" (p. 30). As a result, she could not teach the course material in the level of detail to which she had been accustomed prior to the *Framework*, and she feared that her students were not learning or retaining content that she was asking them to absorb so quickly. This situation took an emotional toll, as Rosa described in the following quote: "We're supposed to do all of this stuff and be accountable for all this stuff. We can't do everything. We're not God. We're not omnipotent. We can't be everywhere. So it gets difficult" (p. 12). When asked by the researcher whether she found this situation to be frustrating, Rosa responded affirmatively. Rosa also commented on the additional stress involved in teaching *Framework*-based courses for the first time during the same year in which the new translation of the Roman Missal[16] debuted. The task of educating students about the changes in the language of the creeds and in the assembly's responses during Mass fell to an already-overextended Religious Studies department: "Even when I did the Roman Missal, it was just 'wham, bam, thank you ma'am.' Even though we had this

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[16] The third edition of the Roman Missal, a new translation of the Roman Catholic Mass, was fully implemented in the English-speaking world on the first Sunday of Advent, 2011.

huge thing we were supposed to do, I didn't have time....there just wasn't enough time" (p. 30).

At the time of her second interview, Rosa was preparing to teach the sophomore *Framework* courses for the first time during the following academic year. As she mapped out the sophomore curriculum, she anticipated that she would need to maintain the same fast pace as she had in teaching the freshmen: "I'm…combining chapters within like a week and a half period. That's still boom, boom, boom, boom. But when you get down to it, that's all the room there is" (p. 45).

St. John's High School implemented the *Framework* in both the ninth and tenth grade years simultaneously. Lanie, who taught the tenth grade curriculum, did not get to the second semester content—the Church—at all, because "there was just too much content to cover" (p. 55). When her students asked her, around Easter, if they would ever use the textbook on the Church that they purchased, she advised them to sell it back to the bookstore. Based on this experience, she expressed a desire that the *Framework* contain less content and, instead, focus on what is most essential for students to learn: "For many of them this is the last religious education they're gonna receive. So let's make sure they've got the tools that they need to live a life of faith out of that" (p. 67).

Julia had a similar experience as Lanie, in that she covered only half of the first semester *Framework* curriculum. Therese also commented on her effort and struggle to teach all of the first semester *Framework* content within the allotted timeframe:

> In Scriptures specifically, in monarchy, it's like swoosh—speed of light through monarchy. It's basically here, tell them what happens during this period. So we can move on, otherwise we won't have time to cover prophets, and we want to cover prophets, so let's just move on. (p. 250)

In addition, Therese remarked that her students complained about the amount of material that they had to learn in *Framework*-based courses.

Picking and Choosing

One strategy for coping with the *Framework*'s voluminous content that three participants discussed—one at length—was choosing what *Framework* content would be taught and what would be omitted, due to time constraints. Julia remarked on the necessity of making decisions "about what we can cover in the content and what has to go, because we don't have the time to cover everything in it" (p. 127). She maintained that this situation can be attributed both to the large amount of content in the *Framework* and to the fact that her department teaches two mini-courses to ninth graders: one on relationships and one on substance abuse, which take about three weeks each. She characterized these mini-courses as "something we're not willing to let go of, and so therefore the *Framework* gets kind of inched out" (p. 127). However, even as she remarked on the need for her department to think strategically about what *Framework* content is most essential and what *Framework* content can safely be set aside, she expressed discomfort with this situation: "I feel a little leery about this, the quantity in the *Framework*, and schools picking and choosing, personal teachers picking and choosing, departments picking and choosing, where's the depth, where's the surface" (p. 154). Julia's discomfort is rooted in her sense that this phenomenon runs counter to the bishops' intentions in promulgating the *Framework*, which she explained in the following quote:

> I think the bishops' desire was to write, their intent was to write this content that they could know was going to be taught in the schools, but what the reality of it is, it's so much that we kind of have to decide, of this beautiful *Framework* that they've written, and this great amount of knowledge, what can we do, how much

of it can we do?....We're kind of second-guessing the *Framework* in some ways and prioritizing for us, making those kinds of decisions. (p. 127)

In summary, she posed this succinct question: "If the bishops were sitting here…what would they approve of us tossing out of their curriculum?" (p. 137).

Like Lanie, who expressed a desire that the *Framework* focus on material that is vital for students' growing lives of faith, Julia also maintained that the *Framework* should emphasize some "definites" (p. 153) that all students will certainly learn, regardless of the school they attend or the teacher they have. Julia stated that these "definites"—such as the Trinity—are, in fact, in the *Framework*, but because they are in there alongside "everything else" (p. 153), they are not emphasized in a way that draws teachers' attention to them as truly essential.

Lanie also explained that she and her colleagues have been seeking to determine how much *Framework* content they can, realistically, aim to teach. She stated that, in engaging in this process, she and her department members are attempting to ascertain what big, important topics must be covered, and what "smaller little details" (p. 63) can be omitted. Additionally, they are closely examining the vocabulary lists that their *Framework*-based textbooks include, in an effort to determine which vocabulary words students must know and which can be considered to be supplemental or ancillary. Finally, Rosa also remarked on the need to "skip around" (p.9) and "leave stuff out" (p. 9) because of insufficient time to teach the volume of content that the *Framework* presents.

Limited Time for the Pursuit of Interesting, Tangential Topics

Both Rosa and Lanie observed that, as a result of the amount of material in the *Framework*, they have less time and freedom to pursue tangential topics in which their

students have expressed interest. Rosa remarked that prior to the *Framework*'s

implementation, she could engage her students in stimulating discussions about sexuality,

social justice, and other issues pertinent to their lives, as well as theological topics about

which they had demonstrated curiosity, such as the final judgment and apocalyptic

literature.   In contrast, now, if her students pose questions about such topics, she may

affirm their questions but not take the time to respond or discuss the questions, lest she

fall behind. She may tell them instead, that "We need to get through this

material….[we've] just gotta do this" (p. 13). Similarly, Lanie, who was creating a

detailed map of the sophomore curriculum at the time of the second interview, anticipated

that time for teachers of sophomores to explore non-*Framework* topics in response to

student interest would be severely limited:

> I just mapped out the sophomore course, and there just wasn't a lot of time left, in
> terms of having any kind of day where you could just go off on a tangent or
> something. I think I only ended up with maybe three days out of the whole
> semester, where, because of where things were falling, it's like, well there is a day
> that you could do something—if everything else went according to plan! There
> was a day that maybe you could do something more in-depth, or pick up on
> something that the students were interested in but you couldn't really fit it in at
> the time. (p. 74)

Moreover, given that "anytime that you map out a curriculum, there are always things

that interfere with it or change or something comes up" (p. 74), Lanie expressed

skepticism that even those three days that she had identified would remain once the

realities of the semester got underway.

One Department Chair's Strategies

Therese, who serves as the Religious Studies department chair at St. Martin de

Porres school, discussed several ways in which she has sought to manage the

Framework's copious amount of content. First, she completed a "spiral analysis" (p.

220) of the Framework, which assisted her and her colleagues in identifying what topics in the ninth grade curriculum would reappear in subsequent years, and, therefore, could be treated somewhat superficially in that first year. Likewise, this process enabled them to determine what topics would only be taught in the ninth grade, and, therefore, needed significant time to be allocated to them. Therese also rearranged the sequencing of some of the *Framework*'s ninth grade content in order to allow for her department to carve out time for an introductory unit on the school's charism at the beginning of the academic year. For example, some of the *Framework*'s second semester content on discipleship was moved forward into the first semester, becoming part of that introductory unit. Likewise, she emphasized that the *Framework*'s content can be successfully compacted if teachers are skilled in developing pedagogical strategies "that cover multiple points" (p. 216). Lastly, Therese consistently cautioned her teachers against supplementing the *Framework*'s content, so as not to add to their own stress level or that of their students.

Repetition of Content

Five participants experienced the *Framework*'s content as repetitive. Grace, who remarked that all six of the required *Framework* courses "pretty much read the same" (p. 102), explained that early in the second semester, her ninth grade students drew her attention to the extent to which the first and second semester *Framework* content is repetitive:

> My students are the ones that brought it up, and these are freshmen girls. And they're like, "Ms. X, we've, I think we've already done this chapter." And I said, "Yeah, I think we have too." I mean I've read through it, but until you do start working with it…I found it repetitive… It was the same concepts that weren't even presented in a different fashion. (p. 91)

Grace described the second semester *Framework* course as "just like a repeat of semester one…. there's no room for growth, it's not expanding, it's not introducing new concepts"

(p. 109). She lamented the fact that this resulted in student boredom: "The students were bored, and that's just the last thing I want for Theology. That's [a] pity, because I want them to leave knowing everything and loving it, about Theology" (p. 109). Grace also expressed concern that this boredom may persist throughout students' four years at St. Ann's, as they continue to study the same theological, doctrinal, and Christological material that they learned during their ninth grade year. Grace stressed that the *Framework*'s content, although "dry" (p. 104), is theologically accurate and pastorally appropriate, but "it's not necessary to do it again and again and again, and that's what ends up happening in the curriculum over four years" (p. 109).

Marshall characterized the *Framework* as having "an air of redundancy" (p. 165), which presented a challenge to him and to his colleague:

> We would look at the curriculum, we'd be sitting there lesson planning, and we'd be like, we just did this. How am I supposed to take another week on this? I already gave this a week!....So sometimes we'd just be like, how, I mean, what am I supposed to do with this? (p. 165)

He responded to this challenge by being transparent with his students:

> I would actually show them the curriculum. I'd show them, alright, this is what we're supposed to do. Can you tell me something about this? And they would be able to list off and tell me stuff about something that was clearly supposed to be taught in that unit that we'd previously covered. (p. 165)

Marshall observed that the *Framework*'s repetition did have a positive aspect, in that it allowed him more time to supplement the *Framework*'s content.

Lanie also described the *Framework*'s first four semesters as redundant, which she distinguished from a type of repetition which would have facilitated, rather than hindered, student learning. She explained this distinction in the following quote:

> The more that there's repetition, the more connections are made, and the more that is remembered, so I think it's a good thing to go back to previous information and lessons and connecting things. But…the problem I see, though, is that there's

a certain redundancy that's happening. It's not like coming at it from a new angle. It's almost like teaching the same thing again. (p. 59)

Lanie emphasized that repetition that would have enabled her students to continue exploring the same concepts, but in a deeper manner each time, would have been worthwhile. However, the *Framework* simply repeats the same material, even, at times, using precisely the same words. Like Grace's bored students, Lanie's students also let their behavior convey the message that they already knew some of the material that she was trying to teach them: "They just tune out, pull out their other book, start doodling, writing notes to each other…texting" (pp. 71-72).

Both Lanie and Therese spoke specifically about the repetition found in the *Framework's* first and second semesters regarding the topics of revelation and tradition. Therese observed that the treatment of these two topics in those first two *Framework* courses is "point for point almost the same" (p. 250), a situation which led her to ask "Do we really need to spend three weeks doing revelation again? Probably not" (p. 212). Similarly, Lanie expressed reluctance to spend time on a topic so soon after she had already taught it:

> They get revelation right at the beginning, but then it comes back again and it's almost exactly the same. It's like, well, if we really taught it well the first time—I don't think they're gonna need to hear it again the second time, within three months. (p. 72)

Rosa experienced as particularly burdensome the number of times the *Framework* presents Trinitarian theology:

> First they introduce God the Father. Whole chapter on God the Father, whole chapter on Jesus, little tiny bit on the Holy Spirit….And then first they do the Trinity, then they do each one [each person of the Trinity]…it's like, enough is enough. Do it once. Do it once, do it completely and move on, instead of going back to it again and then the second semester we go back to it again, and then next year, we go back to it again. Why not just do a whole semester on the Trinity….and just do it once? (p. 21)

At the time of the second interview, Rosa was preparing for the following academic year, in which she would be teaching both the freshmen and sophomore *Framework* courses, the former for the second time and the latter for the first time. Given the overlapping content of these courses, she expressed profound anxiety about the extent to which she would be able to remember what she was teaching in each course: "Am I gonna remember where I am and what I'm talking about?….that I think is gonna be really challenging….I think I'm gonna lose my mind. I really, really do honestly….I think I'm gonna lose my mind" (p. 45). Aside from her concern about her own sanity, Rosa also worried about being able to think of enough creative projects and assessments to keep her students engaged, in different ways, through both their freshmen and sophomore years:

> I'm afraid I'm gonna end up teaching them both exactly the same. But then it'll be a repeat when they go to the next year. So I'm really concerned as far as teaching, how I'm going to differentiate so it doesn't become the same thing because you're teaching the same thing. (pp. 45-46)

Reactions to the Framework*'s Apologetic Approach*

Two participants spoke favorably—one at length—regarding their experience of the *Framework*'s apologetic approach. Marshall described this approach as a "necessary" (p. 163) way to teach and challenge "inquisitive" (p. 163) high school students whose nature is to "question everything….nothing is meant to be taken at face value" (p. 164). He maintained that apologetics constitutes a helpful counterbalance to the pervasive influence of the media, which he believes "is constantly bombarding them [students] with the opposite message—freedom from religion, freedom from mastery of self, go out and just grasp at what you want, what's making you happy" (p. 164). Marshall applauded the potential of apologetics to empower, in particular, students who are trying to sustain their Catholic faith by providing them "with a bit of artillery, something to combat the doubts

that are kind of arising" (p. 164). When, in the second interview, the researcher

questioned him about his use of the word "artillery," Marshall emphasized that he was

speaking metaphorically, but stated that

> Providing the students with artillery, data, or reasons for why they believe something allows them to combat—and for the record, I guess, I could say that I just did air quotes for combatting—to combat not only their own questions and upheaval that kind of arises in themselves but also attacks that come from outside….providing them with the ability to fire back. (p. 193)

In continuing to explain his use of this terminology, Marshall conjured a vivid, dramatic

picture of the world in which he believes his Catholic students must work hard to

maintain their faith:

> They call us the Church militant, you know. We're in this world at war. We're getting pulled on….There's good and there's bad, there's dark and there's light and all this kind of stuff, and there's people who are out there who are unbelievers who are challenging you, and I think that you, you need the repertoire—maybe that's a better word—for responding. For backing up your belief, or what you, why you believe, and not just going silently and softly and turning the cheek in the literal way that doesn't help anybody. And so, you know, I think that's intentionally why I used the term artillery—to paint a word picture. (p. 194)

Marshall expressed a belief that the apologetic approach is particularly crucial at a

time in which "the Church is obviously under heavy scrutiny from just about every

angle" (p. 164). Although Marshall characterized some of that scrutiny as "deserved" (p.

164), he maintained that apologetics educates students to apply that scrutiny "less

liberally" (p. 164), so as not to throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater

whenever news of a new ecclesial scandal hits the Internet. Ultimately, he desires that

his students gain a sense of perspective about the Church, growing in understanding that

"the Church is full of human beings who are capable of mistakes and who are sinful, but

that the heart and the mission of the Church still remains [*sic*] intact and true" (pp. 164-

165).

Regarding his students' reactions to the *Framework*'s apologetic approach,

Marshall described a variety of responses. Students who profess atheism or who simply

lack interest in Religious Studies "don't want to hear it, just seem lackadaisical in class,

disinterested, head down….just tune out completely, don't listen at all" (pp. 188-189).

Students who are questioning their faith, but are still open to belief, participate and

engage readily in discussions, as they "really push back hard…they're playing devil's

advocate" (p. 188). Students who are not Catholic or not Christian benefit from the

"qualitative data" which apologetics provides: these data assist them in understanding

the Scriptural and/or apostolic origins of key Catholic beliefs and practices. However,

even these data eventually fall short when it comes to some "absolutes" (p. 191) of

Catholic belief, such as Mary's perpetual virginity or Jesus's bodily resurrection. In

Marshall's experience, students who are not Catholic or not Christian may find these

beliefs—which lack physical evidence and which the Church asks its members to accept

simply as matters of faith—to be particularly obscure or troublesome.

Although her remarks were neither as verbose nor as enthusiastic as Marshall's,

Lanie expressed cautious optimism regarding the *Framework*'s apologetic approach. She

stated that when she first encountered the *Framework* and noted the pervasiveness of

apologetics within it, "I was not on board with that" (p. 59). However, upon reflection,

she came to believe that "there may be some validity in using that approach" (p. 60).

Lanie attributed this shift in her thinking to a variety of factors, including a secular

culture that espouses relativism; a conflict between Science and Religion that she

believes has grown more pronounced over the past decade; and her students, for whom

"the relevancy of Religious Studies is not apparent" (p. 60). She expressed hope that

apologetics could potentially assist her in navigating this complex set of circumstances, all of which have a daily impact on her teaching. As indicated in the following quote, her departmental colleagues have also endorsed the *Framework*'s apologetic approach:

> It was something that we had a discussion about as a department—is this something that we feel that we are being called to do, is this an approach that we want to take, is to have a more apologetic Religious Studies program? And most everyone agreed that that was a felt need. (p. 60)

Standardization of Secondary Religious Studies Curriculum Across the U.S.

Rosa, Grace, and Julia all praised the opportunity which the *Framework* has presented to standardize the Religious Studies curriculum at all U.S. Catholic secondary schools. Rosa stated that this standardization garners more legitimacy and respect for Religious Studies than it had in the years prior to the *Framework*'s implementation, in which "people could teach whatever they wanted at any school they wanted, and in any way they wanted" (p. 3). Now, in contrast, there is a greater sense of "accountability….you need to show that you produce something at the end" (p. 16). Rosa maintained that the "core standards" (p. 4) presented by the *Framework*—the vocabulary and concepts that all students must learn—help to ensure that Religious Studies teachers are "not just…all touchy-feely all the time" (p. 16); rather, that they actually teach the specific, concrete material for which everyone is now responsible. Similarly, Grace characterized the *Framework*'s "national standards" (p. 103) as having the potential to be "a tremendous asset to Religious Ed" (p. 103). In her view, the *Framework* has helped to give Religious Studies a status similar to that of other academic disciplines, as she explained in the following quote:

> Science has standards, Math has standards, Lit has standards. Theology on the secondary level has no standards. I can appreciate that, from an educational perspective…. That's fair. Expectations are good….So I have no problem with

that at all. I think that's kind of important because one did not exist before….so I see a good thing as an educator, putting in those standards and norms. (p. 95)

Grace also mentioned that these standards would prove useful when families relocate and their high-school aged children must transfer to a different school: if both schools have adopted the *Framework*, then the Religious Studies curricula at the two schools would be the same.

In her favorable comments about the *Framework*'s standardization of Religious Studies curriculum, Julia drew attention to the "commonality" (p. 139) that the *Framework* has provided to both students and teachers:

> The commonality is good. The Catholic principles are super-important, and valued. The continuity of our students learning similar things to students across the country—I like that….I appreciate the work that went into it, and I appreciate the opportunity…to have a shared, whole approach with other Catholic secondary schools. I think that's very valuable….I think that it has created a more common dialogue between schools…which is valuable—really, really valuable. (p. 140)

Julia contrasted this situation with the "free for all" (p. 139) that existed prior to the *Framework*. She also expressed concern about schools that have not implemented the *Framework*: "Ultimately, you're gonna be outside of what our country is doing, and that's a little bit of a loss, I think" (p. 140). In addition, Julia echoed Grace's observation that the common course sequence of the *Framework* will prove helpful if students transfer from one secondary school to another.

Lanie described herself as "grateful for a continuity that's now going to be present" (p. 65) for students, regardless of what school they attend and regardless of whether they have a liberal or conservative Catholic as a Religious Studies teacher. In reflecting on her decades of experience teaching Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, she discussed the complete lack of curricular guidelines which characterized the early years of her career:

When I first started teaching Religious Studies, well there were barely textbooks out. There certainly wasn't any indication of what you were to be doing in what year. It was just Religion 9, Religion 10, Religion 11, Religion 12. So, and I remember when I came to St. John's, because they had an opening for department chair and that's what I really wanted to do, and I remember talking to [a member of the sponsoring religious community], who was in charge then of the schools, and saying, you know, does the [sponsoring religious community] have some guidelines of what we're supposed to be teaching here? Can I get some direction? (p. 65)

In contrast, she expressed hope that the consistency of the *Framework* will allow all students to gain, in the course of their secondary school career, "the tools necessary to live an adult Christian life" (p. 86). However, Lanie tempered her positive remarks about the *Framework*'s standardization of curriculum by drawing attention to the diverse expressions of Catholicism that exist in different regions of the United States. In the following quote, she expressed skepticism about the extent to which the bishops, in promulgating a national *Framework*, considered this regional diversity:

I don't think religious education in California is going to look the same as religious education in Massachusetts. I would hope that our curriculums, though, are presenting the same truths, but I don't think that they would be presenting them in the same manner….And I think that needs to be taken into account, also, and I'm not sure that it has been. (p. 86)

Nuancing the Framework*'s Language, and the Language of* Framework-*based Textbooks*

Three participants discussed the need to nuance or alter the language of the *Framework*, and/or that of textbooks based on the *Framework*, in an effort to respect their religiously diverse student bodies. Speaking about *Framework*-based textbooks in particular, Lanie remarked that all of the textbooks that she and her department members reviewed, including the series they ultimately adopted, "are very much geared towards Catholic students" (p. 75). Engaging in an imaginative exercise, she considered what it would be like for her to read these books if she were not Catholic. She concluded that

> There's times when I felt like they're almost like an outsider, in a way. All the textbooks say "we, we, we, we, us, us, us"....If that's not explained to the students, where it's coming from, it could cause them to feel a little bit defensive. Like, "I'm not a part of that, don't be saying 'we.'" (p. 75)

In navigating this situation, Lanie adopted two strategies. First, she explained to her students that the textbooks were written with the assumption that all students using them would be Catholic. Even though that is not the case at St. John's, she emphasized to them that "I don't mean for this to make you feel like you're an outsider or an outcast. You're not. You are, as far as I'm concerned, in this classroom, we are all equal" (p. 75). Secondly, Lanie rephrased the language of syllabi, tests, and other course materials— some of which are provided by the textbook publisher—in order to acknowledge that not all of her students are Catholic. For example, she changed "in your life" to "in one's life" in cases in which "your" referred only to Catholics.

Although Therese characterized the *Framework* as, overall, respectful of the diverse mix of students enrolled at St. Martin de Porres, she described some of the *Framework*'s language, particularly that found in the "challenges" sections, as "a little bit in your face" (p. 242) and as "confrontational" (p. 244). As an example, she cited, from the first *Framework* course, "Scripture always needs to be read or interpreted in light of the Holy Spirit and under the direction of the Church" (USCCB, 2008, p. 5). In the following quote, she commented on how she would attempt to teach this concept in a manner that respects her students, approximately 44% of whom are not Catholic:

> That is such a flat statement....if you just said that statement, and you had a bunch of Saddlebackers sitting in your classroom they're gonna go, "Wait, are you saying that my interpretation of Scripture, then, is wrong?" And, whereas, I think if you talk about, this is our Catholic position, and remember when we talked about this....you need to soften that language up if you're going to be respectful of your kids from evangelical traditions, because they don't view the authority of the Catholic Church as something that they need in order to interpret Scripture. In fact, quite the opposite. (p. 242)

Even the word "fundamentalist," which appears in the *Framework* in contradistinction to a Catholic, contextual approach to Scripture, proved to be problematic. Therese stated that using this word made her feel as if she were "assaulting" (p. 242) the substantial number of her students who identify as fundamentalist. Therefore, she avoided using this word, and instead taught her students about the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture, language to which these students were more amenable. She defended this choice by stating that

> I don't think we needed to use it [the word fundamentalist], and I don't think it was prescribed….I didn't feel like I was being unfaithful to the *Framework*....it was much more respectful, I think, than just making the bold statement of the Church does not take a fundamentalist approach to Scripture. (pp. 242-243)

As a second example, Therese referenced a question that appeared in the "Challenges" section of the second *Framework* course: "How do we as Catholics answer questions about the Blessed Virgin Mary and her role in the life and prayer of the Church?" (USCCB, 2008, p. 10). Like Lanie, who expressed concerns about the first-person language found in *Framework*-based textbooks, Therese asserted that "We would never state that question as 'how do we as Catholics,' because many of us in the room are not" (p. 244). She would, instead, engage her students in dialogue about Catholic beliefs and practices regarding Mary, seeking, in the course of that, to clarify the difference between revering Mary and worshipping God and to dispel any other misconceptions that her students of other faiths may have expressed. According to Therese, this avoids two potential pitfalls: creating a "we-them" (p. 245) dynamic in the classroom and giving the false impression that her classroom consists only of "Catholics talking to Catholics" (p. 245).

Lastly, Therese remarked that she and her colleagues "steered away from using the word heresy, in terms of the divine nature of Christ" (p. 243). They defined the term historically, but avoided using it in reference to the present day, because "none of our Hindu kids believe in the divinity of Christ, or our Jews" (p. 243).

The student body at Ascension High School includes Mormons, as well as students Rosa described as "hard core Christian girls" (p. 6) who read the Bible literally. Rosa commented on the challenge of teaching the *Framework*'s content, as it appeared in the *Framework*-based textbook that her school adopted, in a manner that does not "degrade" (p. 6) these students:

> There are times when I felt that I was giving propaganda this year… I felt very uncomfortable, because you want them to respect all religions….You have to respect—it doesn't matter what it says in the book…. I would never degrade. Whereas the book doesn't take those things into consideration. (p. 6)

Rosa coped with this challenge by attempting to state clearly what Catholics believe without implying that Catholic beliefs and practices are superior to, or more truthful than, those of other religious traditions.

Added Time and Stress for Teachers and Students

Rosa, Lanie, Julia, and Grace all observed that teaching *Framework*-based courses has demanded a greater time investment and has created additional stress for themselves and, in some cases, for their students. Rosa, who described her teaching as "definitely a lot more fun before" (p. 14), asserted that she and her colleague "feel very stressed" (p. 26) as they attempt to ascertain what content to teach and focus on, what content to omit, and what pedagogical strategies will be most effective for their students. She stated that she was "constantly making things and looking for things…to make it engaging, because you can't just stand up there and talk" (p. 13). At times, she simply

"ran out of time" (p. 19) in the process of lesson planning, a scenario which she attributed

to having two courses to prepare (ninth and tenth grade) and to adjusting to the newness

of the *Framework* curriculum. To rectify this problem, Rosa recommended that

publishers develop textbooks, teaching manuals, and other resources that present

Framework-based content in a more user-friendly manner, which does not require "three

days of preparation just for one lesson, because there's just not enough time" (p. 17).

In contrast, Rosa portrayed herself and her classroom prior to the *Framework* as

"Fun, I used to be really fun….they liked me….it was more relaxed. You could let them

explore their faith" (p. 11). Rosa expressed concern that this shift from a more relaxed

classroom environment to one that is more stressful may have deleterious, long-term

effects on her students' interest in and commitment to their faith. In the following quote,

she compared the attitude toward Religious Studies of the students she taught prior to the

Framework with the attitude of those to whom she taught the *Framework* for the first

time:

> My juniors, the girls who are juniors now who are gonna be seniors…They left
> my class—they loved Religion. Every day, "this is my favorite class"….They had
> a love for Religion. They looked forward to coming….They loved it. They just
> loved being. I loved being there…..Not for me, but just what we were doing
> was just so cool, and they just have turned out to be really beautiful girls. And the
> seniors that just graduated, beautiful girls. And I don't think these girls are gonna
> have that same—they don't like coming. They don't like coming to Religion.
> How are they gonna like coming to Mass? They're not. If they say, this is hard, I
> don't like it, it's kind of like Math or Science or anything. Do you go home and
> say, yay, let's look at the physics of Bernoulli's principle in the shower curtain?
> No, you don't. You don't want to think about it. And I'm afraid that's what
> Religion is gonna become. I don't want to think about it, because I have to think
> too darn hard at school. And I'm in college and I don't want to ever think about
> this again, because it's so much thinking. (p. 17)

Prior to the *Framework*'s implementation, Lanie also experienced a more relaxed

pace in the classroom, enjoying the freedom of adjusting the curriculum based on the

needs and interests of an individual class section. In contrast, now she feels that "I've got to get back to the content that we are supposed to cover. So I feel a little bit more of a pressure that the *Framework* has put on us" (p. 68). Like Rosa, Lanie worried that, in curtailing teachers' freedom to allow students to pursue topics that capture their interest, the *Framework* may have a negative impact on students' attitudes toward Religious Studies, which she described as among St. John's more popular course offerings. However, she tempered that anxiety by expressing faith in teachers' ability to deliver *Framework*-based instruction in a manner that still appeals to students.

As the department chair at St. Catherine of Siena, Julia experienced "the challenge of teaching a new course and also planning for next year" (p. 138) at the same time. Simultaneous to teaching the new, ninth grade *Framework* curriculum, she was charged with the responsibility of developing the tenth grade scope and sequence and initiating those soon-to-be sophomore teachers into the *Framework*, all of which consumed a great deal of time. Lastly, Grace discussed the greater amount of time she spent on lesson planning for the *Framework* course she taught. However, she did not express anxiety about this added time investment. Rather, she characterized it as a natural outgrowth of teaching a new course:

> I've gotten more mindful about planning formal lessons and writing them out now….As a result of this, so that I can make sure I'm covering things appropriately….since this was my first year. So I've taken to writing like formal lesson plans—objectives, goals, materials, all of that. I needed to do it for myself….I had to. 'Cause I was like, what am I doing?...I just have to be more mindful about my lesson planning, and making sure that…what's on my lesson plan gets done in the classroom in whatever capacity. (pp. 97-98)

The Framework*'s Implicit Understanding of the Role of the Teacher*

Marshall commented extensively on his understanding of the role that the *Framework* implicitly assigns to the Religious Studies teacher. He stated that, because

the *Framework* curriculum is Christocentric, it "draws the teacher's…background…faith and belief, into the forefront….one of the definite benefits has been that—the challenge it's provided me in really bringing my faith to the table as far as being a witness, bearing witness as an educator" (p. 178). He described the *Framework* as providing "a very real test" (p. 178) of his ability to openly share his spirituality and faith experiences with his students, which he hopes will "bear real fruit" (p. 178) in his students' own blossoming lives of faith.

Additionally, because the *Framework* presents "absolute claims" (p. 178) about Christ and about the Catholic Church, Marshall emphasized that those who are teaching this content to adolescents must themselves be paragons of genuine, wholehearted belief: "Students can pick up very clearly, very easily, whether or not the deliverer of the message is genuine enough, authentic in believing or whether or not there's some skepticism within themselves" (p. 178). Therefore, he urged that schools exercise prudence in hiring Religious Studies teachers who can be trusted to deliver that message earnestly and honestly, because "obviously you could take the best message in the world and have it be just corrupted depending upon who's delivering it" (p. 177).

As he continued to elaborate on his perspective, Marshall indicated that he views Religious Studies teachers as representatives of the Church, a Church which is "dealing very heavily, I think, with a PR issue" (p. 167). Therefore, "anybody who's representing the Church needs to kind of look at themselves" (p. 167), carefully considering his/her own level of allegiance to the Church. In the following quote, he depicted the consequences he fears will transpire if those who are teaching *Framework* courses are not fully and personally committed to the content the *Framework* contains:

Obviously if you get somebody who's questioning or lukewarm in front of a group of students, what are you gonna do? You're gonna shy away from telling these kids certain truths or whatever teachings of the Church because you're not quite sure you believe them yourself. So you can't speak authoritatively on it because you don't believe it. So they don't get it, so then you've just bred 30 kids to go out there that also don't know or don't necessarily feel this way, because they're taking you for your word. You're the teacher, you have the authority. So that I think is a very dangerous perspective or point or line. (p. 196)

Lanie also wrestled with the question of what, if anything, the *Framework* implies regarding the role of the Religious Studies teacher. In her musings on this topic, she took a long-range, sweeping view, and considered two possibilities. In one scenario, the *Framework* could allow teachers to genuinely engage with their students, fostering in them a genuine commitment to the Gospel; in another, the *Framework* could cast teachers as official, ecclesial representatives, cajoling their students into accepting Catholic truth-claims. She explained these competing visions in the following quote:

I guess it's kind of like the pendulum, you know? We went from the Baltimore Catechism, and then we swung the pendulum to where pretty much everyone was just teaching whatever they wanted to teach, and now it's…are we swinging all the way back to the other, or are we trying to find someplace that's a combination of those two, where we're dealing with the students that are in front of us, and we're looking at them—in their faces and their eyes and their challenges and their life—and helping them understand the Good News. Or are we standing there as representatives of the Church and saying, "This is the truth, and you fit into the truth" or "you adopt the truth." It's a very different way of presenting it. (pp. 85-86)

Finally, Rosa discussed the extent to which she experienced the *Framework* as implicitly directing the teacher to emphasize the positive aspects of the Church, a situation that created dissonance for her:

I just felt it was more that the Church is perfect, the Church doesn't do anything wrong, and if you're not part of the Church you're not as good. And you just can't say things like that. Then you get called into parent meetings. (p. 52)

When asked by the researcher if she felt that the *Framework* placed the Religious Studies teacher in the role of the Church's "PR spokesperson," (p. 52), Rosa replied, "definitely" (p. 52).

<center>*The Realities and Constraints of U.S. Catholic Secondary Schools*</center>

Three participants observed that, in crafting and promulgating the *Framework*, the U.S. bishops do not appear to have considered the realities of studying and teaching in a U.S. Catholic secondary school. Rosa stated that neither the bishops nor the textbook publishers seem to have taken into account "the reality of what a high school semester looks like" (p. 15). Lanie commented on the challenge of teaching all of the *Framework*'s content within the limitations of St. John's schedule, in which each class meets only three times each week, once for 45 minutes and twice for 80 minutes. She also remarked that the *Framework* seems to presume that students can devote a great deal of time to their Religious Studies courses, when, in fact, students are enrolled in a full academic program, of which Religious Studies constitutes only one part:

> I don't think that the bishops had, when they were putting together these courses, had in mind what that was gonna look like in a curriculum when a student's taking six other classes. This is not the only course they're doing…in terms of the amount of work that we can give them, or homework we can give them. (p. 63)

Likewise, Julia asserted that "it's very obvious that the writers of the *Framework* are not classroom teachers. And their expectations are very unreal as far as how much we can cover, and/or what their [students'] needs are" (p. 140).

<center>*The Mission of the School and the Role of the* Framework</center>

The participants in this study offered a variety of viewpoints regarding the extent to which they perceive the *Framework* as supporting their respective schools in living out their institutional identity and attaining their mission. Rosa stated her belief that the

Framework can help her students to grow as lifelong learners and as well-rounded women of faith who understand Catholic teachings and are capable of representing Ascension High School as alumnae. Similarly, Grace asserted that "as long as this curriculum maintains intellectual and spiritual excellence and is teaching the theology of the Catholic Church, which I think it does both, then it's supporting the mission" (p. 118). Marshall praised the *Framework*'s Christocentrism, which, as he articulated in the following quote, dovetails with the St. Michael's High School mission statement:

> The core mission statement or core mission of the school—to have the centrality of Christ in all things—I think is strengthened by the curriculum in that it's obviously very greatly Christocentric. And so these kids are getting a very real interaction with who this person of Christ was, is, said he was, who we believe him to be, what he did, why it's important that we follow him, and how we, you know, act as him, for others. And then you combine that with the mission statement of the school, which is to have the centrality of Christ in all things, see Christ in all things, and then to be Christ for others—and so it provides the students with a very real capability. They can get the information and the background knowledge as to what he did, how he did it, why he did it, all this kind of stuff, which I think then has a very real possibility of being translated into action by our students. (p. 179)

Conversely, Julia maintained that the *Framework* does not offer any support or resources in helping the members of the St. Catherine of Siena school community to live out their charism. Therefore, she and her colleagues alter the *Framework*—both omitting content and adding content—in order to cultivate students who make moral choices, engage in outreach, pursue a spiritual life, and participate in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. Julia stated quite bluntly that "In order for those things to happen, we add to this curriculum, which means that something in the curriculum kind of has to go. So those are the challenges we face" (p. 135).

The Framework *Is Just One Aspect of a Larger Picture*

In discussing the Framework vis-à-vis the mission of their respective schools, Grace, Marshall, and Julia all emphasized that the *Framework*, although important, constitutes simply one aspect of a much larger effort. In the following quote, Grace described the bigger picture into which she understands the *Framework* to fit:

> I'm not gonna say the *Framework* contributes to the girl walking across the stage [at graduation]…because the *Framework* is part of the bigger picture, a part of the bigger whole. In the teaching of Theology, in our whole department…that only gives the intellectual, what about the pastoral activities and retreats and service and all of the above and the peer ministry and the whole environment of this is a Catholic school? I think this is just a piece of a whole puzzle. So does it contribute? Yes, but as a piece in a puzzle. As a bit for the whole. (p. 105)

Likewise, Marshall identified the *Framework* as "a very small piece of the puzzle" (p. 161), that is, as a single facet of a "culture that's bred on campus" (p. 162), a culture which, in a variety of ways, aims to nurture faith, prayer, and service. Finally, Julia stressed that the *Framework*'s influence is limited by the extent to which teachers ensure that its message is both internalized and concretized:

> The *Framework* is written to be Christ-centered, but…if we don't live that in the classroom, it really doesn't mean anything. We can teach it all we want, but if we don't talk about it…if they don't integrate it into their lives, if they don't appreciate it, if they don't benefit from it, if they don't grow from it, it really is just a lecture. (p. 150)

The Framework *Helps the School to Be True to Catholic Tradition*

Julia expressed confidence that the *Framework* contains much valuable content and important information that students who are enrolled in U.S. Catholic secondary schools should be learning. Similarly, Lanie characterized the *Framework* as "a good kind of guide for being certain that we're true to the tradition" (p. 86). The "comfortableness" (p. 65), "confidence" (p. 65), and "validation" (p. 68) that Lanie feels regarding the *Framework* stem from two factors. First, given the diversity of teacher

perspectives within the St. John's High School Religious Studies department, she

appreciates the consistency of content that the *Framework* provides: Across the spectrum

of more liberal teachers and more orthodox teachers, all are responsible for delivering the

same content. Secondly, although Lanie raised many questions regarding the procedures

the bishops followed in developing the *Framework*, she stated that she believes that the

bishops were fulfilling "their rightful job" (p. 65) and their "calling" (p. 65) in

promulgating a Religious Studies curriculum, a curriculum in which she has confidence

precisely because it originated in episcopal leadership. Nevertheless, she is unsure, if, in

the long term, the benefit of this outweighs the cost:

> There's a more kind of, a confidence that, OK, we're covering what we're
> supposed to be covering, for what that's worth. I don't know that that trumps
> losing creativity and losing passion and all of that, but…that is a positive to the
> *Framework*. (p. 66)

<div align="center">

Clear-Cut Answers

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Both Lanie and Grace experienced the *Framework* as presenting clear-cut,

straightforward answers in an academic discipline that does not necessarily lend itself to

that approach. In this regard, Lanie likened the *Framework*'s methodology to that of the

Baltimore Catechism. In the following quote, she acknowledged the advantages that this

approach can convey:

> It [the Baltimore Catechism] was kind of in that same style, of like, multiplication
> tables, or things that they were just like, facts. And that's how it was presented.
> And it was, it was great for kids because it gave them a real—they had an answer,
> and we all had the same answer, so there wasn't any kind of questioning about
> well, wait a minute, that's not the answer I got. So there was a certain, I think, a
> comfortableness with that, and I wonder if the bishops aren't trying to, in some
> way, recapture that kind of certainty with this curriculum. (p. 85)

Nevertheless, Lanie maintained that the *Framework*, in failing to acknowledge the ambiguity inherent in the field of Religious Studies and in the spiritual life, may actually impede students' growth in faith:

> Although that certainty was great, it certainly didn't lead people to, I think, a deeper understanding of their faith. So, although certainty is nice, when you're dealing with the religious dimension, there is always this—the mystery—you know, it's always an act of faith. And even though we say, this is the truth, that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, but…when you talk about what does that really mean… there aren't facts. (p. 85)

Finally, Lanie gave voice both to the strength of her own faith and to her limitations as a Religious Studies teacher. In Lanie's view, no Religious Studies course—*Framework* or not—can, in itself, give students clear and certain faith:

> As certain as I am in my own faith—I say to my students, there's a quote from Paul, "I am convinced that there's nothing that can keep us from the love of God made known in Jesus Christ." I have that quote on my board, and I often will say that, I am certain of this, I wouldn't be standing here if I was not certain of this, but I'm only certain of this for me. I cannot give you that certainty, other than just witness to it. (p. 85)

> Grace, who described the *Framework* as presenting a very "cut and dried" (p.

115) approach to Religious Studies, stated that the *Framework* did not contain "nearly as much depth in theology" (p. 91) as the St. Ann's prior curriculum had. She referred to the *Framework* as focused more on doctrine than on Theology. When asked by the researcher to clarify the difference she perceived between these two approaches, Grace stated that "theological is the question, doctrinal is the answer" (p. 92). She elaborated on this distinction in the following quote:

> Theology is exploration of questions. Exploration of truth. Pondering. Wondering. Doctrinal is—well, this is how it is….doctrinal as in, it didn't ask any questions—it was like, well, this is what you believe. And it didn't teach the student to think or question, just for the sake of thinking…. ponder, engage, in their hearts and their minds. (pp. 91-92)

An Experiment, A Work in Progress

In the course of their interviews, Lanie and Grace stressed that their respective schools are engaged in the very beginning phase of the *Framework*'s implementation, and that, consequently, they find themselves in the midst of "an experiment" (p. 59), as Lanie termed it, or, "a work in progress" (p. 91), as Grace termed it. Lanie described her department as "faithful Catholic[s]" (p. 61) who willingly "jumped on board and said, OK, let's go with it, let's try it, and see what comes out of it" (p. 61). She speculated that it may be quite some time before she and her department members can fully understand the *Framework*'s impact on students, evaluate its effectiveness, and make any necessary adjustments to it. Grace also emphasized the difficulties inherent in teaching a new curriculum for the first time when she stated that "I don't feel like I did as good of a job teaching. But I think part of it was simply…teaching a new course….you just kind of have to muddle your way through a first year, new course" (p. 100). Like Lanie, Grace asserted that her school's experience with the *Framework* has only just begun, and that much more time and experience are needed in order to ascertain its "eventual outcome" (p. 106) and long-term impact.

Making the Framework *Relevant Can Present Challenges*

Therese and Julia offered varied perspectives regarding their respective abilities to make the *Framework*'s content relevant to their students. Therese stated that she and her departmental colleagues enjoyed varying degrees of success in this regard throughout the academic year, ranging from "really good" (p. 213) to "not so good" (p. 213). She observed that her students have always, both pre- and post-*Framework*, questioned "Why do I have to take Religion?" (p. 241), but she did not perceive any increase in these questions following the implementation of the *Framework*. Therese asserted that the

Framework does have the potential to be relevant to many of her students and their families, including those who are not Catholic but who desire "a particular character formation or faith-based approach to living" (p. 241). As a concrete example, she discussed an email that the father of a ninth grade student sent to the Principal, praising the ability of his son's Religious Studies teacher to present the curriculum in a relevant, accessible, and comfortable manner, even though the family is not Catholic and the student had no prior experience with Catholic education.

In contrast, Julia spoke frankly about the depth of frustration she has faced in confronting her present inability to make the *Framework* relevant to her students' lives:

> I honestly don't have a lot positive to say about it, I really don't, right now, because I don't see it having a positive effect on the students right now. I still see it as being big and broad and confusing, and I haven't found a way to make it relevant and applicable. I mean it is—it is, it's all there and it can be, but in focusing on the content I haven't had the chance to do that yet, so I don't see the benefits of it because the benefits really lie in how does this change them personally and spiritually and in their faith and in their walk and in their commitment to their Church and to God. (p. 131)

Julia stated that much of the *Framework*'s content is unfamiliar to students and its pertinence to their lives is far from self-evident: "There's more that, not only that they don't know, but they don't understand why it's important to learn. It's kind of a harsh statement" (p. 130). She expressed a desire that, instead, the *Framework* incorporate material that would assist students in understanding "where they've come from and who they are as people in the context of our culture and their current challenges, and as Catholic Christians how to face those challenges…Much of the content in the *Framework* doesn't really address that" (p. 134). Despite these strong reservations about the *Framework*, Julia conveyed a sense of hope that as she develops greater familiarity and expertise with it, her capacity to "make it alive and real" (p. 130) will grow.

Making a Choice to Fulfill a Professional Obligation

Grace distinguished her own "neutral" (p. 95) attitude toward the *Framework*

from that of some of her colleagues, whom she characterized as "resent[ful]" (p. 91),

"disgruntled" (p. 113), and "upset" (p. 113) regarding the document. In contrast, Grace

stated that she simply accepted the *Framework*, surrendering to her "professional

obligation" (p. 107) to teach it:

> I just said, well, if this is what we have to do, I'm going to. That was my
> approach…. I just said, well, this is what I have to work with….When I do
> encounter a *Framework*/non-*Framework* content, or curriculum, difference, I just
> go with it, with the *Framework*. I just go with it, and say, well, that's what I have
> to do. (p. 100)

Grace explained her acquiescence by posing a rhetorical question: "What is the point in

fighting this?" (p. 113). In the following exchange with the researcher, she clarified how

futile she believes any such struggle would be:

> Carrie: "What is the point of fighting this," in saying that, is your thought, what's
> the point, because any fight wouldn't be successful?
> Grace: Correct. No, it wouldn't be. What leverage do I have in fighting it? I go
> to the principal, I don't agree with these. "Well, you can find another job.
> Thank you for coming." Or, you know, taking it to the bishops—you
> know what, I don't really think this is good. "Well, thank you for
> coming." That's what I mean. (p. 113)

Moreover, she views challenging the *Framework* as unnecessary for two reasons. First,

its content is not fundamentally objectionable to her: "If there was something in there

that…just really made me where I could not teach with integrity, that's a

different…scenario. What I'm being asked to teach is not questioning theological

integrity" (p. 113). Secondly, she took the long view, implicitly questioning the

Framework's staying power by stating that "I'm learning in life these kind of things come

and go" (p. 120). In stressing her own choice to work, for now, within the *Framework*'s

parameters to offer her students the most "theologically life-giving and intellectually

challenging course there is, given what I've got" (p. 113), she urged those teachers, including her colleagues, who cannot cope with this scenario to find another line of work.

Overall Attitude Toward the Framework

Two participants offered general comments regarding their overall attitude toward the *Framework*. Marshall, while acknowledging that the *Framework* has both "downfalls" (p. 166) and "upsides" (p. 166), described himself in positive terms as "excited" (p. 165) about the new challenges which the *Framework* has presented: "It's been nice. I like it, I do. I've really enjoyed it" (p. 178). He attributed his perspective, which he distinguished from his colleagues' more negative attitude, to the particular context of his life. Just six years prior to his participation in this study, Marshall graduated from a Catholic secondary school located in the same diocese in which he presently teaches. At that school, he experienced the former Religious Studies curriculum, a curriculum which he then taught for one year before the school at which he is employed began implementing the *Framework*. He maintained that because of this unique convergence of circumstances, "I think that I can appreciate what's happening. I can appreciate the new curriculum, and being somewhat a part of the generation that is currently learning, I think that…it will be helpful to them" (p. 161).

Conversely, Julia initially remarked that she could find little to celebrate in the content of the *Framework*'s ninth grade courses:

> I haven't seen something that I could say is a positive experience as of right now….right now I haven't seen, in this freshman year, something that I can say "Wow, I'm so glad this is in here and we're teaching it the freshman year." Honestly, I haven't seen it. (p. 138)

However, she then tempered this observation by conceding that "there were some positive things" (p. 139) about the *Framework*; however, those positive aspects were

often eclipsed by the "learning curve," (p. 139), "tension" (p. 139), and frustration of navigating a new curriculum. She concluded by expressing her department's commitment to respect the *Framework* and to keep open minds regarding it.

<div align="center">*The* Framework *as a Middle Ground*</div>

Both Lanie and Therese, who serve as the Religious Studies department chair at their respective schools, expressed hope that the *Framework* may provide a helpful middle ground at a time in which Religious Studies departments, and the larger Church, may be polarized. Lanie stated that her department—comprised of a variety of teachers along the spectrum from "more orthodox" (p. 65) to "more liberal" (p. 65)—has, at times, experienced tension due to these varying perspectives. She maintained that the *Framework* may support her department members in their efforts to "come together and compromise and show the students that…Church can live with both of these" (p. 65). Similarly, in referencing the "new, young adult wave of orthodoxy" (p. 226) of which some of her teachers are a part, Therese expressed a belief that the *Framework* may assist her department members in general and these teachers in particular. For all of her teachers, she maintained that the *Framework* may help them to avoid "this pendulum swing…that we can become more centered again" (p. 226). For her more orthodox teachers, she postulated that the *Framework* may assuage them by offering them a clear opportunity to share "the riches of the Catholic tradition" (p. 226) with their students.

<div align="center">*Commitment to Use the* Framework *Only if It Is Effective*</div>

Lanie stated that she is committed to continued use of the *Framework* at St. John's only if it is found to be effective. When asked by the researcher how she defines effective, she responded with the following quote:

Being authentic to the traditions of the faith and that our students in the end feel that they have an understanding of what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be a Catholic, and how it's a lifelong journey, and that we're just giving them some tools to use in that journey. But, that's what I hope our students get at the end is that they feel a calling to follow Jesus in their lives and have an understanding of what that means. So if the *Framework* can do that, great, if it can't, then we won't be using it. (p. 61)

Lanie expressed awareness that this view may cost her her job, but she believes that her "obligation to do the best I can in passing on the Catholic tradition to our students" (p. 61) trumps even that risk: "if the bishops want to tell me I no longer can teach Religious Studies, well, then fine" (p. 61).

Brief Additional Findings Regarding Research Question #1

Four additional themes emerged as pertinent to research question one, each of which was discussed very briefly by one or two participants. Grace characterized the *Framework* as "legitimate Theology" (p. 114) which "is not offering anything…that flies in the face of my faith or my intellect" (p. 114). In contrast to some of her departmental colleagues, who, she believes, view the Framework as "junk" (p. 104), Grace remarked that "it could be worse" (p. 104).

Both Rosa and Julia maintained that they are adjusting to the *Framework*, and that, consequently, teaching it is getting easier over time. Rosa stated that second semester was easier than the first semester, both because she "had more of a feel" (p. 13) for the curriculum and because the second semester schedule was less impacted by holiday programs and other special events. Similarly, Julia affirmed that by March, she and the other ninth grade teachers "were sort of unified in what we were doing in the classroom, we were all on a basic, on board, and at a similar level enough that the class could kind of work together well" (p. 136).

Therese observed that the *Framework* "is not written in standards language" (p. 212), a phenomenon which she has found it necessary to explain to her departmental colleagues, many of whom lack formal studies in the field of Education:

> Their ability to tell the difference between *Framework* and standards is negligible, so I spend half of my time saying it's a *Framework*, not standards. *Framework* gives you more freedom….it's not as specific and as limiting as a specific standard. (p. 219).

Lastly, Grace remarked that her first year of teaching *Framework*-based courses "was not an upheaval or something overwhelming or anything like that" (p. 100).

Research Question #1: Summary of Findings

This study's participants described their experience of teaching courses based on the USCCB *Framework* with keen observations, clear insights, and profound honesty. They articulated a wide variety of impacts—both positive and negative—which they believe the *Framework* has had on their schools, on themselves as teachers, and on their students. In discussing the challenges which the *Framework* has presented to them as professionals—including teaching a large amount of content within a limited timeframe, managing repetitive content, and handling *Framework*-based course materials that do not take account of the diversity of students who fill the classrooms of U.S Catholic secondary schools—participants shared the strategies that they have developed in order to navigate those challenges successfully and provide a positive, stimulating, and nurturing classroom experience for all of their students. They offered insights and reflections on key aspects of the *Framework*'s structure and design, including its apologetic approach. Participants also theorized about implicit, philosophical understandings which may undergird the *Framework*: understandings of the mission and identity of U.S. Catholic secondary schools, of the role of the Religious Studies teacher in such schools, and of the

nature of the field of Religious Studies. Overall, the diverse experiences which this study's participants articulated drew attention to the wide-ranging ways in which adopting this new Religious Studies curriculum affects a school community.

<div align="center">Research Question #2: Findings</div>

Research Question #2: How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content they teach?

The report of findings that address this research question will begin with an exploration of two key curricular shifts that participants characterized as losses: the loss of an introduction to Catholicism for ninth graders and the loss, or significant curtailment, of sexuality education. The researcher will then proceed to narrate other findings relevant to the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content taught in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, beginning with the *Framework*'s approach to Scripture, particularly its approach to the Old Testament. Considerable attention will be given to participants' assessment of the *Framework*'s Christocentrism, its approach to other religions, its apologetic stance, and its assignment of elective status to courses which many schools required in their pre-*Framework* curricula. This section will conclude with a discussion of those theological topics that participants identified as receiving less emphasis in the *Framework* than in the prior curriculum, and, conversely, those theological topics that receive greater emphasis in the *Framework*.

<div align="center">*Loss of an Introduction to Catholicism*</div>

Five of this study's participants teach at schools that, prior to the *Framework*, required a one-semester or one-year introductory course in Catholicism for all ninth

graders. The implementation of the *Framework* brought the end of that course, and all five of these participants experienced that shift as a loss. Ascension High School required a year-long ninth grade course, called "Catholicism," that Rosa described as a "very basic overview" (p. 7) designed to introduce students to various theological topics, many of which they would return to in greater depth in their subsequent years at Ascension. She stated that the course provided all students with "a level playing field" (p. 30), so that "by the time we were done teaching them, everybody was on the same page before they went to sophomore year" (p. 30). Rosa maintained that this introductory course comprised crucial background for a demographically and religiously diverse student body, not all of whom have graduated from Catholic elementary schools. She asserted that the *Framework*'s ninth grade courses, in contrast, seem to assume that students possess prior knowledge about faith, Theology, and Scripture.

Prior to the *Framework*'s implementation, St. John's High School also required a yearlong "Overview of Catholic Christianity" for ninth graders, the content of which Lanie described in some detail. In addition to previewing various theological topics which students would revisit in later years—including Scripture, sacraments, the historical origins and contemporary organization of the church, and Christology—it also included a unit on adolescent development as part of an overall orientation to high school life. Moreover, the course aimed to build community and a sense of identity amongst the members of the ninth grade class by introducing them to the history and charism of the school's sponsoring religious community, so that students could "see where St. John's fits in the big picture" (p. 66).

Like Rosa, Lanie asserted that the pre-*Framework* ninth grade curriculum
constituted "a way to kind of get everybody on the same page" (p. 56), for St. John's
students also hail from a wide variety of public, private, and Catholic elementary schools
in two counties. As she explained in the following quote, Lanie believes that the pre-
Framework course offered benefits both to Catholic students and to students of other
faith traditions:

> I think doing the freshmen year as kind of an overview of what the religious
> education experience is going to be kind of gave the students a feeling like….they
> had some idea of that this is not gonna be scary….especially for our non-Catholic
> students. And I think for our Catholic students, it was a way to kind of help them
> to see through the eyes of those students who are not Catholic, kind of what this
> Catholic experience is. It was kind of like, when you're in something, it's very
> hard to see it for what it is, until you either step out or you have someone who's
> out of that experience commenting on it. And then all of a sudden you say, "oh,
> oh, well, yeah, I'd just taken that for granted, but it actually does make sense."
> And I've seen that happening to kids in class. (p. 73)

In contrast, Lanie observed that the *Framework*, in "zeroing in right away on Jesus" (p.
74), does not provide the necessary background information to help students—both those
who are Catholic and those who are not—fully understand the larger context into which
Jesus fits: "It's difficult…to jump into Christology when a third of the students have not
kind of been introduced to Jesus in a more kind of human dimension, kind of looking at
his life first" (p. 75).

In reflecting on the loss of this ninth grade "Overview of Catholicism" course,
Lanie recounted a meeting of Religious Studies department chairs convened by the
diocesan superintendent of schools several years prior to her participation in this study.
She recalled that, in discussing the *Framework*, those gathered, including herself,
correctly foresaw that implementation of the *Framework* would have a negative impact
on the ninth grade curriculum:

> Every department chair spoke about their freshmen year, and all of them had this kind of adolescent development, introduction to the school, the charism, the high school, that was, they all felt, were very important, and did not feel that they could give that up. Because it looked like the *Framework* was going to cause us to lose all that, which, in fact, it did. (p. 83)

The St. Catherine of Siena pre-*Framework* ninth grade curriculum consisted of two one-semester courses: "Introduction to Catholic Christianity" and "Adolescence and Faith." Julia articulated the value of these courses using precisely the same language as Lanie did in describing the St. John's pre-*Framework* curriculum: as an opportunity for "getting everybody on the same page at the same time" (p. 122) and for grounding students in "what it means to be a faith-filled person and to understand why we make the decisions that we make and put it in the context of our Christian Catholic faith….these sorts of foundational principles" (p. 133). Julia maintained that the pre-*Framework* curriculum, which laid foundations in Christian Theology, Scripture, and Morality, was useful for all of her students, because even the 80% of the student body who identify as Catholic "come from different levels and places of practice and education and Catholic school and/or religious education" (p. 122). In contrast, Julia has struggled in teaching the ninth grade *Framework* courses, the content of which seems to presume that students already possess substantial knowledge of Catholic Christianity. This situation

> …makes the beginning point a little more difficult. Because not only are we teaching the content of the curriculum, but also having to get everybody there. And so…it makes the starting place not as solid, I think. And then it takes a while to get everybody on board, because they're kind of starting with different places, different concepts, different understandings. (p. 123)

When asked by the researcher whether she frequently finds it necessary to backtrack when teaching a doctrinal concept, realizing that her students do not hold the necessary prior knowledge to grasp such a concept, she replied in the affirmative.

Like Lanie, Julia also viewed the pre-*Framework* ninth grade curriculum as an

occasion for building a sense of community amongst students, many of whom struggle

with the academic and social transition to secondary school. In the following quote, she

maintained that the *Framework*'s ninth grade courses do not provide this same

opportunity:

> They [the ninth graders] already feel kind of lost, and are looking for a stronghold
> some way, somewhere, and with the *Framework*, we kind of just hit them running
> with, this is content you need to know, these are principles you need to know,
> some Old Testament, some New Testament, some Catholicism. To some kids
> that's brand new, so having that opportunity to kind of ground them all together
> and build a relationship and at least teach some basic principles where we know
> we're all starting at this point…that's kind of lost. (p. 136)

Prior to the *Framework*'s implementation, ninth graders at St. Martin de Porres

High School enrolled in "Introduction to Catholicism" in the first semester and

"Sacraments" in the second semester. With a student body consisting of 44% non-

Catholic students, many of whom identify as evangelical Christian, and of approximately

60-65% graduates of public elementary schools, Therese stated that the introductory first

semester was "valuable in terms of getting everybody sort of on board and up to speed as

to what studying Religion was all about, and it was also a good introduction to

Catholicism" (p. 210). In this course, which Therese characterized as "pretty holistic" (p.

210) and "very broad" (p. 210), students explored

> …who are we as Church, what does it mean to believe in God, a lot of self-image
> stuff, and how is self-image reflected in your relationship with God. We did talk
> about revelation and we did talk about Scripture, generally, and tradition….
> touching acquaintance with the four marks of the Church…what is faith, what is
> religion, who is God, who is God in my life, how does God inform who I am with
> other people in the world. (p. 210)

In the following quote, Therese lamented that implementing the *Framework* has meant

the "developmental loss" (p. 227) of this course:

We need that first semester with freshmen who are coming in from a variety of backgrounds to build everybody back up….I really feel as if we kind of need that ease-in. It's hard to be at revelation and tradition and Scripture 5 weeks after school starts with a bunch of kids who never heard the word Catholic before in their life. (p. 216)

Therese stated that if she were to redesign the *Framework*, she "definitely would have a kind of baseline semester that doesn't just throw them into the deep water right away" (p. 221). She asserted that the bishops, in failing to provide this, "missed a huge opportunity" (p. 216) and manifested a lack of awareness of the diversity of students who currently populate U.S. Catholic secondary schools:

I really feel that especially given the increasing percentage of non-Catholics in Catholic high schools around the country, and we're very high, but around the country it's an increasing percentage…. And given our financial need to have that percentage be there, to stay viable, I think our Religion curriculum should be respectful of that, instead of landing it all on the department lap or the teacher's lap to figure out how to make this work. So that's my hesitation. (p. 216-217)

Moreover, rather than demand that teachers navigate a classroom in which 80-85% of the students are not ready for the "deep water" (p. 221), an introductory semester with "a little slower, developmentally more respectful start" (p. 216) would allow teachers to differentiate instruction for the minority of students who are truly prepared for the material: "You could give those kids the ability to do some thematic studies that they are passionately interested in, and to go deeper and share that with the class. There's all kinds of cool stuff you could do" (p. 222).

Similarly, Grace affirmed that St. Ann Academy's pre-*Framework* year-long "foundational course for freshmen" (p. 88), in which students explored entry-level concepts in identity, sacraments, Mariology, and theological anthropology, "served the needs of [her] students better" than the *Framework*'s ninth grade courses do. Introducing

students to this material during their first year at St. Ann's enabled them to investigate

those same concepts in greater depth in subsequent years of study.

Adjustments to Sexuality Education

As a direct result of implementing the *Framework*, Rosa, Lanie, and Grace have

all had to adjust and/or limit the amount of time they devote to sexuality education.   The

first semester ninth grade curriculum at Ascension High School includes a unit called

"Sex and the Teen," which Rosa "crammed in" (p. 2) in the midst of being "very

worried" (p. 2) that she would not be able to finish the content prescribed by the

Framework. She stated that "we did not do nearly as good a job as the year before" (p.

2), and, as a result, "I don't think the girls got as much out of it" (p. 2). In particular, the

need to teach about sexuality so quickly did not allow for the deep level of discussion and

personal sharing which had characterized this unit in the past:

> It's not gonna be the sharing and the finding out about oh, you've never been
> kissed either and oh, I'm not just like a weirdo. Just because this boy tells me
> everybody's having sex, this girl, this girl, this girl, and this girl, they're not, so
> why should I? That kind of thing. You're not gonna be able to get into that. I
> can lecture about it, we can talk about it a little bit, but there's just not gonna be
> any time. (p. 44)

In planning for her second year of teaching the *Framework*, Rosa anticipated that she

would be able to allocate not more than one week to the "Sex and the Teen" unit.

Additionally, the safe environment program[17] mandated by the diocese is also, according

to Rosa, "crammed in" (p. 50) during the ninth grade Religious Studies curriculum.

Prior to the *Framework*'s implementation, sexuality education at St. John's High

School consisted of a diocesan-sponsored program called "Free to Be," presented in a

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[17] The USSCB's *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, released in 2002 in the wake of
the clerical sexual abuse scandal, mandated the implementation of "safe environment" programs in every
U.S. diocese and archdiocese. Such programs aim to educate both minor and adult participants in
recognizing and preventing sexually abusive behavior.

one- week session to ninth grade Religious Studies classes and in a two-day, follow-up session to eleventh grade Religious Studies classes. Although Lanie characterized "Free to Be" as "a good program we don't want to really lose" (p. 70), the ninth grade module has no longer been taught in Religious Studies classes since the implementation of the *Framework*. Despite Lanie's expressed hope that another department—either Health or Educational Skills—would eventually pick up this program and integrate its content into their curriculum, no definite plans for this were in place at the time of her participation in this study. Similarly, as Lanie anticipated the upcoming first year of teaching the eleventh grade *Framework* curriculum at St. John's, the fate of the two-day, follow-up "Free to Be" session appeared to be in limbo, for she stated that "it will be interesting to see if that can still fit in there" (p. 70). Given these myriad uncertainties, Lanie expressed anxiety regarding the long-term continuation of sexuality education at St. John's:

> If it's not something that those teachers [teachers in departments other than Religious Studies] buy into, or feel like it's coming from them, then you run the risk of it deteriorating over time. And there will be no one person overseeing that, like there was in the Religion department. (p. 82)

In the years preceding the *Framework*, St. Ann Academy had required that Religious Studies teachers provide instruction related to sexuality education during all four years. Although this instruction assumed various forms, whether a single lesson, a chapter, or a unit developed jointly with the Counseling department, Grace stated that "always it was expected that the teaching of sexuality came out of the Theology department, to support the Church's teaching of chaste living and what that really means, not just limiting it to sex" (p. 111). This content has since disappeared from the curriculum: "That's not there at all….it is a loss….absolutely" (p.111).

In contrast to Rosa, Lanie, and Grace, Julia and Marshall have still managed to teach sexuality education more or less to the same extent as they did prior to the *Framework*. At St. Catherine of Siena School, this assumes the form of a three-week mini-course which Julia characterized as "something we're not willing to let go of" (p. 122); she and her colleagues adjust their coverage of *Framework* content, as needed, in order to allow them to spend this time on sexuality. Likewise, Marshall explained that St. Michael's High School—both before and after the *Framework*—has consistently devoted one week to sexual ethics during each year of Religious Studies.

The Framework*'s Different Approach to Scripture*

Frequent Use of Scripture, but Often in Less Depth

All six participants compared the *Framework*'s use of and approach to Scripture with that of their pre-*Framework* curricula. Lanie, Grace, Julia, and Marshall all observed that although the *Framework* is infused with frequent references to Scripture, they are not teaching Scripture to the same depth of understanding as they had prior to the *Framework*'s implementation. Lanie attributed this superficiality to the fact that the *Framework* lacks a full-year Scripture course; therefore, students learn only "a bit of the beginning of salvation history…and Jesus' fulfillment of that" (pp. 74-75). Grace emphasized that St. Ann's pre-*Framework* curriculum more thoroughly introduced students to methods of reading Scripture, canon formation, the role of Scripture in Catholicism, and the four evangelists; in contrast, the *Framework* addresses these topics only "very broadly" (p.94). Moreover, she stated that the *Framework* tends not to present Scripture passages in the context in which they appear in the Bible. When asked by the researcher if the *Framework* used such Scripture passages to support theological concepts, Grace responded affirmatively.

Julia acknowledged that students tend not to arrive at St. Catherine of Siena with

a high degree of Biblical knowledge; therefore, she and her colleagues have labored over

the years to craft a curriculum which would enable students to be comfortable with and

fluent in Scripture by the time they graduate. She asserted that "this *Framework* doesn't

help" (p. 135) with those efforts because it lacks a course that is devoted only to Scripture

without "a lot of other layers to it" (p. 131). She believes the first group of ninth graders

to experience the *Framework* curriculum are, as a result, "behind in their basic Bible

knowledge and workability and application" (pp. 131). Similarly, Marshall explained

that he provided his students with "a basic skeleton of Scripture" (p. 187) which he

dubbed "the Old or New Testament stat sheet" (p. 187). This presented only basic

Biblical information, such as the number of books in each Testament, the names of those

books, and when they were written. Like Lanie and Julia, Marshall only drew attention

to the consequences which result from a curriculum lacking an "inherently Scripture-only

course" (p. 187):

> They [students] lack the depth that's necessary as far as like diving in and reading
> an entire book from Scripture and really digesting it, pulling it apart and figuring
> out academically why is this important, as far as spiritually why is this obviously
> imperative. (pp. 187-188)

In her reflections on the *Framework*'s approach to Scripture, Therese recalled her

strong reaction to the document's first draft: "That was my first comment back on the

draft, was there's not enough frontloading…you're asking these kids to use Scripture all

the time, but there's not enough frontloading of it" (p. 214). However, after having

implemented the *Framework* at St. Martin de Porres, her viewpoint is more ambiguous,

and she has opted to reserve judgment until she has gained greater experience with the

Framework: "I guess the jury's still out with me on that" (p. 214). Lastly, Rosa

expressed appreciation for the way in which the *Framework* requires students to use Scripture frequently, maintaining that this exposure enables them to value the Bible as "not just some ancient book that has no bearing, that it's still just as pertinent as it was" (p. 34).

Less Content on Exegetical Methods

Four participants found that they spent more time teaching exegesis in their pre-*Framework* curricula than they have since the transition to the *Framework*. Both Grace and Rosa drew attention to the detailed historical-critical information they formerly shared with their students regarding the New Testament. Grace taught an entire chapter on each of the four Gospels, as well as the Acts of the Apostles and the writings of Paul. Rosa examined the historical development of the Gospels in the decades following Jesus' death and resurrection, teaching how each one was composed within a particular historical setting and for the needs of a particular audience. She gave special attention to contrasting the synoptic Gospels with the Gospel of John. However, since implementing the *Framework*, Rosa has found that "You can't give them all of those things anymore, because there's just not enough time" (p. 21).

Lanie strongly objected to the *Framework*'s placement of Scripture in the ninth grade year because of her perception that ninth graders lack the intellectual capability required to understand and conduct exegesis. Indeed, she experienced the *Framework*'s presentation of exegesis as superficial and repetitious, with each unit within a particular course examining a Scripture passages only on their surface. In contrast, in the St. John's pre-*Framework* curriculum, in which Scripture was taught in the tenth grade, Lanie would pair particular exegetical methods with sections of Scripture especially suited for

practicing those methods, such as source criticism with the Pentateuch and redaction criticism with Matthew's and Luke's infancy narratives. Lanie expressed apprehension about the long-term effects this shift may have on her department's ethos and on her students' lives of faith:

> I'm afraid that we're gonna lose some of that, we're gonna lose some of the focus of Scripture and how to read Scripture and how you understand Scripture…. And I obviously, with my background of Scripture, I think it's, knowing how to read Scripture is really important for their life going on as a Christian, to understand where their faith is coming from. It's not a minor thing! If they don't know the paschal mystery in depth, well, that could be revealed to them, but if they don't know Scripture, that's a problem. (p. 62)

Prior to the *Framework*'s implementation, Marshall also taught his students exegetical methods, including form criticism, literary criticism, and historical criticism, with the latter also integrating insights from the fields of sociology and anthropology. In contrast, he described the *Framework*'s approach to Scripture as offering students "a more spiritual, faithful angle towards their religion" (p. 160) which places Scripture in a broader Christological and ecclesial context, as he explained in the following quote:

> This is the divine word of God. Christ is his Son. Christ came to us and gave us these certain facts, or these certain truths, that we are to live our life by. We are to see Christ in all things, to be Christ for all others, and then the Church's role. (p. 161)

Marshall conveyed concern about the limitations of this approach in helping students to interpret potentially problematic Scripture texts, such as those which portray God as violent and even cruel. He maintained that exegetical tools assist students in reading such texts with an informed perspective and a critical eye towards understanding the socio-cultural context which produced them, a context which, though limited, does not negate the deeper truths these texts may teach. Therefore, he described teaching exegesis

as a "necessity" (p. 185) to which he has struggled to find time to give adequate attention within the *Framework*'s prescribed parameters.

Praise for the Framework*'s Approach*

Therese praised two key aspects of the *Framework*'s approach to Scripture. Unlike Grace, Rosa, Lanie, and Marshall, Therese does not believe that ninth graders need to learn exegesis:

> I don't know that there's anything gained by having first semester freshman learn the word exegesis or learn the process of exegesis. I think there's a lot to be gained from them learning, maybe without the word, sort of being introduced into a couple of the things that they might do if they're taking an exegetical approach to Scripture, without necessarily labeling and formalizing the approach, and then being able to build on that as they get older. (p. 220)

Therefore, Therese expressed appreciation for the way in which the *Framework* "really hammers home the literal and the spiritual senses of Scripture" (p. 253), for she asserted that this approach constitutes

> …a critical piece for the older adolescent and the young adult in maintaining their tie to Scripture—that they need to be able to assure themselves that if there are historical or scientific inaccuracies in Scripture it doesn't invalidate the truth that is revealed therein….I think it's an opportunity for kids to be able to maintain that in a society dominated by a scientific worldview, to know that it's OK, that the scientific worldview is not what Scripture is…so that therefore you can have the two side by side. For them not to have to wait for college to come to that conclusion is an incredible opportunity. (p. 253)

Therese also commended the way in which the *Framework* explicates the Scriptural foundations of Catholic theology.

The Framework*'s Different Approach to the Old Testament*

Less time spent on the Old Testament, with less content covered.

Five of this study's participants indicated that the adoption of the *Framework* has caused them to spend less time on the Hebrew Scriptures, also known as the Old Testament, and, consequently, to teach less content in this area. Grace attributed this

phenomenon to the *Framework*'s Christocentrism. Rosa stated that the *Framework*

presents "a very strong bias toward not understanding the Old Testament and just kind of

bypassing it" (p. 7), a situation which she believed to be problematic: "when you

disregard the Old Testament, you're disregarding a lot of important things" (p. 25). She

found that she did not teach her students even very basic facts about the Old Testament,

such as its scope and length relative to that of the New Testament. Julia also lamented

the loss of the sustained, focused study of the Old Testament which the St. Catherine's

pre-*Framework* curriculum had provided:

> I'd say they're [the students are] definitely lacking Old Testament. Old
> Testament is way lacking. It touches on it here and there and here and there but
> you don't have that solid—this is the experience of God's people, these are the
> original covenants. I mean, it's in here, lightly though, where they don't get to
> get comfortable with it and feel it and see it and see how that evolves into the new
> covenant. They don't, they don't have enough of that to be able to move through
> to the next step. We just kind of say "this is how it was, and then here's the
> whole other story." And in my department, we value those historical foundational
> pieces to who we are. (pp. 131-132)

Julia stated that if she were to revise the *Framework*, she would recommend at least one

full semester dedicated to the Old Testament.

Marshall taught a one-semester Old Testament course to ninth graders prior to the

Framework's implementation, the content of which included the formation of the Old

Testament, the creation stories, the judges, the kings, and the prophets, all of which

constituted valuable background in the origins of Christianity as well a foundation for

further studies. The Religious Studies curriculum at St. Michael's High School now

lacks such a course: "We kind of jump directly into the New Testament….that's the

biggest difference, so we no longer teach the first part of the Scripture. We teach more

Christocentric" (p. 157). He also observed that the *Framework* does not require that

students read Scripture as much as did the pre-*Framework* curriculum. Marshall experienced a sense of loss in making this shift, for now he teaches the Old Testament in a more cursory and less thorough manner, a situation he described as "…a loss for me personally. I think that's across the board a loss for me, and a loss for the students, and a loss for the school…. So that's a loss, the foundation of Scripture" (p. 179).

In reflecting more deeply on the nature of this loss, Marshall expressed misgivings about the extent to which lack of Old Testament background may impede students' ability to study the New Testament accurately:

> A lot of times when you read the New Testament it makes, obviously, a lot of connection to a lot of the Old Testament, what we call the Old Testament, stories, or histories. And so the kids will read these and not have that basis, not understand where it comes from. They don't get the idea that they're all talking about previous prophecies that had been made and that they're coming to fulfillment here. They don't get, they don't see those connections, and they don't also understand the depth of history surrounding the Jewish people or the chosen people and from whom Christ stems. (p. 183)

He also postulated that students who have not been immersed in the Old Testament might completely dismiss this body of religious literature without ever knowing Christianity's roots in Judaism and the inextricable links between the Old and New Testaments:

> The biggest worry on my part would have to be the fact that I think the kids might separate Christianity from Judaism based on this idea that they're dealing with New Testament and they go, "OK, well, Christianity is the New Testament. This part's not important." Because we're putting the emphasis on the New Testament, on the person of Christ, they might discount the Old Testament, thinking that this is—"oh, it's so much longer, why do I have to read this? I'm not gonna read this. We don't have to deal with that part….Christianity and Christ is in the New Testament." (p. 183)

Lastly, Marshall expressed concern that if his students enroll in Religious Studies courses in college, they will recognize the "gaping hole" (p. 184) that lack of an Old Testament course has left in their theological background.

Faced with the need to introduce the entire Bible to her students during the first semester of the ninth grade *Framework* curriculum, Therese explained that the time she and her colleagues allocated to the Old Testament consisted of the following survey:

> An overview of the Old Testament concept of covenant, a fairly deep reading of the creation stories, and of Abraham, just touching on Jacob and Joseph, going to Exodus pretty deeply again, and then just transitioning monarchy really quickly just so they kind of know how we get from Exodus to prophets, a setting for prophets. Then doing prophets, and then the overview of the New Testament. (p. 211)

Therese stated that the teachers in her department who had been accustomed to teaching the year-long, pre-*Framework* Scripture course struggled with this greatly condensed approach to the Old Testament. She advised those who protested, "I don't want to give up monarchy" (p. 214) that

> You got to—there's no room for monarchy. It will be covered at some point later, but it's just, except for the Davidic covenant, it's really not essential to what we're doing. I mean, if they take a Scripture class as an elective senior year, they will get it. But it's not essential to the *Framework.* (p. 214)

Ideally, Therese would prefer more time in the required *Framework* courses to teach the monarchic period and the prophets.

The Old Testament taught with the New Testament, not in its own right.

Four participants commented, some extensively, on the way in which the *Framework* presents Old Testament material alongside of New Testament material, rather than presenting Old Testament material in its own right and on its own terms. Rosa stated that the *Framework*'s approach has caused her students to struggle with understanding that although the Old and New Testaments are related, Jesus does not appear in the Old Testament. When asked by the researcher whether she believes that the *Framework* encourages students to confuse or conflate the Old and New Testaments, Rosa responded in the affirmative.

Prior to the *Framework*'s implementation, St. Catherine of Siena School had required a one-year Scripture course of all tenth graders: one semester of Old Testament and one semester of New Testament. Although students had been introduced to Jesus during their ninth grade foundational course, the year-long Scripture course, in Julia's estimation, allowed students to study the Old Testament "purely in the context of a Jewish framework" (p. 125) and, subsequently, to understand, historically, how Christian faith grew out of Judaism. In contrast, the *Framework* does not clearly delineate between the Old and New Testaments and does not provide "a place to study the events of the Old Testament chronologically" (p. 142), an approach that created confusion for the many St. Catherine's students who lack a strong background in Scripture:

> The way the *Framework* brings in Christology even in the Old Testament can be difficult for them….When we're working with teaching them the prophets and the stories of the Old Testament, and there's always that Christology in there….how does Jesus fit into the story? How does it foreshadow Jesus? How is Jesus a part of these events? It's very confusing for them to try to separate it out. And so it really does bounce along from Old Testament to New Testament….it's teaching Old Testament concepts and prophets and history with always Jesus in it. (pp. 124-125)

Julia further observed that the *Framework* addresses Old Testament topics and events not in themselves, but, rather, as a means of "supporting the Christology of the New Testament" (p. 143) and/or in relation to various points of Christian doctrine. Although she conceded the importance of connecting the Old and New Testaments regarding, for example, the concept of covenant, she stated that "there's something in there that isn't concrete enough, if you sort of pull and pick and choose a theological theme and weave Jesus into it, when it was an Old Testament event" (p. 145).

In the second interview, Julia reflected more deeply on her struggles with the *Framework*'s presentation of the Old Testament. She stated that, in preparation for that

interview, "I started to grapple with…why, theologically, do I have a difficulty with the way the Old Testament is presented?" (p. 144). Her lengthy answer to this question integrated her theological background, pedagogical philosophy, and understanding of adolescents, honed by nearly two decades of teaching Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools:

> Theologically, I think there's an importance in teaching the Old Testament in context of the people of the Old Testament, within the context of their own culture, of their own beliefs, that occurred in the experience of that time…. the reason that I think that that is beneficial when working with the adolescents is…. That when we teach the New Testament as God's redemptive action through Jesus, they can understand, they can learn and understand and integrate that topic into their lives. And when they look back to the Old Testament, they look at that as setting the stage for the redemption of Jesus in the New Testament. And I think it's a theological approach that I think is sound because of the development of the adolescents in that particular freshmen/ sophomore year. Because those kids, everything they're doing in their life as an adolescent, it's so self-centered, it's all about them and what they're doing. And when they reflect on their own lives, they look at the current situation, what's going on, and then they look back at, "oh now, I understand why that happened back then. So that I can apply it to my current situation." And I just think it's how their brains work. They're not mature enough to say, "currently, now these things are happening in my life, because down the road it's gonna develop in this particular God-plan for me." They're not there yet. So when I think of teaching the Old Testament in the context of the culture, of the people of that time, instead of theologically looking at the Old Testament all with the perspective of Jesus is gonna come out of this, we just keep it sound in the culture and the experience of the Old Testament prophets, people, history, theology. They study it separately as it is, then when they look at the redemptive process of Christ, they can look back at that point and say, "this is why these things were important"…. it's tapping into my innate…my experience of working with these adolescents. And I just think that they get the theology of the New Testament and then they can get the concrete value of the Old Testament. But the Old Testament has to set that stage in and of itself so they can better understand God's plan through Jesus. (p. 144)

In conclusion, Julia remarked that the *Framework*'s approach may prove effective for "an adult who has experience studying the Bible, and working with different themes and principles" (p. 145), but, for adolescents, she has found it to be simply "confusing" (p. 144).

As evidenced in the following quote, Marshall voiced some of the same reservations about the *Framework*'s approach to the Old Testament as Julia did:

> What I think that the boys from last year received that the guys from this year missed was that strong psychological connection that they can make between Old and New Testament—that they can make between the Jewish origins and then its birth of Christianity that comes from it and the connections that Christ himself has with his Jewish heritage and background and all that kind of stuff. And they can see this more as salvation history, than just Christianity and the New Testament functioning all alone by itself. (p. 158)

However, despite these concerns, Marshall's perspective proved to contrast sharply with that of Julia. Unlike Julia's preference for teaching the Old Testament first—chronologically, on its own terms, and without extensive references to Jesus or the New Testament—Marshall prefers the *Framework*'s approach of beginning with Jesus, the "final chapter" (p. 183) of salvation history:

> Dealing with Christianity and all of that, the New Testament alone, I think it gives the student the ability to, again, to use that filter, you know, use Christ as the lens, and then like kind of backtrack so they see the ending. Instead of the Old Testament, where you kind of start at the beginning, like you do a novel or a book, and go through it and say, OK, this is the beginning, here are all these historical points that happened and this is why they're important and all that kind of stuff, they kind of get the ending. The whole point is this. And then if they were to go back it might be easier for them to understand the content in light of the final chapter, if you want to call it that. So I think that's probably the biggest pro—is that the students can then look at the Old Testament after having gone through it in the way the *Framework* currently has it, and kind of read the Old Testament in light of what they understand in the New Testament and what they understood as the completion of divine revelation—the person of Christ. And that salvation history is all leading up to that point. And so that might make more sense to them. (pp. 182-183)

Marshall distinguished the clarity which he believes the *Framework*'s approach provides with the difficulties his students encountered in studying the Old Testament on its own prior to the *Framework*'s implementation. Students would read the Old Testament and be

…not quite sure what to do with it.…it doesn't make sense to them.…I think so it becomes a little bit more difficult for them to make the connection between salvation history, who the person of Jesus is, why we have these certain books in the Old Testament, and all that. When you read the Old Testament first, I think these questions arise. (p. 182)

Therese also endorsed the *Framework*'s presentation of the Old Testament as the "backdrop for the fulfillment of the covenant in the New Testament" (p. 211). She further remarked that

It's important for us as Christians to understand that the Jewish prophecies were this and that it's within the context of that covenant relationship and being the chosen people of God that by extension that the chosen people of God then become all of us, in the New Testament. (p. 247)

Although she acknowledged that her view "is not [the] academic, classic, theological approach" (p. 247), she stated that, "I'm not hung up on it. I really am not" (p. 247). Therese did, however, grant that her embrace of the *Framework*'s methodology is partially contingent on the limited time that the *Framework* allocates to Scripture; that is, only one semester for both Testaments. She stated that, given that timeframe, it is not possible to "take an approach of studying the Hebrew Scriptures as Hebrew Scriptures and how they reflect the richness of Judaism" (p. 246). When asked by the researcher whether she would adjust the *Framework*'s approach if she had more time to spend on Scripture study, Therese responded affirmatively.

The Framework *and the Old Testament: respectful/disrespectful toward Judaism.*

Rosa and Therese discussed their divergent perceptions of the extent to which the *Framework*'s approach to the Old Testament may be considered to embody respect towards Jews and Judaism. Rosa characterized her *Framework*-based textbook as portraying the Old Testament as "just a precursor for the New Testament" (p. 6). In her teaching, she explicitly sought to challenge this view:

> I always was constantly saying "you need to understand, girls…it's not called the Old Testament to everyone. This is also called the Torah and for the Jews, this is it." And I really tried to help them understand that we call it the Old Testament, but for Jews it's not old. It's it, and their understanding…is God. This is why they [Jews] don't accept the Trinity. (p. 6)

In the following exchange with the researcher, Rosa continued to elaborate on her perspective and to share her concerns about the *Framework* vis-à-vis Jews and Judaism:

> Rosa: I thought the Old Testament, being respectful of Jewish tradition—I think there needs to be a lot more of that. I think you need to be very careful.
> Carrie: Would you characterize the *Framework* as disrespectful?
> Rosa: Mmm, hmm. Yes. Because, you see, they call it old, everything is old—like it's not so important, new is what's really important. But without the old, you wouldn't have the new. And I just think it needs to be respected more. (p. 20)

Rosa further remarked that because the Old Testament recounts "the covenant God made with his people" (p. 25), "we can't just disregard them as God's chosen people" (p. 25).

In contrast, Therese did not find the *Framework*'s methodology with regard to the Old Testament to be disrespectful towards Jews and/or Judaism. She asserted that even within the parameters of "studying Hebrew Scriptures in the context of a backdrop for Christ as the fulfillment of the covenant" (p. 246), it is still possible to examine some specifically Jewish content, such as the Biblical origins and contemporary observance of Passover, with depth and richness. Such an approach also allows students to appreciate Jesus's Jewishness: when, for example, Jesus recites the Shema, "He's not pulling it out of thin air; he's actually quoting Jewish Scripture" (p. 246). Lastly, Therese postulated that the *Framework*'s interweaving of the Old and New Testaments may have positive ramifications in implicitly challenging anti-Semitism:

> I think it actually builds a bridge to Judaism, which some of our kids might have misconceptions or prejudices against Jews….so I think building that bridge helps them to be more respectful of Judaism versus not. So although theologically it may not be academically the approved approach, I think it's a legitimate approach….in our area, where they can make some pretty nasty comments about

Jewish people, I think showing them that, in our roots, we are Jews, is kind of not such a bad way to go. (pp. 246-247)

A Christocentric Curriculum

Rosa, Lanie, Grace, and Marshall drew attention to the *Framework*'s Christocentric nature, particularly in comparison to their respective schools' pre-*Framework* curricula. Although all concurred that the *Framework* emphasizes Christ and Christology more than their prior curricula, they expressed mixed reactions regarding this shift, noting both positive and negative aspects of it.

Positive Aspect of Christocentrism: An Opportunity to Develop a Relationship with Jesus

In the following quote, Rosa affirmed the *Framework*'s potential to empower students to develop a strong relationship with Jesus:

> I think they need to understand who Jesus is, because they're not gonna have a relationship with Jesus if they don't understand who he is. And so that part of the course is really good, because you really, by the time you're done….that develops a relationship…. they [the *Framework*] try to focus on Jesus as a human and Jesus as the Son of God both, constantly, and they are going deeper. It's definitely scaffolding, they go deeper and deeper and deeper. So, and just like any relationship, the longer you do it, the deeper it should be….so I think that part is really good. (pp. 40-41)

Similarly, Marshall praised the way in which the *Framework*'s Christocentrism offers students "a very real interaction with the person of Christ" (p. 177), an area in which he found his school's pre-*Framework* curriculum to be inadequate. He articulated his perception of the necessity of such an interaction with these words:

> It's important that the kids are getting this, this concept of who is Christ. And getting that as an essential belief—that he's not just another guy, he's not just another person that had lived and did some stuff and died. He is the way, he is the light, he is the purpose, he is why this all is. I think that's important. (p. 173)

Negative Aspects of Christocentrism

Despite Rosa's commendation of the *Framework*'s focus on Christ, she expressed concern, in remarks tinged with sarcasm, about the repetition inherent in that focus:

> I mean they [students] even joke, "Oh, what are we learning about today? Oh, Jesus. Oh wait, let me see, are we learning about Jesus today? What are we going to learn next year, Mrs. X, oh, Jesus?" I said, yeah, you're going to learn about Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Jesus spent three years teaching, so I'm going to teach you for three years on Jesus. (p. 7)

Likewise, Lanie speculated that the *Framework*'s Christocentrism may backfire, as students grow weary of studying Jesus in every course, each semester:

> There is this kind of repetitious thread that runs through the whole *Framework*, every course. It's very Christ-centered, almost to an apologetic way, that I'm concerned at the end that, I hope we're not going to be turning our students off to Jesus. Because it's like we're hitting them over the head with it. (p. 57)

Lanie did affirm the centrality of "the role of Jesus in our salvation" (p. 71) and the need to focus on Jesus while introducing students to Christianity. However, she expressed concern, particularly on behalf of her students who are "brand new to the Catholic experience" (p. 71), that "it's just too much freshmen and sophomore year…. I'm not sure that having that much of Jesus in the first two years is productive" (pp. 71-72). She maintained that a more general overview of Christianity may more effectively serve these students' needs.

Lastly, Grace characterized the Framework as "limiting in its theological scope" (p. 103), a situation she proclaimed to be "a pity" (p. 103). When prompted by the researcher to clarify if the *Framework*'s Christocentrism is what makes it limiting, Grace responded "Yes, yes….I just see too much Christocentrism" (p. 103).

Much More Advanced, Detailed Theological and Doctrinal Content

All six participants noted that the *Framework* encompasses much more advanced, detailed theological and doctrinal content than had been addressed in their school's pre-*Framework* curricula, with some participants questioning the value of this material. Rosa stated that nearly all of the *Framework*'s ninth grade content—with the exception of the incarnation, the annunciation, and rudimentary Trinitarian theology—had either not been covered at all in prior years, or had been covered only on a very basic level. New vocabulary which the *Framework* introduced included Christology and pneumatology. Therese enumerated a lengthy list of terms and concepts which she had not previously taught to ninth graders: divine revelation, natural revelation, Thomas Aquinas's five proofs of God's existence, oral tradition, written tradition, the relationship between tradition and Scripture, and apostolic succession. Grace, who characterized the *Framework* as "highly dogmatic" (p. 90) and "doctrinally heavy" (p. 97), especially for ninth graders, asserted that it contains a "higher level of doctrinal language" (p. 94) than she had previously taught. She also observed that the *Framework* consists of "mostly, or all, Christology and doctrine" (p. 109). Likewise, Julia described the *Framework* as "very dogma-oriented" (p. 125) and "doctrine-heavy" (p. 130). Marshall stated that in comparison to the St. Michael's pre-*Framework* curriculum, the *Framework* offers students "more Catholic theology as far as doctrine, as far as encyclicals, the teachings that are passed down… and official Church teaching" (p. 160).

Lanie cited a number of theological vocabulary words—including the anagogical method of Scriptural interpretation, the proto-evangelium, the analogy of faith, and the hypostatic union—which she had not taught prior to the *Framework*'s implementation

and with which both her Catholic and non-Catholic students have struggled. She stated

that she and her colleagues have questioned the importance of students learning this

terminology, some of which Lanie considers to be rather obscure:

> In all of my studies, and I consider myself to be pretty Catholic, a lot of these
> terms I have never used nor heard of in my theological studies. So, I don't know
> how necessary it is to our evangelization of our students. (p. 58)

Moreover, in the following quote, Lanie theorized that the *Framework*, in presenting so

much detailed vocabulary, may be implicitly overemphasizing the importance of

mastering this terminology: "You get all these terms down and all of that vocabulary,

and those definitions, will lead you to the truth. I don't think so! Somehow I don't think

that if the students don't know hypostatic union, that they're doomed" (pp. 86-87). Lanie

also expressed reservations regarding the *Framework*'s in-depth treatment of some

topics, such as the Trinity. While acknowledging that such subject matter must be

addressed on some level, she stated that

> …the depth in which they expect us to go into, that's where I question the
> appropriateness for students. We talk about Trinity, but…I think in how you
> speak about it, you have to be certain that the students are comprehending the
> concept. (p. 77)

Both Lanie and Julia raised questions regarding the need for the *Framework*'s

one-semester course on the paschal mystery. Lanie explained that the St. John's pre-

Framework curriculum addressed the paschal mystery within the context of the Scripture

course, but not on its own and not for an entire semester. Julia expressed her views about

this course in the following quote:

> The course on paschal mystery…I think that there's not as much in that course
> that is of value when trying to help them become faith-filled Catholics, right now.
> It's just in a high school place, I think there's more valuable things that we could
> be teaching. (p. 133)

Lanie also called attention to the *Framework*'s one-semester course on ecclesiology, an area of study which, like the paschal mystery, had been addressed in a more cursory fashion, and not for a whole semester, prior to the *Framework*'s implementation.

Lastly, Marshall expressed concern about the particular challenge which the *Framework*'s advanced, detailed theological and doctrinal content may pose for students who are not Christian. He revealed that, "I've heard from my non-Christian students, sometimes, when we give them more doctrine and more absolutes, it's more difficult for them to kind of wrap their minds around it" (p. 163). Marshall drew an analogy in considering what might occur if a Christian student attended a Muslim school. In Marshall's view, such a student would surely struggle to comprehend Muslim beliefs if the school presented such beliefs as "these just are" (p. 163) without contextualizing them or "giving them any sort of rhyme or reason" (p. 163). Marshall maintained that the *Framework* presents "very specific" (p. 163) Catholic beliefs and teachings in a similar manner, which, in his experience, has provoked struggle for students who are not Christian.

Androcentric Content

Rosa, one of two participants in this study who teaches at an all-girls Catholic secondary school, expressed strong reservations regarding the *Framework*'s androcentric content: "I think that everything is, because of the historical context, it's all Jesus, his apostles, all the way through it's men, men, men, men, men" (p. 35). She maintained that this pervasive focus on men reflects a lack of awareness of the needs of girls. Additionally, in the following exchange with the researcher, Rosa indicated that the

Framework does not support Ascension High School's mission of empowering young

women:

> Carrie: You talked about your school's focus about empowering women to be
> leaders and to be moral and ethical leaders…But I wondered if, would you
> say that the *Framework* helps you in doing that?
> Rosa: No, not at all….No, not at all, in any way. (p. 37)

Yet, according to Rosa, in an all-girls environment, "you just really have to be

cognizant of bringing in women" (p. 37). Especially because many of her students are

preparing for the sacrament of Confirmation, she expressed a desire that they understand

that there is a place for them in the Church and that "there are women of the Church who

do phenomenal things" (p. 37). In order to accomplish these goals, Rosa articulated her

plans for the coming academic year: to supplement the *Framework*'s content with an

exploration of female saints, such as St. Teresa of Avila, and prominent female Catholics,

such as Dorothy Day. In teaching about these and other women, Rosa hoped to cultivate

amongst her students a sense that "everybody can say "yes" at their own time….they're

not…just these holy, holy women at the end, but all these women went through the same

things that you [do], so about the community of saints, and how we're all called" (pp. 35-

36). Along with her expressed commitment to supplement the *Framework*'s androcentric

content, Rosa also clearly stated her perceived need that students understand that some

aspects of women's ecclesial roles will never change; namely, that "there's never gonna

be women priests" (p. 36).

A Different Approach to Other Religions

Rosa reflected at length on her struggles with the *Framework*'s presentation of

Catholicism vis-à-vis other religions. She characterized the *Framework* as "propaganda"

(p. 6, p. 7) which she often felt uncomfortable teaching to her students for three reasons.

First, she stated that she does not want to foster a biased perspective in her students; rather, she desires to prepare them to interact respectfully, in college and beyond, with people from a wide variety of religious backgrounds. Secondly, she expressed a commitment to respect her students' religious diversity even while ensuring that they learn Catholic theology accurately. For example, in the following quote, she discussed the delicate balancing act in which she must engage in order to teach her Mormon students about the Trinity:

> I have Mormons and trying to teach them the Trinity, and they don't believe in the Trinity. And I have Mormon girls and you have to be respectful. I understand that you don't understand this, and I understand why you don't understand it, but this is, you have to learn it this way. I'm not telling you you're wrong, but this is what we believe, and for the test, this is the way you need to answer the question. You can't say that it's three separate gods. You can't say that everyone can become a god….but ….I would never degrade. Whereas the book doesn't take those things into consideration. (p. 6)

Thirdly, Rosa wishes to respond with accuracy and with compassion to her students' queries about the ultimate fate of non-Catholic people. In her experience, the *Framework*, and the *Framework*-based textbooks used at Ascension High School, have not supported her in attaining this goal:

> You have girls who say, "What if my dad's not baptized? Does that mean that he's not going to heaven?" And there were things in here [in the textbook] that alluded to…the fact that unless you were a baptized Catholic—kind of a little bit back to that. Not blatantly, but in some ways. You can't, you can't tell people that! I'm sorry, I don't care if that's what the church believes. You can't tell a ninth grade girl that your Dad isn't gonna go to heaven because he's not baptized. (p. 49)

Rosa continued by stating that the *Framework* seemed to imply that "if you're not part of the Church you're not as good" (p. 52). She suggested that in emphasizing the Catholic Church as "the one true way" (p. 49), the *Framework* may reflect a more narrow view of salvation than the Church actually teaches:

> We believe the Catholic Church comes directly from Jesus and the apostles and apostolic succession. We do believe that. But if you are the best Buddhist you are, and you have not learned about Christ and you were raised as a Buddhist and you live your life as a Buddhist, and you are a good Buddhist, that does not mean that you can't go to heaven. And that is what the Church teaches, but they didn't go into that. It was just, this is the Church, and this is the one true way, and this is the way it is, and I just don't feel comfortable saying that. (p. 49)

In concluding her remarks on this topic, Rosa reiterated her commitment to share with her students her understanding of an inclusive God who welcomes all people, as distinguished from the *Framework*'s more restrictive perspective:

> The bottom line is, it's not gonna stop you from going to heaven, that God calls everyone. Yes, I want you to be a Catholic, I'm not trying to teach you to be something else, but if this is where you were raised, and this is what you know, and this is, if you were going to leave it, you would lose your family and all of these things, do you think God is saying, "Sorry, you're not coming? Sorry, but you are not a Catholic, you're not coming." So, 'cause then they're like, "are you gonna go to hell? Where you gonna go? What's gonna happen to you?" And I say, I'm sorry, but they don't know all the answers. They don't know all the answers. Jesus welcomed Gentiles, Jesus welcomed all of these people, are we gonna stand here and say—is the Church hierarchy gonna stand here and say—"you are not us, so you are them, so you are not going to heaven?" I can't tell you that. This is what they're saying, but I can't tell you that. (p. 49)

Both Rosa and Julia expressed concern about the *Framework*'s elective course E, "Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues." Although they acknowledged that they have not yet taught this course, because the *Framework*'s design intends the elective courses to be taught in the junior and/or senior years, they offered observations based on their review of the course content outlined in the *Framework*. Rosa deemed the course to be "biased" (p. 19), in contrast to Ascension's pre-*Framework* World Religions course, which she described as "not from a Catholic perspective, it's just a general overview of world religions" (p. 19). Similarly, Julia articulated a profound sense of unease with what she perceived to be the larger implications of the *Framework*'s perspective:

> When I reviewed the elective course E, it really confirmed my initial thoughts…. There's a sense of a, sort of a supremacy, that all religions are compared to Catholicism…there's definitely written words about encouraging acceptance, understanding of all faiths and all people. But the way the *Framework* lays it out, I did not see in the *Framework* an opportunity to study and appreciate those separate religions just as they are. That there's always this perspective of comparing them to Catholicism, with a sense of, well, Catholicism is a little better and these don't quite meet that standard. Which, I think, gives the message that some form of humans could be a little better than others, and that all are not necessarily equally blessed as God's children and to be taken care of by God. (p. 146)

Julia contrasted the *Framework*'s approach with the manner in which she prefers to teach a World Religions course, that is, by fostering appreciation for those religions on their own terms:

> There's such a value in understanding the different religions from the perspective of the religion, of appreciating their understanding of God and spirit and rite and ritual, just as for what it is for those people, and how they benefit and how they grow from it, so that, as humans in the human race, we can give authentic appreciation, rather than, "I appreciate you, but you're not quite as good as I am." (p. 146)

Apologetic Content: Emphasizing the Positive, De-emphasizing the Negative

Both Marshall and Rosa discussed the way in which the *Framework*'s apologetic stance has caused them to teach theological content which emphasizes the Church's positive aspects and de-emphasizes its negative aspects. Marshall maintained that if a teacher were to present only the *Framework*'s content, as written, without supplementing, "the students might not get enough regarding dealing with some of the sinfulness in the Church and explaining to them that the Church is comprised of people who sin" (p. 196). Because, in Marshall's view, the *Framework* tends "to skimp on it, to go lightly over, [or] to gloss over" the Church's more problematic aspects, he drew attention to the educator's responsibility to address these topics: "this falls on the shoulders of the educator, or of the teacher, whoever it is, to kind of be like, listen, guys, the white elephant's in the

room…. kind of explaining to the kids this element" (p. 195). In particular, Marshall highlighted the importance of teaching students about the clerical sexual abuse scandal and sharing with them strategies for preventing, challenging, and reporting abusive behavior, a series of topics to which St. Michael's High School devotes a week each year as part of a diocesan-mandated program. However, even in addressing troubling issues like this one, Marshall stressed the need to assist students in understanding that the mistakes and sinfulness of the Church's members do not negate the goodness of the Church's overall mission.

Rosa asserted that both the *Framework*'s content and tone portray the Church in an almost exclusively positive fashion:

> It's really just, Church is good this, and Church is good that, Church is this, Church does this, and aren't we just really great, and you should be a Catholic, because look at all, we're really just good. We follow Jesus….Jesus was super, and we're super because we do everything Jesus does. (pp. 37-38)

She further maintained that the *Framework* depicts priests, in particular, in a complimentary manner: "There's just so much—the Church is wonderful, believe in the Church, the Church is great, and we, the priests, are the ones who make it great" (p. 25). In her view, this depiction fails to take account of the clerical sexual abuse scandal:

> I think they had one sentence in the entire book about yes, the Church is still run by man, and man makes mistakes. That was their only sentence in the entire book that alluded to the priests [sexual abuse scandal]. And that was it. (p. 51)

Like Marshall, who called attention to the educator's role in addressing the *Framework*'s lacunae, Rosa described the way in which she has assumed responsibility for educating her students about this situation:

> They alluded to the priest scandals, but they don't come out and say it, because they don't want to say it, and so I say it. And I just say it. Because a lot of times, I don't think their parents even talk to them about it, and there are girls who don't know. And they need to know—everyone needs to know. And I just think that's

> very, very important and I don't gloss over it, that anything like that, whether it's your teacher, whether it's your youth minister, your coach, anyone….This is not OK, and don't ever think that it is. And just abuse of power and any of those things. (p. 50)

Rosa also observed that the *Framework* devotes scant attention to historical manifestations of the Church's mistakes, imperfections, or sinfulness, such as the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition. She stated that this portrayal of the Church as "perfect" (p. 52) contradicts the "more balanced" (p. 51) material her students encounter in their History courses.

Mariology

Participants offered a variety of disparate perspectives regarding the amount of attention the *Framework* devotes to Mariology. Both Grace and Julia indicated that they have spent more time on Mariology than they had prior to the *Framework'*s implementation. Julia articulated the value of this focus on Mary in the following quote:

> The *Framework* does have a good, solid aspect of Mary in it. And we thought that was really beneficial, not only for our school, but for kids in general, especially like how I described how they come in from the different walks and places and Christian beliefs and understandings. Many of them have a misconcept [*sic*] of Mary, so to have that worked into the *Framework* is really neat. We definitely enjoy that aspect of it. (p. 131)

Conversely, Rosa and Marshall asserted that the *Framework* manifests a deficiency with regard to Mary. Rosa maintained that in an all-girls environment, helping the students to understand their connection to Mary is critical; yet, in her view, the *Framework* fails to provide this: "They don't spend a lot of time on Mary. They just say we don't worship Mary. And I think for girls it's really important" (p. 21). Marshall stated that he and his colleagues believe that Mary needs more attention "than the current bishops' curriculum allots or suggests" (p. 160), particularly because devotion to Mary is a constitutive aspect of the charism of the religious community which sponsors St.

Michael's High School. To that end, he described the work he and his colleagues have undertaken in order to ensure that St. Michael's students receive adequate education regarding Mariology:

> We have been discussing in our meetings a lot about how we can fit specific units—supplementing actual units—like add a unit to the course regarding Mariology. And doing this on a yearly basis. Sort of freshmen through senior level, they'll get four different units regarding Mary and Mariology, and her centrality to the Church and her centrality to the order. (p. 198)

Incorporating Supplemental Content into Framework *Courses*

Five participants detailed the ways in which they incorporate supplemental content into *Framework*-based courses, both Scriptural content and other theological material. Of these five, three offered their perspective on what, if any, impact this practice has on their ability to teach all of the *Framework*'s content thoroughly.

Supplemental Scriptural Content

Both Marshall and Therese emphasized the extent to which they supplement the *Framework*'s treatment of Scripture. Marshall explained that he regularly begins class with reading and analyzing a Scripture passage that may complement the theme on which that particular class session will focus. In engaging his students in this exercise, he has sought to provide them

> …with a little experience of exegesis, so they get a taste for understanding why it's so important that they not only just read it [Scripture] at its face value, but look into it as far as context and authorship, who wrote when and where and why, and what from this [they] can pull out as being the fundamental religious truths that we then take and apply to our lives. (p. 187)

In the following exchange with the researcher, Marshall defended his incorporation of additional Scriptural content into his lesson plans, asserting his belief that this practice congrues with the intent of the *Framework*'s authors:

Carrie: So even if that's not in *Framework* per se, that's something that, it sounds like you've taken it upon yourself, like "I want to make this a part of my class."

Marshall: Something that I find to be excruciatingly important. And I think that the *Framework* allows for it to be put in there. It doesn't say, oh, when you do this, I want you also…but it also doesn't disallow it. And it also keeps it open because the kind of themes and things that we're talking about, standards that we're supposed to accomplish are very much being based on Scripture, being based on the person of Christ. Or whatever the unit might be, it allows you to go to Scripture as one of your primary sources, which is I'm guessing what they intended. I'm sure they intended for Scripture to be used heavily, so that's something that I'm gonna be doing. (p. 187)

Therese, who described herself and her colleagues as "very concerned" (p. 215) about the *Framework*'s "deficits" (p. 215) with regard to Scripture, professed her commitment to "infuse Scripture much more intentionally just as part of the lesson plan" (p. 215) in every *Framework*-based course. For example, in the first semester ninth-grade course, she supplemented the *Framework*'s presentation of the Old Testament with more information about the historical, cultural, and sociological background and evolution of Judaism. In the second semester ninth-grade course, she taught Jesus's parables, Jesus's miracles, events in the life of Jesus, and the distinctions between the synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John in much greater depth than the *Framework* prescribed. Regarding the tenth-grade courses, Therese specified her intent to begin the first semester course on the paschal mystery with a thorough examination of the creation stories in the book of Genesis and of the suffering servant passages in the book of the prophet Isaiah. Likewise, she intended to begin the second semester course on Ecclesiology with study of the Pentecost account. She summarized her approach to supplementing the *Framework*'s Scriptural content by stating that she and her colleagues aim to utilize Scripture as much as they utilize their course textbooks, in order to "bulk

up what's missing intentionally in the *Framework* in terms of the infusion of Scripture"

(p. 215).

Other Supplemental Content

Before describing the theological content with which she supplements the

Framework, Grace articulated her fundamental attitude regarding the extent to which the

Framework holds sway over her autonomy as a teacher and her authority to determine the

content she presents in her classroom:

> Sometimes they say, this is the norm, freshmen Theology, in chapter 3, you cover,
> um, the Immaculate Conception. OK, fine. You do that, and you do what they
> say, these are the topics that need to be covered, and you do that. And then you're
> like, I'm just gonna do what I want anyway. I've followed what they told me,
> and….I'm just gonna do this anyway, I don't care what they say….when people
> in our department meetings are like "we have to teach what?" And I'm thinking,
> take it with a grain of salt. Just do it, and then do whatever you want! (p. 95)

When prompted by the researcher to specify what content she presents to her students

after having taught the material that the *Framework* prescribes, she stated that "maybe I'll

study theologians that the Church says are not in proper communion with the Church" (p.

96), such as Charles Curran, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Sandra Schneiders[18], "or any

of those nuns that are on the bus[19] going across America" (p. 108).

In describing the way in which she portrays such individuals, Grace stressed that

she is neither seeking to undermine the Church, nor to foment rebellion amongst her

students, nor to glorify dissent. Rather, she desires to offer her students "good

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[18] Charles Curran is a Roman Catholic priest and moral theologian. In 1986, the Vatican's Congregation
for the Doctrine of the Faith declared him unsuitable to serve as a professor of Catholic theology because
he had expressed views on various moral issues that dissented from the official teachings of the Catholic
Church. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is a Catholic feminist theologian and Biblical scholar. Sandra
Schneiders is a Roman Catholic religious sister, feminist theologian, and Biblical scholar.
[19] "Nuns on the Bus" was a nine-state, 15-day bus tour which occurred in the summer of 2012. Through
the tour, four religious sisters, all members of Network, a Catholic social justice lobby, sought to raise
awareness of what they perceived to be inadequate attention to the needs of the poor in the proposed federal
budget that was then being debated in the U.S. House of Representatives.

scholarship" (p. 108), information "pertinent to what's going on in our Church now" (p.

108), and "another perspective that [they] as discerning women of faith needs [*sic*] to be

mindful of" (p. 96). In the following exchange, Grace elaborated on the rationale which

underlies her selection of supplemental theological content:

> Carrie: Is there anything more you wanted to say about what you're trying to
> accomplish theologically and/or pedagogically by supplementing the
> content in that way?
> Grace: Yes. One, critical thinking skills, OK. Analytical skills. Reading sources
> that students would not normally read about and work with them so that
> they can have a proper understanding of what Curran writes and who he is
> and what his work—the truth that can be found in his work. I take that as
> [a] professional obligation as a theologian. I don't read and talk about or
> reflect on concepts in Theology that only support what I think and
> believe….I have to be open to the evangelical Christian. I have to be open
> to the Muslim, the Jew, the Hindu, the Buddhist, the traditional,
> conservative Christian, Catholic, the liberal Catholic, and everything in
> between. That's my job.
> Carrie: And it sounds like you're trying to cultivate that same openness in your
> students.
> Grace: Exactly. Into my students. Yes, yes, precisely. They don't have to
> believe it, but I would be remiss if I didn't expose them to other thoughts
> of Theology, other schools of thought. As an educator. They're gonna
> meet all kinds of people in this world. (pp. 108-109)

Grace continued by discussing contemporary films with theological themes which

she routinely utilizes as supplemental content following the completion of a unit in a

Framework course. Examples include *Saint Ralph* (2005), which she described as a

"sweet, cute movie…that brings in…less doctrinal, more praxis-oriented theology.

Pastoral—talking about the role of love, the role of God, actually, in this young boy's

life, rather than just reading the Trinitarian doctrine on the page" (p. 115); and *One True*

Thing (1998), which provides an opportunity to examine "the dynamics of family" (p.

116) and "the role of faith" (p. 116). According to Grace, such films assist her students

in viewing faith as "pertinent to their everyday life" (p. 116) and in viewing Theology

concretely: "the stuff we're studying is real, and so, how do they use it, and how do they live it" (p. 116).

Supplemental theological content which Marshall has incorporated into *Framework* courses included the seven sorrows of Mary; ethics, conscience, and moral decision-making; and contemporary moral issues such as teen suicides, bullying, and sexual orientation. Rosa also has supplemented the *Framework*'s content with attention to current moral and ecclesial issues. For example, in August of 2011, the rector of the cathedral of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Phoenix announced that girls would no longer be permitted to function as altar servers, an event which garnered national attention in the Catholic media. Rosa devoted class time to discussing this matter, because

> I just wanted to bring it to their attention and say, what do you think about this, girls? Is this OK? Because I don't think it's OK…. I said, is this the church we want? And how much power a bishop has. So I want them to be aware of those things. (p. 36)

Lastly, Julia mentioned the two supplemental units which her department teaches during the ninth-grade Religious Studies courses, one on substance abuse and one on relationships.

The Possibility of Supplementing and Still Teaching All of the Framework*'s Content*

Julia indicated that because she and her colleagues devote about three weeks to each of these supplemental units, "the *Framework* gets kind of inched out" (p. 127). Moreover, she stated firmly that these units are "something we're not willing to let go of" (p. 127), even if retaining them means omitting some *Framework* content from the instructional plan. Conversely, Marshall characterized the *Framework* as "an 80/20 kind of thing" (p. 159); that is, he estimated that he spends 80% of his time teaching

Framework content and 20% of his time teaching supplemental material. He emphasized that supplementing the *Framework* with additional theological material has not caused him to "skimp" (p. 198) on the *Framework*'s content: "I feel like I've had plenty of time, plenty of time, to get through the material and then supplement more…. I don't feel like I've had to pare down the *Framework* at all" (p. 198). Similarly, Therese stated that she and her colleagues, despite supplementing the *Framework* substantially, "did not really have to give anything up in terms of coverage" (p. 213). She further remarked that she does not feel "constrained" (p. 240) by the *Framework*'s parameters; rather, she believes that, with the exception of the "packed" (p. 254) ninth grade curriculum, "There seems to be room for being very selective about what you want to add in…. There really does seem to be room there" (p. 240).

Charism and Heritage of the School: Creative Solutions to Retaining This Material

Four participants professed their commitment to retaining, in some form or fashion, theological content related to the charism[20], heritage, and history of their respective schools and/or of the Catholic religious communities which sponsor those schools, even if the implementation of the *Framework* has complicated this task. Grace stated that she and her colleagues have continued to teach a unit on the founder and history of the St. Ann's sponsoring religious community during the first quarter of the ninth grade year. Grace stated that they may adjust their treatment of the *Framework* material in order to allow sufficient time for this unit; they have not, however, curtailed this unit since adopting the *Framework*. Similarly, Therese and her colleagues carved out

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[20] Charism, from the Greek word *charis*, meaning gift, refers to the gift of a particular ministry and spiritual focus given by God to the Church. For example, all U.S. Catholic secondary schools sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy are animated by the charism of Venerable Catherine McAuley; that is, a focus on the works of mercy, with particular concern for the education of women and girls, especially those who are economically poor.

three weeks during the first semester ninth-grade course for an exploration of the history and contemporary meaning of the St. Martin de Porres charism. This unit also served to prepare the students for the first Eucharistic liturgy of the academic year, which would present a new experience for the many students who had never before participated in Catholic worship. Likewise, Marshall worked cooperatively with the other members of the Religious Studies department at St. Michael's High School to develop strategies for teaching some aspect of the history of the school's sponsoring religious community at each of the four grade levels.

In contrast to the experiences of Grace, Therese, and Marshall, Lanie found that implementing the *Framework* prompted the loss of the unit on the charism and heritage of the St. John's sponsoring religious community which formerly had constituted several weeks of the ninth-grade Religious Studies curriculum. Lanie characterized this situation as "a big change" (p. 56) about which she feels "concern" (p. 82). Because "there just isn't room in the curriculum to do that now" (p. 56), she and her colleagues have considered various ways in which students could still be exposed to this material. One possibility would entail repackaging this content into four smaller units, each of which could be taught during one of students' four years at St. John's. Another option would be to focus the ninth-grade retreat, a mandatory, day-long event, "on the charism of the school and what it means to be a part of St. John's" (p. 82), if the school's new Retreat Director were to be amenable to this. Lastly, because all ninth graders enroll in an "Educational Skills" course which "does not have necessarily a set curriculum" (p. 81), Lanie indicated the possibility that this course could incorporate the charism and heritage material formerly taught by the Religious Studies department. Regarding this last option,

Lanie stated that, in years past, the members of the Religious Studies department tended to be the only faculty members who knew and understood the charism well enough to be able to teach it. In contrast, presently, many "more of our teachers are really on board with our mission and speak about it in class" (p. 81); therefore, Lanie believes that the Educational Skills teachers would possess the capability to teach this material effectively. At the time of the second interview, Lanie had not solidified which, if any, of these options, would be actualized when the new academic year commenced in the fall. She did, however, express a firm commitment to follow up on these various possibilities, any or all of which could function "to give the freshmen a sense of identity—that they are part now of this much bigger mission" (p. 82).

More Content, But Less Depth

Both Julia and Therese discussed how the *Framework* contains a greater quantity of theological content than they had previously taught; however, they are teaching this content in a more superficial, less in-depth manner. In the following exchange with the researcher, Julia began to express her feelings regarding this shift:

> Carrie: What do you think about that shift to this more content-heavy…?
> Julia: Right now I don't like it. Allow me to be blunt…. My gut reaction is to say the kids don't get on board as much. But…as their teacher, it's my job to deliver it and to be a part of it so that they do get on board. (p. 127)

Julia depicted herself and her colleagues as "feeling our way as we go" (p. 127), as they attempt to navigate the content of a *Framework* which she described as

> …too heavy and too impacted…too full. It's too much quantity of what we need, of what the bishops are asking us to teach, versus the quality of being able to teach certain concepts in depth. The bishops require the students to learn a lot of Catholic dogma. (p. 151)

Julia expressed frustration with the amount of content in the *Framework*, and with her consequent inability to teach all of that content thoroughly, when she stated that "You

can't say that all of that is equally as important and it can all be covered, because it's not.

It's not and it can't" (p. 154).

In her role as the Religious Studies Department chair at St. Martin de Porres High

School, Therese assumed responsibility for helping her teachers to understand that they

could not teach all of the *Framework*'s content "to mastery" (p. 213); rather, she advised

them simply to focus on laying foundations, particularly regarding topics, like the Trinity,

that the *Framework* repeatedly revisits throughout the four years. She maintained that

she and her colleagues "didn't give up anything in the *Framework*" (p. 213) in terms of

content; however, they did not teach this content to the level of depth to which they had

become accustomed prior to the *Framework*'s implementation. She further

acknowledged that many teachers in her department struggled with this situation: "I

think most of my teachers had a really hard time. They knew it intellectually, but in

practice they were really overloading themselves and the kids, just automatically trying to

go into the depth that they would have otherwise" (p. 214).

Courses That Teachers Perceive to be Important Are Electives in the Framework

All six of this study's participants critiqued the *Framework*'s assignment of

elective status to some courses which they perceive to be essential, some of which were

required in their schools' pre-*Framework* curricula. These courses include Scripture,

Social Justice, Church History, and World Religions and/or Ecumenism/Interreligious

Dialogue, all of which appear in the *Framework* as one-semester electives.

Scripture

Grace, Lanie, Marshall, and Julia all lamented the loss of the year-long Scripture

course which had been required of their students prior to the *Framework*'s

implementation. Grace spoke with passion, conviction, and energy in articulating and

defending her belief that Scripture should appear in schools' curricula as a year-long

required course, not as a one-semester elective:

> How can you do the Bible in one semester?....Sacred Scripture is a font of, the
> source of our Theology.   You have Scripture, and you have tradition. Scripture is
> God's word. We don't have Theology if we don't have Scripture—that's where it
> comes from! And I'm sure the Protestants would be laughing at us. I'm not
> trying to get away from Christology by any means, but how do you have a
> Theology program where Scripture is an elective? That just blows me away,
> when it's the source of our faith, God's word. (pp. 101-102)

Lanie situated her remarks on this same topic within the context of a reflection on the

Catholic Church's greater emphasis on Scripture in the years since the Second Vatican

Council (1961-1965), suggesting that the bishops, in crafting the *Framework* without a

required Scripture course, may be intentionally contradicting the conciliar view:

> I have issue with it being an elective. I think Scripture's pretty important. It's not
> always been the case in the Catholic Church that the laity were supposed to be
> reading Scripture. But I think since Vatican II, it's very clear that we should be.
> And I would feel that the bishops would be, in that sense, being a bit hypocritical,
> maybe, is the word—to, in one sense, the Vatican saying "this is important," and
> then the bishops saying "well, we can have it be an elective. We want to maintain
> our authority in interpreting Scripture for our faithful." I don't know, maybe
> that's me projecting my own bias. That male ego sometimes, I think, gets in
> there. (p. 77)

Marshall, who characterized the *Framework*'s lack of a required Scripture course

as a "great omission" (p. 176), stated that students have lost an essential foundation for

their theological studies and been deprived of a "very strong and very clear-cut reading of

the sacred text" (p. 180). Although a year-long Scripture course had been required at St.

Michael's prior to the *Framework*'s implementation, Marshall stated that such a course

would have even "more potential and more power" (p. 176) within the context of the

Framework's Christocentric curriculum: "If the kids have established that relationship

with the person of Christ, and then we give them the tools to look at Sacred Scripture…in

a meaningful academic…way, then it allows them, their own spirituality, to grow" (p.

175). Lastly, Julia stated that it would have been "wonderful" (p. 133) if the *Framework*

had allowed for a full year of Scripture: one semester of Old Testament, including

history and prophets, and one semester of New Testament, with an emphasis on

Christology and the Gospels.

Social Justice

Marshall described himself as "upset" (p. 176), "depressed" (p. 176), and "sad"

(p. 180) regarding the shift from a one-year Social Justice course required of all St.

Michael's juniors to the one-semester elective mandated by the *Framework*. Like his

views on the omission of a required Scripture course, Marshall maintained that a required

Social Justice course would manifest more transformative potential when experienced

within the context of the *Framework*'s Christocentric curriculum than it had prior to the

Framework's implementation. He expounded upon this hypothesis as he reflected on his

own experience of taking a pre-*Framework* Social Justice course as a high school junior,

a course which, he now believes, overemphasized the human capacity to effect present-

day social change and de-emphasized God's capacity to effect the coming of the

kingdom:

> My experience was, I took much more of a distance from "God will," and I saw it
> much more the "I must," you know? And I think that was a product I think of just
> how things were structured. I saw Social Justice as, this is man-created, this
> needs to be man-solved, it is my moral obligation to fix this evil or this injustice
> and all this kind of stuff, and this can't go down. Or this can't happen….I think a
> lot of people have a tendency to think less about the kingdom and more about the
> now. So there's, I think, a problem with that, because I think it allows kids or it
> kind of has students and people think more that this is it, and if there's injustice
> and pain and turmoil and all that kind of stuff here, then that's all it is. And so we
> have to fix it. (pp. 174-175)

Although Social Justice is now a one-semester elective at St. Michael's, Marshall

does not fear that social justice-oriented activities will cease; rather, he predicted that

students and teachers would, in various capacities, continue to engage in service, charity,

and justice in the local community. However, he expressed fear that without a strong

anchor in the Religious Studies curriculum, such activities, however popular, will lack

theological grounding and/or religious motivation:

> The kids are not going to be anymore, I think, explicitly making the connection between social justice and Christ. They're gonna see it I think more in a humanistic way, that you're supposed to do good for other people. But they're not going to see it necessarily as you're supposed to do good for other people, because you are of one body, and then that connection that is made with Christ, as unifying us all in that one body. I think that that's where it's gonna be lost, which…you still get good things being done, but they're not gonna be making the connection which I guess then can lead to a sense of utopian attempt that is void of God. This idea that we are alone, so, let's do it ourselves—we've got to make what's here the best that there is because there's nothing else. That's the risk. So I don't think social justice is gonna die, but I think that its face might be changed. (p. 180)

Because Lanie believes that "knowing the church's social teachings is an

imperative" (p. 67), she characterized herself as "very stunned" (p. 67) when she

discovered that the *Framework* does not require a Social Justice course. She stated that

students must grow in "understanding the Church's call to serve" (p. 67) as a key aspect

of "who we are as Catholics" (p. 67) in a global world. Additionally, social justice lies at

the core of the charism of the religious community that sponsors St. John's. Therefore, as

the Religious Studies department chairperson, she has decided to retain the one-semester

Social Justice course currently required of all juniors. Sequentially, this course will

follow the *Framework*'s required one-semester Morality course and supplant the

Framework's required Sacraments course, the content of which will be incorporated into

an existing elective course at St. John's. Lanie stated that she informed the diocesan

Superintendent of Schools of this plan, and "so far there hasn't been any repercussion" (p. 65). Even though no one has, as of yet, expressed any opposition regarding this adjustment to the *Framework*'s scope and sequence, Lanie did attempt to imagine her response to any such protest: "I think we have a pretty good argument, and I would just, I would really have a problem if between [the superintendent] and the bishop, they would not be fine with that" (p. 68).

Grace discussed the St. Ann Academy one-semester Social Justice course, which, prior to the *Framework*'s implementation, was required of all seniors. The course provided students with the opportunity to explore global issues such as poverty and environmental devastation and to develop their own views on controversial issues of particular interest to them, such as same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption. Students learned about these topics utilizing "a balance of church sources and social, secular sources" (p. 97). With the transition to the *Framework*, not all St. Ann's students will have access to this experience. Lastly, Therese discussed her strategy in adjusting to Social Justice as an elective course at St. Martin de Porres, rather than the required course it was previously. She and her colleagues have attempted to infuse Catholic Social Teaching into the *Framework*'s required Morality course, so that all students will be exposed to the substance of these basic principles.

World Religions and/or Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue

Both Grace and Therese advocated for a place in the required core courses for World Religions and/or Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue. Grace argued that in a world which has increasingly evolved into a "global society" (p. 102), students must learn "how we as Catholics work with the other religions" (p. 102). Therese situated her

remarks on this matter in the context of her understanding of Vatican II's call to dialogue with other religions and of her perception of the state of such dialogue in the geographical area in which she lives and teaches:

> I'm living in [location], where it's very pluralistic, and yet I find, and I found this in parish ministry so it's not just unique to Catholic high schools, where I find that what is spoken versus what is actually thought relative to acceptance of the different, the other, is dismal. And so I think fostering that—not just tolerance, and not just mouth service of the encounter with the other. I think we really need to foster, keeping in the spirit of [Vatican II documents] *Nostra Aetate* and of *Lumen Gentium*, really need to foster that understanding that the other is not just tolerated, [but is] to be accepted and to be dialogued. And I think it's important enough that it should be one of the required semesters regardless of what else we're doing. (p. 225)

Church History

Both Rosa and Grace briefly expressed a belief that a Church History course of some length, whether a year or a semester, should be required. Grace stated that Church History "is about identity" (p. 102), and, as such, presents a valuable opportunity for students to learn who they are as members of the Church based on that ancient heritage.

Theological Topics Emphasized Less in the Framework

In addition to discussing semester-length or year-long courses that were required prior to the *Framework*'s implementation and that are now electives, participants also identified theological topics which receive less emphasis in the *Framework*'s courses than they did in their respective schools' pre-*Framework* curricula. Five participants reflected on the *Framework*'s lack of attention to Catholic liturgy and sacraments, particularly at the ninth-grade level. Additionally, Rosa specified several other theological topics, prominent in Ascension High School's prior curriculum, which she wished that the *Framework* would have highlighted.

Little or No Attention to Catholic Liturgy and Sacraments, Particularly in Ninth Grade

Of the five participants who offered reflections on the *Framework*'s neglect of Catholic liturgy and sacraments, particularly at the ninth-grade level, four expressed consternation regarding this phenomenon. Conversely, one maintained that liturgical and sacramental education is best left to the junior year, which is the time at which the *Framework*'s sacraments course is slated to occur.

Prior to the *Framework*'s implementation, Rosa taught her ninth-grade students about the centrality of the Eucharistic Liturgy, or Mass, in the life of the Church:

> Why the Mass is important , why we don't just go out in nature and sit under the trees and be with God, and really talk about how important it is and going back to Corinthians, about the Body of Christ. (p. 30)

She also conveyed more specific information to them related to liturgy and sacraments, such as the names and symbolic meanings of the vestments worn by priests and other ministers; the names of the various vessels used to hold, among other things, bread, wine, water, and oil; and the seal of the sacrament of Reconciliation. She stated that not having access to this information during the ninth-grade year places students, especially those who are not Catholic, at a disadvantage when they attend Mass at school. Because such students have not learned about the sacredness of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, in Catholic theology and worship, they experience confusion regarding whether or not they can or should receive communion. Rosa maintained that teaching about these theological matters, which have very practical consequences, "should be my job" (p. 33), but, since adopting the *Framework*, she does not have time to address these topics.

Lanie explained that in the years before the *Framework*, the St. John's Religious Studies department would incorporate an age-appropriate, liturgy-focused lesson into all of their courses, at every grade level, before each all-school liturgy and before the start of each liturgical season. This lesson, designed to prepare students for the upcoming liturgy and/or season, would occasionally incorporate some concrete task that the Student Life department requested that all students complete, such as making a star or other object to be used during the liturgy. Lanie stated that she now lacks the time for this type of liturgical and sacramental education, because the ninth and tenth grade *Framework* courses contain little to no content in these areas. However, she did profess a commitment at least to teach the sacraments of initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—in the context of the ninth-grade material on Scripture. Study of the remaining four sacraments will be integrated into one of the school's senior Religious Studies electives.

The ninth-grade pre-*Framework* curriculum at St. Ann's Academy included a substantial unit on sacramental theology, a topic absent from the *Framework*'s ninth grade courses. Grace characterized this shift as a "disservice" (p. 92) to her students and, as evidenced in the following exchange with the researcher, a missed opportunity for evangelization:

> Grace: A lot of our students come from Catholic feeder schools and they really do get the content on sacraments, OK? They do. But then I have some girls who are Methodist, I have some girls who are Hindu, or Muslim, I have some girls who are Catholic or Christian, but completely unchurched, and I even have a girl who said "I guess I'm Catholic, but I've never been baptized".... So freshmen theology is a grab-bag, OK, of what you get. Those are the girls that I wish had sacramental theology.
>
> Carrie: The girls who did not come from the Catholic feeder schools?
>
> Grace: Yes. That's why I wish it was there.... so the Catholic school girls are like "yeah, I already know this"....But for those girls who know nothing—

> I feel like we're missing, one, an opportunity, to share the beauty of the Catholic Church with them, the beauty of God's gifts. And I've even had two students convert. They said, "you know what, Ms. X, I think I want to be Catholic." I said, great, let's set up an appointment for you to talk [about] it with Fr. X, and he can organize it with a local parish. And then one girl's like, "I guess I better get baptized"…. that's what I think is beautiful that's missing, and the *Framework* doesn't offer that on the freshmen level. (pp. 92-93)

Julia stated that the St. Catherine of Siena High School pre-*Framework* ninth grade curriculum encompassed "a good solid piece of the liturgical year…. We hit the sacraments in that freshman year pretty heavy" (pp. 128-129). This emphasis on liturgy and sacraments was rooted in several factors. First, in the diocese in which St. Catherine of Siena High School is located, students preparing for the sacrament of Confirmation attend classes at their local parish during ninth and tenth grades, receiving the sacrament in the spring of tenth grade. Therefore, simultaneously studying liturgy and sacraments in their secondary school Religious Studies courses helped to support these students "in their walk and in their faith" (p. 133). Secondly, St. Catherine's offers all students the opportunity to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation twice a year. Julia stated that "we want them to understand that, and be able to have the desire to participate" (p. 129). Thirdly, learning about liturgy and sacraments motivated students to pursue involvement in liturgical ministries, such as serving as a Eucharistic Minister. Lastly, Julia testified to the value of liturgical and sacramental education for all of her students, even for those who are practicing members of other faith traditions and for those who are not currently practicing any faith:

> We like to be able to have them have a common understanding of sacraments, because some of them don't come from sacramental practices and walks, and some do but haven't practiced them in a long time….at least we give them an understanding so that the students who aren't of the Catholic faith can walk with us and journey with us and understand what it means. (p. 137)

In stark contrast to a curriculum infused with liturgy and sacraments, the *Framework*

"barely touches on sacraments that whole first year….we barely talk about sacramental

awareness in the curriculum the freshman year or sophomore year" (p. 129), a situation

which Julia characterized as "frustrating" (p. 129). She stated that she and her colleagues

were strategizing in the hopes of rectifying this problem during the following academic

year, but no definite plans had been conceptualized at the time of her participation in this

study.

Therese's viewpoint on this topic diverged considerably from those of Rosa,

Lanie, Grace, and Julia. At St. Martin de Porres High School, sacramental theology had

been the second semester ninth-grade course prior to the *Framework*'s implementation.

In arguing in favor of the *Framework*'s placement of sacramental theology in eleventh

grade, Therese drew upon her understanding of adolescent intellectual, emotional, and

spiritual development:

> I love the idea of making sacramental theology the junior year, because I don't
> think freshmen can really appreciate sacraments in terms of viewing themselves
> as sacramental people and the world as sacramental. They're just too hormonal at
> the time. I think junior year's kind of a sweetheart year in terms of development.
> That's why I think it's a great year to place sacraments in terms of their
> understanding, not just didactically, these are the symbols, this is the sign and
> symbol of each sacrament, and this is what a sacrament is, but in terms of the
> efficacy of it, in terms of understanding Jesus as the primary sacrament and the
> church as the sacrament of Christ in the world. I think juniors are much more
> capable of that understanding. So I love the fact that sacramental theology is
> moved. (p. 216)

Additionally, Therese stated that this revamped sequence enabled her to connect the

Religious Studies course content more explicitly with "the liturgical prayer life of the

Church…. [In] our old sequence [it] was really hard to find those liturgical moments" (p.

254).

Rosa's Perspective: Other Theological Topics Emphasized Less in the Framework

Other theological topics that Rosa identified that receive less emphasis in the *Framework* than they did in Ascension High School's pre-*Framework* curriculum include prayer, social justice, theological reflection on students' real-life concerns and struggles, and the Holy Spirit. Regarding prayer, prior to the *Framework*'s implementation, Rosa would instruct her students to memorize traditional Catholic prayers, one each month, including the Angelus, Hail Holy Queen and other Marian prayers, the Guardian Angel Prayer, the Prayer of St. Francis, and the Prayer of St. Patrick. When her students questioned the need to learn this "old school stuff" (p. 42), she proposed that this material would serve them well in the future: "Someday, you're gonna be sitting in a hospital, either with someone that you care about, or yourself, and that's the only thing you're gonna know" (p. 41). Since adopting the *Framework*, Rosa has abandoned this practice, because "There's too many other things, too much hard stuff that they need to learn….You can't do everything, so those things that I used to have them do, we just can't anymore" (pp. 41-42). Rosa expressed dismay at this loss, maintaining that these prayers constitute a meaningful aspect of Catholic tradition about which her students are no longer learning. In addition, Rosa remarked that the *Framework* briefly defines prayer practices such as *lectio divina* and the Liturgy of the Hours but does not allocate sufficient time for her to offer her students an actual experience of these ways of praying.

Concerning social justice, Rosa observed that in maintaining an historical focus on Jesus, the *Framework* fails to "make that jump to today, of how you are called to work for social justice" (p. 37). She stated that in prior years, in all of her courses, she devoted substantial time and energy to raising her students' awareness about poverty, the

environment, and related present-day issues, seeking to empower them to effect social change within the context of their everyday choices. Rosa maintained that, since implementing the *Framework*, she no longer has time to address these issues "even in passing" (p. 37), and she suggested that the *Framework* itself seems implicitly to discourage this practice: "It doesn't really empower…. it's just so, Jesus then [and] so much, priests now…. It just becomes like a History course in some ways" (p. 38).

Prior to implementing the *Framework*, Rosa engaged her students in theological reflection regarding their real-life concerns and struggles, including bullying, sexual pressures, and relationships. Now, in contrast, she does not "have time for all that sharing anymore" (p. 12), because she is "spending so much time explaining all of these really hard concepts" (p. 17). Rosa also observed that the *Framework* allocates less attention to the Holy Spirit than she would prefer: "I want them [students] to know that the Holy Spirit is always with you, everywhere, really try to get them to understand. The Holy Spirit is really shortchanged" (p. 21). Rosa summarized her perception of the *Framework*'s many lacunae by stating that "I just think that the *Framework* thinks what they think is important, and it is important, but there's [*sic*] just so many other questions out there that are equally important" (p. 40).

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Theological Topics Emphasized More in the Framework

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Four participants identified theological topics that receive greater emphasis in the *Framework* than they had in their respective schools pre-*Framework* curricula. These participants expressed largely positive views regarding the increased attention to these topics, which included the Trinity; the portrayal of humans as searchers, with God as the

answer to that search; the early Christological heresies; ecclesiology, especially the Church's apostolic origin and eschatological destiny; and the universal call to holiness.

Julia praised the *Framework*'s focus on Trinitarian theology, particularly the thorough introduction to the Trinity which occurs early in the ninth-grade year. As indicated in the following quote, she also appreciated the *Framework*'s depiction of human beings as engaged in a perpetual quest for meaning, which she believes reflects the state of mind of many of her adolescent students:

> They did design that we, as human beings, are all longing and seeking and searching….we really had a great appreciation for that, that we start out as longing, as seeking humans, and that God is the answer to those questions….that is so much where our freshmen are—the longing, the seeking, the searching—and to be able to provide them with answers to that, that was good. (p. 139)

Julia stated that she and her colleagues intended to emphasize this theme to an even greater extent during the following academic year.

Marshall commented on the *Framework*'s heightened attention to the early Christological heresies, including its examination of the creeds produced by the early councils in an effort to resolve these disputes. He maintained that studying this material assists students in understanding that Christian beliefs and creedal statements "weren't just made up" (p. 160). Therese also remarked on the presence of this material in the *Framework*, describing how she endeavored to explain to her students, in accessible language, the early Church's dueling heresies regarding the human and divine natures of Christ:

> They meant that Christ just put on divinity, but he was really human, but he put on divinity, divine powers. Or, he was really divine, and humanity was like a Halloween costume, was the best way that we could think of to explain this to the kids. (p. 243)

Marshall characterized the *Framework* as presenting "a more Church-centered focus" (p. 161) than did the St. Michael's High School pre-*Framework* curriculum, for it allows his students to learn about the Church's apostolic origins; its mission in the contemporary world, namely, to nurture faith and share the message of Jesus; and its eschatological destiny. He stressed that such study of the Church aids both Catholic and non-Catholic students in identifying the legitimate motives which underlie key Catholic beliefs and practices:

> It also gives them, I think, a lot more of a pragmatic view as far as the Church's beginnings, and the origin, and her methodology as far as producing teachings and official beliefs and doctrine, and it's not just a bunch of people twiddling their thumbs, being like, "we're gonna believe in a virgin birth." It's more like, this is what we look at, this is where the tradition came from, this is where the apostolic tradition came from. It's not just made up. So I think that's beneficial to our non-Christian students, to give them that. (p. 163)

Similarly, Rosa praised the *Framework*'s clear presentation of the apostolic origins of Catholicism, material which she has found to be useful in dialoguing with students who express a desire to leave the Catholic Church and join another Christian denomination.

Lastly, in the following quote, Rosa commended the *Framework*'s attention to Christian discipleship, especially the universal call to holiness, which she has recognized as a powerful message for her students:

> I really, really like that they really focus toward the end of second semester about the apostles and how lowly they were and how it's not like some "ahhhh" [holy, angelic-sounding noise] kind of person that comes down. It's all of us schmucks that are just going around. It's not just the star athlete; it can be the little mousy girl in the corner. It can be anyone, that we're all called. And that I do like. (pp. 33-34)

Research Question #2: Summary of Findings

In offering data pertinent to this research question, the participants in this study articulated many concrete, specific ways in which the implementation of the *Framework*

has had a direct impact on the theological content they teach in their Religious Studies courses. Adopting the *Framework* has meant the loss of an introduction to Catholicism for ninth graders; the loss or curtailment of sexuality education; an altered approach to Scripture, particularly the Old Testament; and a different presentation of other religions. These shifts in curricular content have placed new demands on teachers, as they attempt to navigate a curriculum that is more Christocentric; that contains much more advanced, detailed theological and doctrinal content; and that is infused with an apologetic perspective that emphasizes the Church's positive aspects and de-emphasizes its negative aspects. Participants discussed the ways in which they supplement the *Framework*'s theological content, most notably its material on Scripture, and they articulated, often in a very pointed and expressive manner, their reactions to the *Framework*'s assignment of elective status to courses that had been required at many of their schools prior to the *Framework*'s implementation. Lastly, they identified theological topics that receive less emphasis in the *Framework* than in their schools' pre-*Framework* curricula, particularly liturgy and sacraments, and, conversely, theological topics that receive greater emphasis in the *Framework*. The participants' thorough assessment of the ways in which the *Framework* has had a direct impact on the theological content they teach has illuminated the far-reaching implications of the *Framework*'s implementation: in schools that have adopted it, the *Framework* has had an immediate and profound effect on the theological material that students learn during the course of their Catholic secondary education.

Research Question #3: Findings

Research Question #3: How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe the *Framework*'s impact on the pedagogical methods they employ?

The report of findings that are pertinent to this research question will commence with an examination of the more teacher-centered methodologies and more traditional assessment strategies that participants reported employing in *Framework* courses. It will continue by recounting the various activities, learning experiences and projects that were hallmarks of participants' pre-*Framework* curricula but that are no longer utilized. The researcher will then proceed to report participants' varied perspectives on the extent to which the *Framework* allows teachers to meet the needs of students with diverse learning styles; promotes an adequate balance of cognitive and affective skills; permits small-group discussions and personal sharing; fosters prayer experiences; and illuminates connections with the real, everyday world. After describing participants' pedagogical strategies for managing the *Framework*'s repetitive content, this section will recount the creative, engaging pedagogical methods that participants have utilized successfully in *Framework* courses and present participants' hypotheses regarding the *Framework*'s implicit pedagogy. This section will conclude with a report of participants' expressed hopes that their pedagogy will improve in future years of teaching *Framework* courses.

More Teacher-Centered Methodologies

Rosa, Grace, Lanie, and Julia all discussed the extent to which the implementation of the *Framework* has moved them toward pedagogical strategies that are teacher-centered rather than student-centered; namely, toward more teacher lecturing and student

note-taking. Additionally, Rosa observed that, in teaching *Framework* courses, she has

relied more heavily on the textbook than in years past and that she has directed her

teaching toward her students' attainment of a passing grade in the course and a passing

grade on the ACRE (Assessment of Catechesis/Religious Education) test.

More Teacher Lecturing and Student Note-Taking

Rosa depicted the classroom dynamic at Ascension High School in her

Framework courses in the following quote:

> Lecturing a lot more. Taking notes, notes, notes, notes, notes, notes, notes. Took
> tons of notes and it was notes, a lot. It was boring. I was bored with myself.
> Sometimes, I was like, oh girls, I'm so bored with myself. (p. 13)

She characterized her pedagogy as "passive learning" (p. 43), with the students taking

notes and answering questions while she either sat or stood at the podium and "just

talk[ed] all day long" (p. 44). She described her progression through the textbook, page

by page, as she instructed her students regarding what material to underline for future

reference. Rosa stated that this methodical approach was necessary for the estimated

85% of her students "who had no clue what was going on, and was [*sic*] getting an F

because they couldn't understand the book" (p. 44). She sympathized with the remaining

minority of students, who would "have another book open, but you didn't fight it,

because you understood, because it was boring. I'd be doing the same thing, 'cause if

you can understand it, it was really boring" (p. 44).

Grace also lectured more in teaching *Framework* courses, as an integral aspect of

her effort to explain theological concepts thoroughly and accurately. As an example, she

cited a two-day lecture she gave on the Trinity:

> We spent two classes just lecturing on the Trinity. Two full classes….What are
> we saying? What is the economic Trinity, the salvific Trinity, how does it work

out in the world, in our lives, where did it come from? We spent two full days.
(p. 97)

Grace did assert that in lecturing on material such as the Trinity, she endeavored to

"make it fun" (p. 99) and "make it real" (p. 99) by drawing parallels between the Trinity

and human relationships such as the relationship among a father, mother, and child.

Thus, she aimed to offer St. Ann Academy students accessible material that, although

"intellectually challenging" (p. 99), could be readily applied to their own lives. In a

manner similar to Rosa's and Grace's lecturing, Lanie's pedagogy in *Framework* courses

consisted of "explaining, giving the information to them, and then some way of assessing

if they've gotten the information" (p. 63). She contrasted this style with her pre-

Framework pedagogy, in which she enjoyed the time and freedom to discuss the material

with her students "in a more leisurely fashion" (p. 63).

Julia characterized her pre-*Framework* teaching style as "very project-centered

and student-led" (p. 126). In implementing the *Framework*, she attempted to teach the

Framework's content using the pedagogical methods to which she had become

accustomed. As explicated in the following quote, her limited success in this enterprise

prompted her to rethink this strategy for the following academic year and to anticipate a

shift to more lecturing:

> I took the *Framework* and put [it] into my familiar style of pedagogy. But now
> that the year's over, I found that I was not able to cover as much of the
> *Framework* as I probably should have. And then looking at next year, I think that
> I need to incorporate much more, I'd almost even say lecture, in order to get it all
> out, which to me is kind of a backwards place from where teaching Religion has
> evolved to. Because the *Framework* is so heavy—it's just really, really full of
> content. And where in the past we've been able to focus on some key themes and
> key lessons and make sure that we teach those in depth, we haven't been able to
> identify sort of key things from the *Framework* that we will value as our
> department and as our school's charism. We really haven't been able to do that
> yet. So I didn't change too much using the *Framework* this year. But, I may need

to next year. And it may need to be more of a delivery of information style. (p. 126)

In the second interview, the researcher sought to clarify Julia's use of the term

"backwards" (p. 126) as a descriptor of the *Framework*'s impact on pedagogy:

> Carrie: It sounded like you were saying that the *Framework* is pushing the pedagogy used in Religious Studies "backwards" towards more teacher-centered methodologies. Is that what you intended to say?
> Julia: Yeah. Your analysis was really correct. That was really what…when I read your analysis of it, I thought, yeah, that's really where I was going with it. (p. 147)

Lastly, in the following exchange with the researcher, Julia expounded upon both her

own feelings and her department's struggle regarding the modification of pedagogy

which teaching the *Framework* may require:

> Carrie: So, if, as you think about next year, if you decide in your department or your grade level that you need to do more lecture in order to cover more content, how do you feel about that? Does that excite you, or depress you, or…?
> Julia: I don't like it. It does not excite me. Let the record reflect: it does not excite me. It doesn't. And the content is so heavy, the vocabulary, the concepts, it's so heavy that freshmen year, that it ends up being a lot of that. You need to understand this vocabulary, so that you can understand these concepts, and these terms. You know, we're kind of fighting it, honestly.…
> Carrie: Fighting a move to more lecture?
> Julia: Yes. We're fighting the draw that the *Framework* is so heavy, there's so much content, we're fighting the need to have to be more lecture-centered in order for them to cover everything in the *Framework* that's required to be covered. So, no, I'm not happy at looking at that and learn[ing] how to balance that and make those choices. (p. 129)

Rosa's Perspective: Greater Use of the Textbook, Getting Students to Pass

Rosa described herself as "tied to the book" (p. 44) during her first year of

teaching *Framework* courses. She attributed this phenomenon to the "intense reading"

(p. 43) that the *Framework*-based textbook presented, which her students were unable to

comprehend on their own: "You couldn't send them home to read it, because

they….couldn't read a paragraph and understand. Literally could not understand what the paragraph said" (p. 43). Therefore, she devoted a considerable amount of class time to oral reading of the textbook, "paragraph by paragraph by paragraph…like we're still in sixth grade" (p. 15), attempting to elucidate its meaning for the students. Rosa expressed a desire that a textbook, instead of "the be-all, end-all" (p. 16), be a "part of the journey" (p. 15), a "resource" (p. 15), a "jumping-off point for their [students'] everyday lives" (p. 16), and a "reference" (p. 44). She speculated that if the content of a *Framework*-based textbook were more accessible to students for independent reading, then her teaching could, potentially, be more dynamic and relevant:

> You should be able to send them home and have [them] read the book so that when they come to class, you can talk about other stuff and bring in the book and talk about your faith journey and how it relates to what the Church is teaching, and how it's not just the words. Where do the words take you? Look at this saint, what they experienced, or look at these people, like Dorothy Day or these people who work at the Catholic Worker…How did they bring in and live out what this book is telling you? Rather than explaining the book. (pp. 15-16)

> Rosa also ascribed her heightened reliance on the textbook to the pressure she has

experienced to ensure that her students score well on the ACRE test:

> I think we were so, especially myself, so intent on doing the book, that we really totally concentrated on getting through the book…'cause I'm more of a concept teacher…but I really, really did detail…because I don't want anyone to come back and say, "you didn't teach this." Especially with the ACRE test, if it goes past the WASC [Western Association of Schools and Colleges] year, if we continue with it, I don't want anyone coming back and saying, "You didn't teach." Because they're changing the ACRE test to reflect the bishops' new curriculum, and every chapter in the book, it has what it meets of the ACRE test, and so, I'm sticking to that book…. I'm not going anywhere else. (pp. 30-31)

Rosa described the effects of students' attainment of passing scores on the ACRE test as "the school looks good, and we look good, so it looks like we did our job" (p. 3).

Additionally, Rosa has found her pedagogy in *Framework* courses to be driven by the desires of parents and of the principal that students pass these courses. In the

following quote, she shared how she has attempted to manage the expectations of these

various constituencies and the way in which those expectations have had a direct impact

on her pedagogy:

> Parents don't like F's. So, you have to dumb it down. Teachers have to do a lot, if you're willing, and if your principal pretty much pressures you. Just like the teacher today—she's giving make-up tests so that these girls don't fail. Because you can't fail, because then your parents have to pay for summer school. And ultimately we're the ones who die on the hill, not the student. So it's a constant making up, constant trying to make the curriculum successful for the girls, rather than teaching enriching—enriching souls. It's not about enriching souls. It's just like any other core class—how can we get them to pass this? (p. 3)

More Traditional Assessment Strategies

Rosa offered several concrete examples of assessment strategies she regularly

utilized in her classroom prior to the *Framework*'s implementation. For example, as part

of a unit on stewardship, she created a class Facebook page on which students posted

photos of themselves engaged in activities that embodied the value of stewardship. She

then required students to comment on their classmates' posts. In another unit, students

worked in small groups to produce videoed public service announcements (PSA's) about

social issues:

> It was an alternative assessment—it was a PSA. We studied how to make a PSA—short, sweet, to the point. We watched good PSA's, we watched bad PSA's, how long is a good PSA, what's the message, and how you have to talk about the message, and what message do you want to do and all of this stuff. Anyway, and then they made their own. And they had so much fun. (p. 28)

Lastly, Rosa described a multi-dimensional project which required students to engage in

a service project, create a PowerPoint presentation about that project that incorporated a

fitting song, and write an essay that connected the project to a saint.

In sharp contrast to these types of assessments that are "fun" (p. 27) for the students and that "engage them at their level" (p. 27), Rosa characterized the *Framework* as implicitly promoting "old school assessment" (p. 27); that is, test-taking:

> It doesn't lend itself to different types of assessment….it doesn't lend itself to, like make a PowerPoint about, I don't know, other than Mary, there's not really, make a PowerPoint about the magisterium? Snoresville. I wouldn't want to listen to that! But it's either do you know who the magisterium is? Who are the consecrated religious? Either you know it or you don't. You know, you can't do a lot with it. It's just learn it, take a test, learn it, take a test. I feel like the nuns when I was little, and that's just not me. So that part is hard. (p. 27)

Although she acknowledged that traditional assessments as "easier to grade" (p. 29), Rosa described the shift from creative, alternative assessment to more traditional, "boring" (p. 29) assessment as a "loss" (p. 38), particularly for students with diverse learning styles. She stated that because not all students take tests successfully, alternative assessments can create situations in which "somebody else is successful, because all of a sudden, somebody shines….they write a beautiful prayer, and they get to share it….perform something" (p. 18).

Because Rosa has experienced the *Framework* as implicitly encouraging traditional testing, she has demanded more memorizing from her students than she did in the years prior to the *Framework*'s implementation. However, she feared that her students would "just memorize, learn it for the test, and then they forget it" (pp. 10-11). Similarly, Julia maintained that although "there was a certain amount of memorizing that went on before" (p. 130), the *Framework* contains more material that is unfamiliar to the students and that must be memorized.

Activities, Learning Experiences, and Projects That are No Longer Utilized

Lanie, Rosa, Grace, and Julia all recounted various activities, learning experiences, and projects that they had integrated into their respective schools' pre-

Framework curricula but that they no longer utilize. In the following quote, Lanie

described the "Holy Land project" (p. 63) she formerly assigned, the extent to which the

St. John's students enjoyed completing it, and her skepticism that even a modified

version of this project could be retained in the *Framework* curriculum:

> Research of the historical Jesus, what was life like in his growing up, what was the geography, and the religious groups. And the students did all the research; they presented it to the class. So it was about maybe a week in the library and then another week to actually, for the students to present the information and to talk about it. It was a great project. The kids loved it. They'd bring in food from the Holy Land; they'd dress up. It was a great one. We're still hoping that, at least I am, that we might be able to fit it into the freshmen year, but just this summer I've been going through kind of trying to map it out and I just don't see that. (p. 63)

As another example, she discussed her use of skits in teaching her pre-*Framework*

Scripture course:

> I'd divide up [the Biblical books of] Kings, and we'd do skits on King David and his life. And the kids would get in that and ham it up, and it was fun for them. But we just don't have the time to spend on that. (p. 63)

Lanie also mentioned that she can no longer allocate the time to show an entire film all

the way through, from start to finish, and then facilitate a discussion on it. Instead, she

shows only discrete parts of a film in order to save time. In reflecting on all of these

now-defunct learning experiences—the Holy Land project, Scripturally-based skits, and

films—Lanie observed that "the more fun assignments for the students are kind of getting

cut out because they're not as necessary" (p. 63).

Rosa detailed several creative, engaging learning experiences which she regularly

offered to her students prior to the *Framework*'s implementation. For example, she

utilized the five colors of Skittles candies in order to teach about the five forms of prayer:

> If you're the doing five forms of prayer, I used to do this really fun thing with Skittles, because Skittles there's five colors. And I'd give them each five Skittles on their desk. And we would talk about intercession, and then I would have each

of them write an intercession, and then I would have them read their intercession, and then we would eat that Skittle….And then at the end we would say, so every time you eat Skittles, I want you to remember how sweet prayer is, how colorful prayer is. (p. 12)

Rosa used a different candy—M&M's—in order to orchestrate a simulation about temptation and sin. In this exercise, she placed M&M's on the students' desks and then left the room briefly while several students she had pre-designated as her collaborators attempted to lure their classmates into the "sin" of eating the M&M's. When she returned to the classroom, she engaged the students in conversation about their experience: "Those M&M's represented sin. How many M&M's did you eat?....Did your friends lead you into temptation?" (p. 12). Rosa stated that she has not incorporated such experiences into *Framework* courses because "you can't waste a half hour doing something like that, because there's just so much content and such limited academic teaching time" (p. 12).

Other activities and learning experiences that Rosa no longer employs since implementing the *Framework* include skits, making posters, and showing films. Regarding skits, Rosa stated that she had regularly used skits as a pedagogical strategy. For example, students would update a Gospel story like the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) who squandered his inheritance to a more modern version of "the prodigal daughter" (p. 28) who squanders her money on a shopping spree. Rosa lamented the loss of these sorts of experiences, which enabled her students to "be creative [and] have so much fun" (p. 28). She asserted that she does "not have time for that stuff anymore at all" (p. 28); moreover, she maintained that the *Framework*'s content "doesn't lend itself" (p. 28) to this type of activity. Regarding posters, Rosa described making and sharing posters around a particular theme as an opportunity for students "to listen to each

other" (p. 12) and to grow in faith as a result. Lastly, regarding films, Rosa detailed a film she often showed her students which highlighted Jesus's humanity, including his vulnerability to temptation:

> I love the movie, but it's so frigging long. But it's cool because they see Jesus as a human being and how he had to discern…. but it takes two whole [class] periods. You can't do that—you just can't give up those kinds of time anymore. (p. 13)

Instead of showing the whole film, Rosa now showcases only very brief clips from it.

Grace stated that in past years, she attempted to "freshen" (p. 116) her teaching each year with the addition a new book, a new film, or a new guest speaker. She confessed that "I didn't get to do it as much this year" (p. 116), a phenomenon she partially attributed to time constraints brought on by the *Framework*; that is, the feeling of "I have to get through this theme" (p. 116). In further reflecting on her first year of teaching *Framework* courses, she observed that "I was not as creative as [in] years past, with this new *Framework*….. I was not a creative teacher, no, I wasn't" (p. 98). For example, she did not utilize role plays and other sorts of "interactive" (p. 98) experiences that had been staples of her pedagogy prior to the *Framework*'s implementation. However, Grace acknowledged that these omissions may be a function of the *Framework*'s newness, and she expressed hope that she could integrate more engaging pedagogical strategies in the coming academic year.

Julia remarked that some of the projects which she had utilized at St. Catherine of Siena prior to the *Framework*'s implementation "had to be skimmed down, so that we could get the content of the *Framework* in" (p. 126). She expressed a desire to design projects that would effectively incorporate *Framework* content and concepts; however,

this desire may be stymied by lack of time: "We don't have the time to create these projects that we're wanting to" (p. 148).

Hampered Ability to Meet the Needs of Students with Diverse Learning Styles

In articulating her commitment to teach in a manner that allows all of her students, with all of their diverse learning needs, to flourish, Rosa admitted that she fell short of that ideal during her first year of teaching *Framework* courses:

> I really try to have it on the board, have it in front of them, have them touching, so that every modality—I'm meeting everybody. I really, really try to do oral, visual, auditory, kinesthetic in every single lesson, because it's not fair. Those parents are paying a heck of a lot of money, and their daughter deserves to be educated, and you can't just stand up and lecture. You have to do all these things, and I don't feel I did that this year. I don't think I was able to. (p. 14)

Rosa further explained that prior to the *Framework's* implementation, she attempted to maintain her classroom as "a place where they [students] could relax and do it a little differently, have an alternative way of learning, explore other ways" (p. 17). Now, she continued, "you can't do that anymore" (p. 17). When the researcher sought to confirm Rosa's belief that teaching *Framework* courses has made it harder for her to utilize different learning modalities in an effort to meet the needs of students with diverse learning styles, Rosa responded affirmatively. In responding to the researcher's further inquiry regarding her hopes and plans for integrating these pedagogical methods during the following academic year, Rosa expressed cautious optimism, tempered by her realistic sense of the quantity of content she must teach:

> Carrie: In thinking about next year and continuing with the *Framework* into the future, do you think there's potential to do more of that kind of teaching, in terms of, like you said in the last interview, integrating the oral, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic?
> Rosa: I think so. The only thing is, still, there are 14 chapters in that book.
> Carrie: For one semester?
> Rosa: For one semester. (p. 44)

Lanie also shared her belief that the *Framework* fails to take into account the importance of "the different modalities of learning" (p. 64) in teaching adolescents—as distinct from adults—effectively.

More Emphasis on the Cognitive, Less Emphasis on the Affective/Spiritual

In the following exchange with the researcher, Rosa described her students' changing attitudes toward Religious Studies courses, a shift she attributed to *Framework*-inspired pedagogy that emphasizes cognitive engagement and de-emphasizes affective or spiritual engagement, with the latter, now, in her view, relegated to the expertise of parish Confirmation teachers:

> Rosa: I think love of Religion class has been lost. Looking forward to what we're going to do. Making it something different than every other class, just like your faith should be something special that defines you. I don't think that now Religion class is something for them [students] to say, "I want to come to school today because I'm gonna have Religion." That it was something to look forward to, and…I'm a hard teacher, but, it was hard in a good way, whereas now it's just hard, and so I think that's been lost. The feeding of your spirit—now it's just feeding your brain. More of this is on the Confirmation teachers.
>
> Carrie: It almost sounds like you're saying that the *Framework* is making the school kind of do the cognitive piece and then the Confirmation is doing the affective piece.
>
> Rosa: Yes. (p. 24)

Rosa reiterated that because the *Framework* courses are "not about enriching souls" (p. 3), "it's pretty much gonna be the job of the Confirmation teachers to find out if they [students] are spiritual or not" (p. 9). Similarly, Grace remarked that, since adopting the *Framework*, she has had to exercise greater intentionality in providing her students with affective, meditative, and/or prayerful opportunities to explore their spirituality.

Less Time for Small-Group Discussions and Students' Personal Sharing

From Rosa's perspective, the *Framework* has allowed less time for students to engage in small-group discussions and to share, in both large-group and small-group settings, their personal experiences and questions. Regarding small groups, Rosa did not utilize this strategy in her first year of teaching the sexuality unit within the *Framework*'s parameters:

> It's really good for them to talk to each other and listen to each other and that's what they didn't get this time. Everything was big group. OK, boom, we did it, boom, we did it, boom, we did it, just like checking off boxes. They didn't get to have their small groups, where they really bonded at the beginning of the year. (p. 10)

Regarding large-group discussions, Rosa stated her strong preference for allowing every single student to articulate her viewpoint, a prerogative she did not exercise during her first year of teaching *Framework* courses:

> I'm not good at just picking two or three people. That's something that's really hard for me, because sometimes there's a student who never talks, and it takes listening to 25 other girls…I like to pick on every single person because everybody does have something to say. There's [*sic*] always the ones that are hiding in the back that never say anything, and they're left behind in everywhere else. So, I'm not good at not letting everybody talk, and I just don't have time for that anymore. (p. 11)

Additionally, Rosa observed that the all-girls environment at Ascension High School lends itself to honest, in-depth discussions centered on topics such as the sexualization of girls in the media, gender roles in society, and women's presence in the Church. However, the time constraints Rosa has experienced since implementing the *Framework* have prevented her from allowing her students to engage in such discussions:

> They just start talking, but you just can't—you don't have time. And it's not just idle. It's valuable. You just don't have time to listen to that, and they want to talk, 'cause they're girls, and they're comfortable, because they're all girls. And they just can't, there's just not enough time to really discuss those things, and those things are very important things. (pp. 50-51)

Lastly, Rosa described how, in teaching about discernment, she pared down her lesson plan on this topic, which had involved asking students to reflect with their classmates on their community service experiences. Instead, she presented a greatly simplified view of discernment so that she could "move on" (p. 11):

> When you're talking about discernment it would be nice to have the girls who do work, community work to talk about it, share it with us. What do you do? How do you feel about it? How could we become involved in this? What do you think? Things like that. You can't do that. There's just not enough time anymore. So…it's just OK, know what discernment is, OK, you should discern, and you can pray for discernment. (pp. 11-12)

In the following exchange with the researcher, Grace described the open, intellectually inquisitive milieu that she seeks to create in her classroom and that she struggled to maintain during her first year of teaching *Framework* courses:

> Grace: I think they should be able to learn and wonder and talk about. There's nothing that couldn't or shouldn't be talked about. So what if they wanted to come up and talk about women priesthood and that sort of thing and really theologically explore that. I'm like, yeah, why not? I didn't say that was gonna happen and I didn't say, in my class, girls, we're gonna start a campaign and we're gonna fight it. Nothing like that. But they should be allowed to ask the question. There's nothing you can't talk about. That's my philosophy. You can ask questions, and there's nothing that can't be talked about.
> Carrie: Do you feel like the *Framework* still allows for that?
> Grace: No. No…..So maybe when you get to the university level that's when they can question more. (p. 95)

Grace stated her belief that her students are not asking as many questions during lectures or during class discussions as they did prior to the *Framework*. She attributed this shift in the nature of her students' engagement to their desire to maintain an academically serious focus: "I get it, they're trying to take the notes, and stay focused. I get that" (p. 98). Nevertheless, this has necessitated a conscious effort on Grace's part to avail herself of whatever "wiggle room" (p. 98) the *Framework* may allow—for example, at the

conclusion of a lecture, lesson, or unit—in order to solicit questions from her students and to involve them in discussions.

<div align="center">*Dichotomous Findings*</div>

Two categories of data relevant to research question three may be classified as dichotomous; that is, participants shared very different, even contradictory, views regarding those topics. In reflecting on the *Framework*'s impact on the pedagogical methods they employ, participants considered their use of prayer experiences and their ease, or lack of it, in relating the *Framework*'s content to the real, everyday world. The researcher will report data relevant to each of these, in turn.

Use of Prayer Experiences

Julia observed that, in teaching the ninth grade *Framework* courses, she lost the focus on religious formation with which she had infused the ninth grade curriculum prior to the *Framework*'s implementation. She attributed this loss to the amount of content the *Framework* contains: "The ability to, as freshmen, focus more on the formation side—it gets lost in trying to make sure that we've covered the content of the *Framework*. It's heavy—the   freshman year is heavy on content" (p. 136). In former years, she had allowed her students to assume responsibility for the "whole community aspect of the classroom that involves Scripture and their reflections and their analysis and application which takes up some of the class each day" (p. 126). When pressed by the researcher to describe how this had looked in practice, Julia stated that "it is prayer, reflection, formation….the students do it, they're in charge of it, they work it through, it's their thoughts and their process" (p. 126). She further remarked that

> We had little time for that this year, looking at how much of the *Framework* had to be taught….I could keep that at a real small level, but with so much

information in the *Framework* that needed to be taught, that definitely took a back seat. (p. 126)

This shift away from formation and toward information has prompted Julia and her colleagues to worry about their students' ability to move forward both in their Religious Studies courses and in their lives of faith without "the amount of foundational and formational experiences they've had in the past" (p. 128). She expressed a desire to attempt to incorporate such experiences in her future years of teaching *Framework* courses.

Similarly, Rosa stated that prior to the *Framework*'s implementation, "it was fun because you could do little prayer services without saying, oh my gosh, how much time am I giving up?" (p. 11). Lastly, Therese described her efforts to manage a St. Martin de Porres teacher who struggled to adjust to the limited time the *Framework* allowed to him to engage his students in prayer experiences:

> We had, for instance, one teacher who liked to do a lot of prayer and going to the chapel and meditating, and you can do that a little bit, but you can't do it every week. He was feeling very constrained in not being able to do that every week. (p. 218)

Contrary to the perspectives of Julia, Rosa, and Therese, Grace continued to integrate prayer experiences into her curriculum following the *Framework*'s implementation. In the following quote, she articulated and justified the pedagogical value of such experiences:

> Depending on the season, the Church season, I'll always have some kind of activity that will take us to the chapel, whether it's a mini-retreat in class of a little activity, little journaling, little singing, little praying, or [a] guided meditation that I give. Or we did Mary stations, Stations of the Cross. The girls actually each performed one station of Mary stations, and it was really, really neat, with music and we were in the chapel. And it allows them these lived faith experiences that aren't necessarily intellectually challenging, but they're participants in the Church's life of faith in a variety of ways…. activities like that to make having faith pertinent to their everyday life. Make it real. Not just faith, I should say—

Theology. The stuff we're studying is real, and so, how do they use it, and how do they live it…. what does the Holy Spirit and Trinitarian Theology look like in this little mini-retreat day that we're gonna have in class? (pp. 115-116)

Relating the Framework*'s Content to the Real, Everyday World*

Rosa, Lanie, and Julia all struggled to relate the *Framework*'s content to the real, everyday world of their students. In the following quote, Rosa attributed this phenomenon both to the volume of content in the *Framework* and to that content's level of difficulty:

> You don't have time for the connections, you don't have time for, like I said, relating it to the everyday world, because there's just so much that they need to know, before you go to the next chapter, and there's just so many chapters, so many chapters…. You didn't get to talk about what it meant for life. We were too busy talking about [*emphatically*] what it meant. (p. 43)

On the occasions when Rosa did attempt to connect the *Framework*'s content with the real world, her efforts were stymied by time constraints. For example, she assigned a *U.S. Catholic* article that examined the media's tendency to prematurely sexualize girls and adolescent young women. However, the decision to allocate time to reading and discussing this article meant that Rosa "lost a lot of time" (p. 50) that she needed to cover the *Framework*'s content. Therefore, she concluded, "I didn't get to finish that effectively…. I didn't do as good a job as I wanted to" (p. 50).

Likewise, Lanie identified her lack of ability "to do as many things application-wise with the students" (p. 63) as the "biggest difference" (p. 63) that the *Framework* brought to her pedagogy. Finally, Julia spoke to her struggle in "trying to make this *Framework* more tangible, more real for the students" (p. 134), asserting that "it's pretty tricky" (p. 134) to related "the content we've been given" (p. 134) to the real world.

In sharp distinction to the views of Rosa, Lanie, and Julia, Marshall shared a lengthy description of his efforts, which he believes have been largely effective, to

connect the *Framework*'s content to the real, everyday world of his students at St.

Michael's High School. While acknowledging his limited pre-*Framework* teaching

experience—one year of teaching an Old Testament course and a World Religions

course—he stated that during that year he "didn't venture too far" (p. 169) from the

textbook: "it was just more self-contained….the walls were very much in the classroom"

(p. 170). In contrast,

> In the new curriculum, I found and I find myself attempting and making more
> connections to modern culture. So trying to take this [gesturing to the
> *Framework*] and kind of open its doors and its windows to let it kind of mesh with
> what the kids are getting outside…. I want to say that I pull more from culture in
> the new curriculum. I try to make the connection between the *Framework* and
> culture…. I think I'm trying to break the walls, knock down the walls, and have
> them take it with them out into the world…. I think that the new curriculum as far
> as the freshmen level is concerned is a lot more permitting of an interaction with
> culture, current culture. And so in the classroom I try to do that. (pp. 169-170)

In continuing to reflect on his efforts to relate the *Framework*'s content to the real world,

Marshall credited both the *Framework* itself and his own Jesuit education with his ability

to execute this task successfully:

> I think it does lend itself to it, which is, I think, completely meant to be given as
> credit to the curriculum, or to the *Framework*—that it permits me to do so…. So I
> would say my growth as an educator, my experience with having been trained in a
> Jesuit spirituality, at a Jesuit university has allowed me to see this and to make
> these connections, but again, I think the curriculum and the *Framework* does
> deserve credit in that it allows me to. I don't think that the past one, I didn't see it
> as clear. If I wanted to make a strong connection to culture it had to have been
> done in some sort of a meditative or journaling exercise, maybe before we got to
> content. Whereas now I can do a more interweaving, it's more interwoven, so I
> can actually take the content that is given forth by the *Framework* and the
> curriculum and what I'm trying to do as far as making connection to culture and
> the world outside and overlap that and actually put it together in a lesson, so that
> they not only retain the information and the standards put forth by the
> *Framework*, but also the connection to the practical, to the real world….Which I
> think the old curriculum, at least as far as I was concerned, as far as what I was
> teaching, it was more black and white, there was more of that line between the
> two, where I had to make a connection to Theology and the world around them,

and then be like, and now we're gonna talk about the cycle of judges. (pp. 171-172)

Marshall offered three concrete examples of pedagogical strategies that he has utilized in order to relate the *Framework*'s content to his students' everyday world and, consequently, to give them "a little bit more ownership" (p. 201) of that content. First, he stated that in teaching about apostolic tradition and the magisterium, he directed the students to read a news article

> …about a controversy that had arisen between society looking at the church, criticizing the Church…seeing the Church as being archaic, and then making the connection to this is what and why the Church is operating this way…. this is where pop culture is kind of missing that connection. (p. 170)

Thus, he endeavored "to make those connections for the kids, so they can be more critical of what they're seeing in their surrounding culture versus what I'm trying to teach them in class" (p. 170). Secondly, in teaching about Thomas Aquinas's five proofs of God's existence and the relationships among reason, faith, science, and religion, Marshall showed his students a video in which actor and political commentator Ben Stein interviewed the prominent atheist Richard Dawkins. In the interview, the two discuss the nature, origin, and purpose of human existence and critique a fundamentalist approach to Scripture. In having his students watch the video, discuss it, and write a reflection on it for homework, Marshall sought to

> …use that as an experience for the kids to see modern people, modern—today—culture, discussing stuff that was also being dealt with by Aquinas. So they take something that's in the *Framework*, and they get a real-world application of it, something that's from current culture. (p. 200)

He also expressed hope that this learning experience would enable his students to perceive "the wisdom and truth in the Church's teaching" (p. 200); that is, that reason and science complement, rather than contradict, faith and religion.

Lastly, Marshall described his use of "words of wisdom" (p. 200) and "music Mondays" (p. 201). Each day, Marshall offers his students "words of wisdom" (p. 200) in the form of a quote, often, but not always, from Scripture. On Mondays, the "words of wisdom" (p. 200) take the form of song he plays for them. Whether or not the quote or the song is overtly religious, Marshall intends its thematic focus to connect with the day's or the week's course material, a focus he invites his students to attempt to determine:

> So I will have them listen to the song, or look at the quote, or read the quote, and then in interpreting it I try to see if they can—so what from this, what are the major themes here, and what do you think it is that we're gonna be talking about this week, or talking about today. So that's another experience I give the kids with dealing with culture as well as tying it back into the *Framework*, and into the lesson. (p. 201)

In concluding his lengthy discourse on this topic, Marshall spoke with great conviction about the larger goal that underlies his efforts to relate the *Framework*'s content to his students' world beyond the classroom. He desires that his students grow in their ability to integrate faith into every aspect of their lives:

> I think the kids have a lot of times to think the Church is a whole other world… separation of Church and state has become separation of faith and everything else. So it's like, oh, keep Church on Sunday, for that hour…. And then they go out and they think "I'm not supposed to apply what I've been talking about on Sundays or whatever with what I do on Friday night, or with what I do on Saturday night, or with what I do the rest of the week." They don't make that connection….their faith being left out of everything else. They don't apply it to their whole life, it's exclusive, not inclusive, and I've been trying…. to be more inclusive as far as making connections to all things—seeing God in all things, everywhere, in everything, the good and the bad. I talk a lot with the kids about consolation versus desolation, very Ignatian spirituality. I talk to them about *ad majorem Dei gloriam,* everything that they do can be prayerful. It doesn't matter whether or not you're reading a book or if you're at football practice. Making any sort of connection to sports is huge in an all-boys school—the more sports analogies that I can make, the more chance I have at getting through to them. It's just like, "oh wow, so it is like a football game." "What do you mean I can be praying while doing up-downs?" So, I would say that I try to make that connection…. I've been trying to do that more. (pp. 170-171)

In expressing a viewpoint similar to that of Marshall, Therese also asserted that the *Framework*, more so than the former curriculum, lends itself to making connections with the students' real-world, lived experience. Therese stated that, prior to the *Framework*'s implementation, many of her colleagues, particularly Scripture teachers, struggled to relate the course content to the everyday world: "they were busy doing Biblical archaeology kind of stuff" (p. 214). Now, however, she perceives that these same teachers, partially as a result of the time constraints imposed by the *Framework*, are focusing more on relating Scripture to the students' lives:

> One of the things that surprised me in practice was that I think the lesson plans were less academic relative to Scripture and more, how does Scripture inform my life?... And I don't think that was necessarily the *Framework*'s intention. I think that was the outcome of that X amount of time, you've got to teach X…We work on an understanding by design model for our unit maps, so the affective component is huge.   And so then how am I going to have kids do a project that is really based on their relating personally to Scripture or relating Scripture to their lives if all I'm doing is teaching the academic portion of it? So I think [that was] an outgrowth of it being compacted in the way that it was. I don't think it was intended, that's just what happened at our place, and that was sort of a happy occurrence. (pp. 214-215)

Strategies for Managing the Framework*'s Repetitive Content*

Each of three participants discussed one pedagogical strategy they have employed in attempting to manage the *Framework*'s repetitive content. Although the *Framework* courses are all one semester long, Lanie and her colleagues at St. John's High School restructured the two ninth-grade, semester-length *Framework* courses into one integrated, year-long course in order to reduce the amount of repetition. Lanie stated that, without this adjustment, "the students will say 'we've already learned this, we already did this,' and they just immediately turn their ears off" (p. 59). Therese and her colleagues at St. Martin de Porres opted to utilize pre-assessment at the beginning of the second-semester,

ninth-grade course in order to identify students who would benefit from the re-

examination of revelation and tradition with which this course opened. In other words,

they sought to answer this question: "If the kids remember it, do we really need to do

this again?" (p. 212). In the following quote, Therese articulated how, relying on the

results of the pre-assessment, they sought to meet the needs of the small number of

students who needed additional exposure to those topics without hindering the progress

of the majority:

> We actually did something where we exchanged kids during periods. We had a group of about 20 kids who just weren't solid on that whole concept, so those 20 kids just went with one of the Religion [teachers]. They reported to their regular period but then they just went somewhere else…. And that enabled us to just continue with the curriculum second semester. And we were able to do revelation, just touch on it again, and make sure that that thread, for continuity's sake, but we were able to do that within a week as opposed to three weeks. (p. 212)

> Lastly, Rosa sought to imbue the repetition of content with pedagogical value by

examining topics on a deeper level each time they reappeared in the *Framework*. She

postulated that Religious Studies teachers who lack background in Education may fail to

comprehend the importance of repetition for learning:

> I see the scaffolding. But if you're not a teacher, a trained teacher, "well, they already talked about this in the last book, why do we have to talk about it again? If they're gonna talk about it next year, why do we have to talk about it now? Let's just skip it." And to try and explain, that, it's like, well, you're going to teach addition and subtraction for the rest of their life, does that mean you skip it the first two years, in first and second grade? Because, you introduce it, then you go deeper, then you add to it. They forget what you taught them the first year anyway....But it's like anything, the more times you repeat it, sooner or later they might actually understand at least half of it. (p. 4)

Additionally, Rosa articulated the value of repetition for those students who, for a variety

of reasons, may not have been ready to learn the first time a particular topic was

presented:

Sometimes people hear it the first time, sometimes they need to hear it the hundredth time, and that's just the way learning is. And accepting and being in the right place at the right time, that what they didn't really, weren't interested in the last time, maybe now the boy they thought was just the most wonderful thing in the world just broke up with them and now they're in the right place and they're ready to listen. So, that part is good because each time you go into it, they may get a little bit more about it. (p. 41)

Using Creative, Engaging Pedagogical Methods in Framework *Courses*

Each of five participants offered at least one specific example of a creative,

engaging pedagogical method that they believe they have successfully employed in

teaching *Framework* courses. Rosa empowered her students to become the teachers

themselves, deputizing them to present certain sections of the course material to their

classmates. She also instructed them to create "stained glass windows" (p. 27) made of

tissue paper in order to illustrate events from salvation history. Marshall drew attention

to his use of classroom discussions, including Socratic seminars: students may prepare a

response to a question prompt for homework and then discuss that response in class the

following day. Grace identified her use of "crossword puzzles as fun ways to understand

the vocabulary, rather than me just telling them define this, do that" (p. 94). Furthermore,

she expressed her commitment to integrate more creative pedagogical strategies as she

continues to teach *Framework* courses: "I take it upon myself—if this is the content, how

can I then teach this creatively? That's my approach" (p. 104). Julia described a project

on creation spirituality designed to allow her students to engage with a very abstract topic

in a concrete manner:

We literally took them outside and had them experience sacramental awareness by finding something living outside for them to sit with and look at and look through for its connection to everything around it, rather than as an object on its own. And then we connected it to a New Testament story and an Old Testament story. But they talk a lot about that experience, and I think one of the reasons is because it was so concrete and so real—it was alive. (p. 128)

Therese spoke at length regarding her belief that engaging, student-centered pedagogy is possible to practice within the *Framework*'s parameters, particularly if "you're adept at compacting curriculum and having pedagogy that covers multiple bullet points" (p. 216). She cited several concrete examples. First, she detailed a "Scriptural rosary" (p. 213) project intended to integrate several discrete areas of *Framework* content:

> Second semester there's a lot of minutiae detail on the early life of Christ in the *Framework*.... There was also Mariology in terms of trying to understand the Catholic concept of who Mary is and why Mary….And so we did a Scriptural rosary, where we were able to encompass all of the early life of Christ, teach some of the Mariology, teach rosary as a prayer practice, and it all combined together and took five sessions…. We were able to touch everything we needed to touch in a way that the kids actually—we had them make string, knotted rosaries, so engage them kinesthetically while also in a way that the kids really I think got into it. We did a PowerPoint where there were little video clips for each one of the mysteries, so when we clicked on the mysteries we had clips from *Jesus of Nazareth* for each one of those events in the Scriptural rosary. And we only concentrated on the five mysteries that covered that early life of Christ, but it enabled the kids to get also the Mariology and to say why and how this is a meditative practice and how it's really about praying with Mary. Going through the words of the Hail Mary, and saying, it's a Scriptural prayer, showing them how it is. (pp. 212-213)

Secondly, Therese described her use of a jigsaw process in teaching the prophets, a methodology that, she maintained, enabled her students to engage with prophetic literature in a meaningful, yet time-efficient, manner. She organized the class into small groups, with each group assigned a particular prophet for in-depth study. Furthermore, she assigned each person within that small group an area of focus with regard to that prophet: call and mission, symbolic language, the prophet's message, and the application of that message to the contemporary world. In the following quote, she explained how the class, collectively, synthesized this considerable volume of material:

> Each kid had an area of responsibility for one of the prophets, and then every area of responsibility met in their own small group with the teacher, and then went back and did a micro-teaching [with their original small group]. And then each group presented a PowerPoint of their results on the prophet to the whole class. (p. 249)

Therese also mentioned projects that she formerly assigned in the St. Martin de Porres pre-*Framework* ninth-grade course and that she intended to incorporate into the *Framework*'s tenth-grade ecclesiology course during the following academic year. These included multi-media representations of various ecclesial offices and positions, children's books on the marks of the Church, and cereal boxes that depicted the Church's hierarchical structure; for example, "popette boxes instead of Cheerios boxes" (p. 232). In describing these projects, Therese defended the pedagogical value of performance-based assessment, particularly for students who are not Catholic:

> I think the non-Catholic kids actually liked doing the projects more even than the Catholic kids did. Because for them it then became more an interactive kind of exploration type of approach, which I think made it more meaningful for them. So I do think that there's a real place for performance-based assessment with a non-Catholic population. I think it gives them an easier entrée… into the relevance of it. (p. 241)

Other creative, engaging pedagogical strategies that Therese utilized in teaching *Framework* courses included small-group discussions, Socratic circles, film clips, and a Paschal Triduum simulation during Holy Week. Lastly, she described one particular class section of a *Framework* course in which, of 35 students, only six were Catholic, and many were, in Therese's assessment, "unchurched" (p. 241). Three days a week, she began class with an open-forum opportunity for students to pose questions about the course material, questions which would be discussed first in small groups and then as a whole class. This proved to be a successful means of capturing these students' interest

and attention: "They were completely interested…. They had lots of questions…. They were very engaged and really liked it" (pp. 241-242).

<center>*The* Framework*'s Implicit Pedagogy*</center>

Although the *Framework* encompasses only theological content and not pedagogy, both Lanie and Therese maintained that certain aspects of the *Framework*'s presentation and structure implicitly promote a particular pedagogical methodology. In her first interview, Lanie speculated that the bishops, in developing the *Framework*, may have intended to bring Religious Studies back to the era of the Baltimore Catechism:

> I don't know where their [the bishops'] mindset was, I don't know if it was….
> let's go back to the Baltimore Catechism idea where students are just drilled with
> questions and you learn the answers and then that's it. There's a little feel of that
> to it…. I don't know if that was intentional in terms of repetition that they're
> trying to get across. That they're kind of asking the same things over and over
> again so that it's almost like the students would be able to regurgitate an answer if
> asked. (p. 60)

In the second interview, the researcher followed up on this assertion, seeking to ascertain the extent to which Lanie believes the *Framework* to promote, implicitly, particular pedagogical methods:

> Carrie: The *Framework* doesn't explicitly state a pedagogy. It doesn't say lecture
> on this, do small groups on this, whatever. But I wonder if you thought it
> sort of nudges teachers, or sort of implicitly pushes the sort of pedagogy of
> students memorizing and then "regurgitating," as you said.
> Lanie: I think because of the amount of content, there would be that tendency, in
> order to get through the material faster, to just—here, memorize these
> terms. And, maybe, give more, just, here's the explanation, and not enter
> into a lot of dialogue, or a lot of time for the students to be able to put it
> into their own words. So they're [students are] going to just take the
> words in which it was expressed, and that's what they're going to give
> back. (p. 84)

Lanie continued by describing her own experience of attempting to encourage her students to engage with the *Framework*'s content on a more personal and meaningful

level, only to find her efforts thwarted by the volume of content in the *Framework*—and

attendant time constraints—and by her students' strong desires to attain A's in the course:

> I tried to say—try to put this into your own words. And as they started to do it, then the questions would come back, "well, I didn't really understand it, can you explain it some more." So I'd explain it again. But each time that you go through that explanation, you're losing time for the content, and so I could see where some people would just say—just take this….A lot of our students are very academically-minded, and they want to get straight A's. And so some of them, it's like, "well, what is the answer that's going to get me the A?" And so because of the amount of content trying to be covered, I could see where it would lead to that, 'cause there wouldn't be the time to help the students articulate it in their own language. (p. 84)

Lanie concluded by asserting that her attempts to engage her students beyond "the

answer" (p. 84)—including her attempts to utilize performance-based assessment—have

left her feeling frustrated: "That's why I think the tendency would be to just give them

the answer" (p. 86).

In describing her efforts to supervise teachers who embody a wide variety of

pedagogical styles, Therese stated that those teachers "who are more 'sage on the stage'"

(p. 218) encountered no problems in the transition to teaching *Framework* courses.

However, those teachers' level of comfort with the *Framework* created a problem for

Therese as department chair:

> My problem, then, as department chair, is saying, OK, you're killing these kids. I don't want this to become a dry, disembodied, professorial thing just because the material's written that way in terms of the *Framework*. That doesn't mean that's how you have to make it come alive. (p. 218)

When the researcher sought to clarify whether Therese believes that the *Framework*

promotes, implicitly, a "sage on the stage" pedagogy, Therese responded affirmatively,

offering this explanation:

> There are some people who will do exactly what they're told, that's their perception. So if it says this, in this order, "This is how I will do it. And I need to be sure that they know each and every single one of these points in this order." I

don't think that that's necessarily the intention of the *Framework*, but you have to remember that Religion teachers are not trained in pedagogy, most of them….So then if you read it, and it reinforces that type of linear approach, I think implicitly some of the message it delivers might be, "this is the way you do it, and this is what has to be done." (p. 219)

Basic Level of Comprehension, Lack of Higher-Order Thinking

Three participants admitted that in teaching *Framework* courses, they tend to aim

for simply a basic level of comprehension among their students, without progressing to

higher-order cognitive tasks. Rosa stated that prior to the *Framework*'s implementation,

she could assign a chapter of the textbook as reading for homework, and then, in class,

briefly review key themes from the chapter and use those themes "as a jumping-off

point" (p. 44) for a variety of learning experiences. In contrast, in a *Framework* course,

she struggled to move her students beyond "just comprehension skills" (p.44): "The way

this [the *Framework*] was, you couldn't jump off from anything, because you were

standing on the diving board going through how to do it" (p. 44).

Similarly, Lanie postulated that the pedagogical shift prompted by the *Framework*

fails to dovetail with current theory and praxis regarding learning and instruction:

I think it's been more of a skimming through information rather than taking time to do a more in-depth study of it, because there's so much content we're trying to cover in a given year…when you think of levels of intelligence and differentiated instruction and all of that that we're trying to incorporate into our curriculum, [the *Framework*] doesn't allow a lot of time for that. So, pedagogically that has changed. (pp. 62-63)

Moreover, Lanie expressed fear that a pedagogy that remains superficial, neglecting the

more in-depth, complex questions which characterize a mature life of faith, will

ultimately disappoint her students in the future:

I see where there's that pull with the bishops—they're trying to make it as clear and as factual as you can get it. And so I could see where there would be this tendency to want to just present it that way—these are the facts. This is what you need to know, and this is what will lead you to salvation. Period. And our

students, that's not how they—I don't think that's being truthful to the students about what their journey's gonna be like in the future. Because they are going to encounter moments in their life when those answers are not gonna satisfy their question any longer. And if we don't teach them how to interpret and analyze this information that we're teaching them, they're not gonna have that skill later on in life when they are faced with the true struggles that happen in life—faith crisis or whatever. (p. 85)

Lastly, Grace recounted a concern that members of her department have expressed, and that she also believes to be legitimate, regarding the extent to which the *Framework* deeply engages students who already possess a strong background in Religious Studies. In the following exchange, the researcher sought to clarify the nature of this concern:

> Grace: Members of my department…think the *Framework* is good for—a good introduction to students who really just don't know or just don't get it. But to the girls that have the theological background, or are extremely talented and intellectually savvy, that this is boring to them. It does not challenge them. It challenges the students that just don't know who Jesus is and then the girls that already do—this bores them. That is a concern that has been raised at my department.
> Carrie: Do they, in raising that concern, do they think that, is it that the girls who are more with it to begin with need more kind of higher-order thinking?
> Grace: Yes. Yes.
> Carrie: And this isn't bringing them to that?
> Grace: Correct. Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Kind of a dumbed-down version. (p. 106)

Pedagogical Challenge of Teaching the Amount of Content in the Framework

Lanie discussed the challenge of attempting to teach the amount of content in the *Framework* in a pedagogically appropriate manner. She remarked that she and her colleagues have struggled in "trying to figure out how to do a good job at what we're doing and that the students are learning it, but that we're not just going so fast that there's not any processing" (p. 57). She stated that they desire not only "to do the *Framework* justice" (p. 63) but also to "fit in the content in a pedagogical manner that is appropriate

for the age level that we are teaching and that is effective" (p. 64). Lanie labeled the latter task "the biggest challenge" (p. 64) that the *Framework* has presented.

In an effort to meet this challenge, Lanie has resorted to assigning projects, including research projects, with the understanding that students will complete those projects on their own time, thus leaving class time relatively intact. For example, she assigned the ninth graders a project to complete over Christmas vacation which required them to research the history and local presence of the religious community that sponsors St. John's and to create a booklet of their findings. On the due date, she allocated half a class period for the students to display, share, and/or present their work to one another. Although Lanie was pleased that she was able to incorporate this project in a way that did not occupy class time, she lamented that "there's not really time to talk about it in any depth" (p. 82). Similarly, she sought to utilize performance-based assessment, in which students worked independently throughout a unit on a "performance task" (p. 84) designed to "help them go more in-depth on their own" (p. 84). However, Lanie enjoyed only limited success with this strategy, as she realized her students' limited ability to conduct research without close teacher supervision. In particular, her students struggled to locate Internet sites and other materials written primarily for their age group and not for adults.

Pedagogical Implications of Teaching the Old Testament with the New Testament

Therese spoke at length regarding the pedagogical implications of the *Framework*'s approach to the Old Testament; that is, teaching the Old Testament not in its own right, but, rather, as the backdrop for the New Testament. Although she acknowledged the need for students to understand certain Old Testament events and

concepts within their original Jewish context, she nonetheless defended the *Framework*'s approach as pedagogically sound for a Religious Studies course:

> If I don't understand Passover in the context of the Jewish experience, in the context of covenant and liberation…I can't understand Christ as paschal lamb. And so I need it within the context of the Jewish experience, but I think for kids, pedagogically, you learn by connections. So if you don't take advantage of those connections, then you're missing the opportunity to really have that discussion and that continuity and the ability for kids to make those connections. And so then I think we're not so much—then we're not the Religion class, that we're an English-History class, pedagogically. And I'm not saying that that's necessarily bad, because I've taken "The Bible as Literature" at [a public university]. That's not necessarily bad, but it's just, what are your goals? And if your goals are you're teaching Religion and religious formation, not Theology at the graduate school level, then I think making those connections pedagogically, since that's how we learn is by connection, I think that is pedagogically pretty sound. (pp. 248-249)

Therese continued by explaining that if the end point for students' study of Scripture is "who Christ was and then who the early Church was as a response to their experience of Christ" (p. 248), then, in her view, it makes sense pedagogically to present all of Scripture as a "continuum" (p. 248), infusing one's presentation of the Old Testament with references to Christ and the New Testament. She concluded by remarking that if a Religious Studies course embodies "a religious formational approach" (p. 248), which she distinguished from an "academic…didactic" (p. 248) approach, then teaching the Old and New Testaments in a concurrent, interwoven manner is essential: "I think it's necessary to marry them pedagogically, because it is one flow of salvation history" (p. 248).

Little Pedagogical Difference Between the Prior Curriculum and the Framework

Both Marshall and Therese maintained that the implementation of the *Framework* did not bring a concomitant shift in their pedagogical methods. Marshall asserted that both before and after the *Framework*'s implementation, he sought to utilize a

methodology based on "the three-step process of prepare, act, reflect" (p. 168). However, even while testifying to a lack of pedagogical difference between the ways in which he taught the former curriculum and the *Framework*, he also noted, in a self-deprecating manner, that this perception may be attributed to his lack of experience:

> This might be my own personal, having not much or many years of experience….I don't know what I'm doing well enough in order to recognize differences, or in order to realize that I had changed something especially and that was a product of the curriculum shifting. So I guess maybe I don't have enough direct experience to make that kind of analysis on my own methodology. (p. 168)

Similarly, Therese stated that "very little in terms of pedagogy changed" (p. 218) for her when St. Martin de Porres implemented the *Framework*. She ascribed this continuity to the educational philosophy that undergirds her teaching: "My teaching strategies—if you will, my pedagogy—is very non-content based. My pedagogy tends to be very student-centered based. I'm not a crazy constructivist, but I am very much a constructivist" (p. 218).

Reflections of a Department Chair

Although Therese maintained that the *Framework* had a minimal impact on her own pedagogy, she offered several salient reflections regarding her experience of supervising teachers in her department, who, at the time of the *Framework*'s implementation, were practicing a diverse range of pedagogical methods. She asserted that many of the teachers in her charge simply adapted whatever pedagogical methods that they had been utilizing in the years prior to the *Framework*, including Socratic circles, film clips, and small group work. Regarding small group work in particular, Therese recounted the story of a teacher who found this method to be even more effective with the *Framework* than it had been with the prior curriculum: "[She] found that small

group fit really well into this compacted curriculum because she could jigsaw so much more effectively and really eke out more time for some things that she wanted to do" (p. 218).

However, Therese stated that two groups of teachers in her department experienced "the biggest pedagogical shift" (p. 218) in transitioning to the *Framework*. In Therese's characterization, those teachers were located at the "polar ends" (p. 218) of a pedagogical continuum; that is, they taught either as a "monk" (p. 218) or as a "sage" (p. 218). Regarding the former, teachers whose pedagogy was structured around frequent use of meditative and reflective exercises struggled to incorporate more direct instruction and "more intentional learning" (p. 218). Regarding the latter, teachers whose pedagogy involved extensive lecturing struggled to engage their students more actively in the *Framework*'s content.

Lastly, Therese reflected on the importance of supporting teachers in "recontextualizing" (p. 228) activities and learning experiences that they had effectively employed in their pre-*Framework* curricula and that they had enjoyed teaching. From Therese's perspective, recontextualizing allowed teachers to retain many of these favorite activities and learning experiences, even though they may not have been utilized in precisely the same manner in *Framework* courses. She referenced one teacher, in particular, who expressed gratitude to her at the end of the year, stating that "I only have one activity that was a favorite activity of mine that I've yet to figure out how to do" (p. 229).

Hopes for Improved Pedagogy in Future Years of Teaching Framework *Courses*

Four participants expressed hope that their pedagogy would improve in their second and subsequent years of teaching *Framework* courses. At the time of the second interview, Rosa had begun preparations for teaching the 10th grade *Framework* courses, which prompted her to remark that "now that I see the second year, I see the progression more" (p. 41). She also anticipated that greater comfort and familiarity with the *Framework* would bring greater confidence to her teaching. Similarly, Lanie expressed hope that as she and her colleagues "refine" (p. 74) their teaching of *Framework* courses, they may discover opportunities to incorporate more "differentiated experiences for the students" (p. 64). Grace also flatly stated that, "I hope I'll do a better job this next year, being exposed to it now for a second time, after having worked with it" (p. 117).

Julia couched her relatively lengthy reflections on this matter in a clear acknowledgement of the inherent limitations of teaching a new course for the first time:

> As I grow and work with the *Framework*…maybe I'll see the whole picture better, and know the material better, so that when I'm teaching it, it will be more of an experiential…they'll [students will] feel that value and that worth. Right now, not enough of that is there. It's just kind of information that I've only partially bought into because of lack of experience and newness. (p. 130)

As she anticipated her second year of teaching *Framework* courses, Julia articulated a commitment to student-centered pedagogy, a commitment rooted both in educational research and in a fervent desire that her students apply the course content to their lives:

> [The *Framework* is] gonna challenge us to create opportunities, more likely in forms of projects, that are going to allow us to maintain that student-centered learning experience. And the reason that we want to do that is because research shows over and over that when the students are engaged, when they find that it's relevant, when what they're learning is relevant to their life, and when they're engaged of their own interest, and desire to invest in the work, then it's more relevant. They're going to learn more, they're going to be more likely to understand it at a deeper level and apply it to their life. So keeping it student-centered is gonna be a challenge. But, again, I think, as a department, we're

gonna have to come together to make sure that that continues to happen. And then also, we'll be challenged as teachers to keep them engaged in active learning experiences, and not just, "we have these topics, that are part of the *Framework*, that you have to know." We have to create learning experiences out of that….So trying to maintain that harmony between this is what the *Framework* says the kids need to know, which is a lot of dogma, versus in the classroom, we find that a student-centered style of learning engages them more and allows the [content] to be more relevant to their life and allows it to move out of the classroom and into other realms of their life. So really kind of trying to blend the two, and we're still finding our way in that. But I know that that's, from having taught this freshmen year, and getting ready to move into implementing the curriculum for the sophomore year, that's a big consideration. How can we keep the student-centered learning? How can we keep it as a formative process, to increase and enrich their faith? (p. 147)

Brief Additional Findings Regarding Research Question #3

Three participants offered very brief remarks regarding several additional themes pertinent to research question three. Grace stated that, in the face of the large quantity of material in *Framework*, she regularly solicits student input on what topics from a given chapter will be covered. She prepares whatever topics are of greatest interest to her students, designing her teaching and assessment strategies with those topics in mind, instead of attempting to teach the entire chapter. Marshall remarked that he endeavors to teach in a manner that enables his students to develop skills which readily transfer to other academic disciplines, such as English, History, and Mathematics. Such skills include reading, writing, logic, and critical thinking.

Rosa characterized her natural teaching style as "concept-oriented" (p. 43), with an emphasis on "the big picture" (p. 43). However, in teaching *Framework* courses, she adjusted this style, focusing on "tiny fine details" (p. 43) instead of larger concepts: "Now it's all the little details that lead to the big picture, that you don't necessarily get to focus on the big picture at the end" (p. 43).

Rosa also shared two additional pedagogical methods that she has utilized effectively in *Framework* courses. She directs her students to access their prior knowledge of words' Latin roots, which they have learned in their English classes, in order to grasp theological terminology. She also seeks to assist her students in understanding the nature of a relationship with Christ by comparing that relationship to a daily reality to which her students can easily relate: the relationships they have with their close friends.

Research Question #3: Summary of Findings

In imparting data germane to research question three, participants in this study offered both practical and philosophical reflections regarding the *Framework*'s impact on the pedagogical methods they employ. Practically, participants described the way in which the *Framework* has prompted them to utilize more teacher-centered methodologies and more traditional assessment strategies and has caused them to abandon particular activities, learning experiences, and projects that had been mainstays of their pre-*Framework* curricula. They articulated, often with great angst, their hampered ability to teach in a manner that meets the needs of students with diverse learning styles, that balances the cognitive and affective realms, that incorporates small-group discussions and personal sharing amongst students, and that fosters higher-order thinking. They presented divergent perspectives regarding the extent to which the *Framework*'s content is conducive to prayer experiences and to connections with the real, everyday world. Despite these many and varied pedagogical challenges, participants also detailed creative, engaging pedagogical methods that they have effectively utilized in *Framework* courses,

including strategies to assist them in managing the *Framework*'s large volume of material and the repetitive nature of that material.

Philosophically, participants theorized about the presence of an implicit pedagogy embedded in the *Framework*'s content and structure, mused about the pedagogical implications of the *Framework*'s approach to the Old Testament, and, in the case of one participant, offered observations rooted in her experience of supervising a diverse group of teachers as they transitioned into teaching *Framework* courses. Lastly, in a spirit of profound humility and a clear desire to serve their students well, participants acknowledged their limited experience with the *Framework* and expressed hope that their ability to teach *Framework* courses in an engaging and life-giving manner would improve in future years. Considered collectively, these data suggest that a shift in curricular content, such as implementation of the *Framework*, may, in some cases, prompt an accompanying shift in pedagogy.

<div align="center">Ancillary Findings</div>

All six participants shared reflections that, although not directly pertinent to the research questions driving this study, nevertheless merit attention. These data are classified as ancillary findings and will be reported in this section. They include a consideration of the ways in which the *Framework* is being implemented in the dioceses in which the participants teach; concrete suggestions for teachers and administrators and for the bishops, including suggestions regarding the *Framework*'s scope and sequence; questions for the bishops; and participants' plans for their second and subsequent years of teaching *Framework* courses. Additional ancillary topics that participants addressed include the *Framework*'s potentially negative impact on students' ability to fulfill the

University of California's admissions requirements, the relative importance of catechesis and evangelization in setting the direction for Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, and the marginalization of the Religious Studies department within the school community. This section will conclude by recounting the reflections that participants spontaneously shared with the researcher regarding their involvement in this study.

<p align="center">*Implementation of the* Framework</p>

Five participants shared information regarding the way in which the *Framework* has been implemented in their respective dioceses. The researcher will present this information for each of these participants, in turn, beginning with Rosa.

Rosa explained that, in the year prior to the *Framework*'s implementation, the diocese convened meetings for all Religious Studies teachers. She described these meetings as a "sales pitch" (p. 3) designed to garner support for the *Framework*: "We would all have to come together and get the *Framework* sold to us" (p. 16). Similarly, Lanie recounted diocesan meetings of Religious Studies teachers, meetings characterized more by the delivery of information than by conversation: "that was more [the superintendent] talking to us, not any kind of dialogue" (p. 83).

Lanie continued by detailing the ways in which St. John's High School is adjusting the *Framework*'s scope and sequence without consulting diocesan officials. Most notably, Lanie and her departmental colleagues are incorporating elements of the *Framework* within their existing twelfth-grade elective courses, rather than adopting the *Framework*'s electives: "We're taking elements of the *Framework* and addressing them in those courses, but we're not changing the courses. But [the superintendent] doesn't

know that yet" (p. 68). Lanie defended her choice in this matter by explaining that

neither the bishop nor the superintendent had yet issued an unambiguous,

uncompromising mandate regarding the *Framework*:

> Unless our bishop absolutely says…he hasn't, they haven't said that to me yet—
> that they want to implement it, but there's no sense that if it's not working that we
> still have to do it….I feel there's a little opening there with our superintendent.…I
> don't know about our bishop. Our bishop is new. (p. 61)

However, Lanie expressed anxiety that the superintendent may challenge St. John's

approach to the *Framework* during an upcoming visit to campus, scheduled for the

academic year following her participation in this study:

> We are implementing the *Framework*, just not exactly the way they might want it
> to be, but we'll see what happens with that. I might have a whole other reaction if
> we're told that we can't do that.…he [the superintendent] is coming to visit…. in
> the fall to look at all of our curriculum and our teachers, so he may have
> something to say at that point. (p. 68)

In her second interview, Lanie also articulated concern regarding the possibility that the

bishop and/or superintendent may, at some point, exercise greater control over the

selection of Religious Studies textbooks.

Grace characterized her bishop's approach as "across the board….adopting the

Framework as is" (p. 89), an approach she detailed in the following quote:

> We were required to use the actual *Framework* textbooks and at the same time the
> *Framework* itself. We were required to rename our courses with the *Framework*
> names that was [*sic*] prescribed. And that was a big deal, and that's how it's
> listed in our course compendium. (p. 89)

However, despite this wholesale implementation seemingly mandated by the bishop,

Grace identified two schools in her diocese that, at the time of her participation in this

study, had not yet commenced the implementation process.

Marshall maintained that he has experienced greater flexibility and freedom

regarding curriculum at St. Michael's High School, which is sponsored by a Roman

Catholic religious order, than he had at the diocesan Catholic secondary school at which

he had previously taught. This perception has shaped his view that, regarding the

Framework, he is neither directly nor completely accountable to diocesan officials:

> At the diocesan school you obviously draw your directions and your methodology
> directly from the bishop, and directly from the diocese. Whereas at the order
> school, we have a little bit more freedom…. I just know that we have a little bit
> more control personally over what we teach. We still fall under the umbrella of
> the diocese, but we're not directly responsible, if you want to say, to them. We go
> through [name of city], which is where our headquarters is [the headquarters of
> the school's sponsoring religious community]. (p. 159)

Therese offered extensive data regarding the specifics of the implementation

process at her school and in her diocese. First, she described the pilot year in which she

and her colleagues engaged prior to the *Framework*'s implementation at St. Martin de

Porres. Because they knew that they would be implementing the ninth-grade *Framework*

courses during the 2011-2012 academic year, they voluntarily undertook the task of

piloting those courses during the 2010-2011 academic year. The three teachers who

taught those courses during the pilot year—Therese among them—engaged in

collaborative planning and conversation in an effort to address problems as they surfaced:

> In that test year, the pilot year—how are we gonna do this? How are we gonna do
> this so that it's not just a bunch of dry, disembodied stuff? We're talking
> freshmen—how are we gonna do this? I think us having that conversation was
> one of the most valuable things we did—in coming up with pedagogies and using
> existing pedagogies in such a way that it actually makes the *Framework* viable for
> kids as young as they are. (p. 219)

Therese asserted that the pilot year "made our first implementation year smoother" (p.

234) because it provided the opportunity to generate ideas, test-run activities, develop

common assessments, gauge the effectiveness of textbooks, and make any necessary

adjustments prior to the official implementation. Additionally, she stated that the pilot

year enabled her and her colleagues to identify "redundancies" (p. 250) in the *Framework*

that the skillful use of pre-assessment could eliminate. Thus, if pre-assessment revealed

that most or all students had mastered a particular concept, then that concept would not

need to be taught again, and that time could be allocated to another topic area.

Secondly, Therese discussed her diocese's ambiguous policy regarding schools'

freedom to modify or augment the *Framework*'s scope and sequence. In two instances,

requests for modification were denied; conversely, in one instance, such a request was

granted and even encouraged. Regarding the former, Therese had asked her bishop if St.

Martin's could retain their existing World Religions course rather than replacing it with

the *Framework*'s elective course E, "Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues." The bishop

rejected this proposal. He also denied a request to reverse the sequence of the tenth grade

courses: to teach Ecclesiology during the fall semester and the Paschal Mystery during

the spring semester in order to integrate the presentation of the Paschal Mystery with the

spring celebrations of Lent, the Paschal Triduum, and Easter. Therese stated that, "We

were told that we didn't have freedom to change semester sequence" (p. 231).

Regarding the latter, Therese detailed the way in which her bishop, via the

diocesan vicar for faith formation, communicated his stance that the *Framework*'s

elective courses are only recommended, not mandated. Therefore, he encouraged schools

to submit additional electives "for episcopal approval" (p. 235). At the time of her

participation in this study, Therese had already submitted a Philosophy course for such

approval and intended to submit an Ethics course and a Christian Leadership course. She

characterized her bishop as "amenable" (p. 224), "very open" (p. 235), and "receptive"

(p. 235) to these submissions, provided that they meet certain criteria. For example, the

courses must contain substantive content that is not predominantly secular, and the

courses must not be purely praxis-oriented: no "worker bee class for preparing school liturgies" (p. 235) would be approved. In the following quote, Therese described the required documentation which must be submitted to the diocese in soliciting approval for a non-*Framework* elective:

> It's more than a syllabus because we do have to write a rationale, as to why, what we think the value is, and why it's valuable for seniors and how it fits into our school's mission and our vision, that type of thing…. the rationale piece I know is one thing that they're looking at pretty carefully. And you have to describe which textbooks you want to order, and the resources….They just want to make sure you're not just being kind of whimsical about it. (pp. 235-236)

 Therese concluded her observations on this topic by remarking that "there's so much episcopal discretion" (p. 236) involved in the manner in which each bishop chooses to implement the *Framework* in his diocesan territory.

<p align="center">*Suggestions and Recommendations*</p>

All six participants offered concrete suggestions and recommendations regarding the *Framework*'s content and/or the way in which it has been, or should be, implemented. They directed these suggestions to a variety of constituencies, including teachers and administrators in schools that have adopted the *Framework* and the U.S. bishops. They also offered particular feedback on the *Framework*'s scope and sequence.

Suggestions and Recommendations Directed to Teachers and Administrators

Therese offered recommendations directed toward assisting teachers with the transition to teaching *Framework* courses. She touted the need for professional development and "coaching" (p. 229) in this regard:

> There needs to be a lot of support done on the professional development of how do you implement this without killing kids and without teachers feeling like they're really strapped in. Because I think it can be taught at a developmentally appropriate way, but….I think it needs to be very, very intentional about how much you eke out and how much you don't. (p. 220)

Therese urged that administrators allocate sufficient time for such professional

development; failure to do so may, in her view, result in dire consequences:

> Teachers need to be allowed that time.…to make it their own.…and if that means
> cutting time out of the school schedule, to allow them to do that with one another,
> then it needs to be done. Because I think otherwise what you get is a begrudging
> implementation, and possibly even a very dry, sort of bullet point by bullet point
> implementation, which I think is spiritual death. (p. 229)

Therese also highlighted the need to support teachers in "recontextualizing that

which you do which you think is effective for you as a teacher and for your students as

students" (p. 227). If teachers do not understand that the *Framework* does allow them the

freedom to recontextualize—that is, that they need not abandon their favorite classroom

activities and learning experiences—then they may feel "bereft and unsettled" (p. 227)

and "worried" (p. 227), feelings that may negatively affect their ability to teach. Therese

concluded by articulating and defending teachers' emotional, professional, and vocational

needs, needs that, she maintained, must be met in order for implementation of the

Framework to proceed smoothly:

> I think it's really important for both people at the diocesan level and at sites and
> [department] chairs to realize that if teachers are resistant it's not just 'cause they
> wake up in the morning and say "I'm gonna be the worst teacher ever."   It's
> because they need to be validated and respected, and they need to be provided
> some context with which they can still be who they are, because it's their
> vocation. It's what they've chosen to do. They certainly didn't do it for the
> money. (p. 229)

Rosa and Lanie each offered one concrete suggestion to teachers and

administrators, respectively. Rosa strongly recommended that teachers carefully examine

the scope and sequence of the *Framework*'s six required semesters in order to ascertain

how much time and attention to allocate to a particular topic each time it arises in the

Framework. Lanie urged administrators in schools that have implemented the

Framework to plan now to conduct an exit interview with their first students to complete all four years of their Catholic secondary school Religious Studies courses within the *Framework*'s parameters. Such a process would enable them to gather information "about what their [students'] experience of the four years has been" (p. 61).

Julia suggested that schools that have implemented the *Framework* engage in an ongoing evaluation process, carefully documenting the ways in which *Framework* courses appear to have an impact on students' intellectual maturation and religious formation. Julia believes that such site-based research could occur at St. Catherine of Siena High School through collaboration between the Religious Studies and Campus Ministry departments:

> One of our barometers will be how things run through the Campus Ministry office of our school….There's a lot in our Campus Ministry program that is not changing, but as the Religious Studies courses are changing, they'll be able to tell us how are those changes affecting the students…on the retreats…in their Christian service work and their outreach hours….it'll be interesting to see what the Campus Ministry experience is, because that's where their faith comes alive. (p. 137)

Suggestions and Recommendations Directed to the U.S. Bishops

Rosa, Lanie, Julia, and Therese all offered concrete recommendations to the U.S. bishops regarding the *Framework*. Rosa suggested that the bishops publish a color-coded chart to assist teachers in navigating the *Framework*, especially in managing content that appears in multiple courses. She also advised that the bishops explicitly address not only content, but also pedagogy: "I just think they needed to go further and not just think about what they wanted people to know, but *how* are we gonna get them to know that, instead of just leaving it to the textbook companies" (p. 53).

Lanie offered one suggestion regarding the bishops' attitude vis-à-vis Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools and proposed one specific way in which the bishops could support the effective implementation of the *Framework*. Regarding the former, she expressed a desire that the bishops' attitude toward Religious Studies teachers be characterized by openness and trust:

> I hope that as this *Framework* is implemented across the United States, and hopefully as people are allowed to talk about it, and dialogue about it, that the bishops will be open to hearing what those in the trenches have to say, and that they would have the confidence in those that are doing this work that we're going to be true to the content of the faith, the tradition of the faith. (p. 86)

Regarding the latter, Lanie observed that "the bishops aren't supplying a lot of resources" (p. 85) for students who are enrolled in *Framework* courses. Therefore, she recommended that the USCCB website "have a lot more kind of links available that could meet the needs of Catholic high school students, besides just the Bible" (p. 84).

Julia proffered two recommendations to the bishops. First, in an effort to assist teachers in managing the large volume of material in the *Framework* and to respect the bishops' presumed intention to provide "consistency in education" (p. 153), Julia proposed that the bishops identify a limited number topics within the *Framework* that are most crucial for adolescents to learn: "If you can't cover all 12 topics in one semester, make sure you hit these four—that this, as a Catholic adolescent, is rich, it's valuable, and we need to know that every student has had the emphasis here" (p. 154). In making this recommendation, Julia rejected the idea that she, as a teacher, simply decide this on her own, maintaining that the bishops should exercise leadership in this regard:

> For me personally to go through and pick them out, that would be sort of the definition of my faith experience and my walk. But I think that's a job that the bishops—because that's defining the Catholicism of our students, their identity, defining their Catholic identity…. and that needs to be supported with an

understanding of where students are and what they need, and where do we want our Church to go for the future. (p. 154)

Secondly, Julia advocated the launch of a rigorous study designed to ascertain the extent to which the *Framework* has a positive, measurable, long-term impact on adolescents' faith and on their ecclesial involvement:

> Julia: This discussion that we've had today has led me to think, kind of in a backwards design manner, where it would be interesting to have the *Framework*, to have sort of a five or seven year plan where they can look back and say, given this *Framework*, where have we come, how has it benefitted Catholic education? And that's something they should be designing now.
> Carrie: They, being the bishops?
> Julia: The bishops, yeah. And how is it affecting students three, four, five years after they graduate? What are they doing as, with their Catholic identity? What are they doing for their children's education? What are they doing in their parishes, or in their outreach work? Those kinds of answers tell us what kind of effect the *Framework* had on them.
> Carrie: So you're suggesting the bishops do a study of some sort to see the effect of this.
> Julia: Mmmm-hmmm. Yeah. That'd be interesting. Otherwise, how do they know? (pp. 154-155)

Therese suggested that the *Framework* encompass not only theological content, but also pedagogy and "affective components" (p. 217), all in "a complete package" (p. 254). Regarding pedagogy, she recommended that the *Framework* explicitly articulate measurable outcomes for students:

> What kids are able to do? Not just stuff that they memorize it and know, but what are kids able to do with this? I think that should be explicitly laid out, because you could direct that content to different end points, depending on how you designed the flow of the learning activities. (p. 254)

In order to match "expectations of knowledge, skills, and understanding to what kids are ready and able to do" (p. 221), Therese proposed that these outcomes be articulated for each semester of the *Framework*, thus creating a "continuum" (p. 221) of true, substantive learning, "not just a bunch of memorized stuff" (p. 221).

Therese lamented the *Framework*'s failure to address the affective components of

Religious Studies:

> I think there's more that would be really useful to add in there in terms of—what are we trying to do? Are we trying to have kids come to either falling in love with Christ, or at least an appreciation of who Christ was? Are we trying to have kids realize that Scripture is something that can be taken into their lives?... I think [the] *Framework* is relying on Religion teachers' heart and practice and kind of common sense to address those affective components. But if you look at, coming out of secular education, if you look at standards, even in Math or Science or literacy standards, they have an affective component that has to do with attitudes toward Science or attitudes toward the inquiring methods. I would've liked to have seen more of that…. Not in saying, "you have to do this"…but more, in general language, address affective components of religious formation explicitly…. If we're talking about, "these are our expectations," then I think to not address it explicitly is to say "oh, this isn't necessarily our expectation." Really? Then who are we? (pp. 217-218)

In recommending that the *Framework* incorporate material related to pedagogy and to

affectivity, Therese urged that such material not be imposed as a mandate, but, rather,

simply appear as "an enrichment section" (p. 255) to "provide that extra bit of direction"

(p. 255). Otherwise, she remarked, the *Framework* "can just be very fleshless—bone and

skin" (p. 255).

Suggestions and Recommendations Regarding the Framework*'s Scope and Sequence*

Four participants offered feedback to the researcher regarding the *Framework*'s

scope and sequence. Two put forward specific, discrete suggestions; one argued strongly

for the need to a broader approach to Ethics than the *Framework* provides; and three

maintained that a vocations course—that is, the *Framework*'s elective course E,

"Responding to the Call of Jesus Christ"—is unnecessary.

Various specific suggestions.

Therese offered three concrete recommendations regarding the *Framework*'s

scope and sequence. First, she contended that the sequence of tenth grade courses should

be reversed, with Ecclesiology taught in the fall semester and Paschal Mystery in the spring semester. This, she believes, would constitute "a better flow" (p. 222) from the ninth grade curriculum and allow study of the Paschal Mystery to congrue with the liturgical year; that is, with the spring celebrations of Lent, the Paschal Triduum, and Easter. Secondly, Therese suggested that the *Framework*'s elective course E— "Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues"—should be a year in length, rather than one semester. From Therese's perspective, this year-long course should encompass an in-depth study of non-Christian religions—including Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism—as well as an examination of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Lastly, Therese asserted that because Social Justice is an elective in the *Framework*, the *Framework*'s required Morality course should incorporate some elements of Social Justice.

Julia offered one suggestion regarding the *Framework*'s scope and sequence. She recommended that the sequence of courses commence with "something very heavy in general Christian principles….within the context of the Catholic Church by all means, but these sorts of foundational principles" (pp. 132-133). Beginning their secondary school Religious Studies courses in this manner would enable students to become grounded "in what it means to be a faith-filled person" (p. 133).

A broader approach to Ethics needed.

Therese spoke at length regarding her strong belief that students need an opportunity to enroll in an Ethics course—minimally, as an elective—that is broader in scope than the *Framework*'s required Morality course and its elective Social Justice course. Such an Ethics course—"more of a philosophical approach to Ethics" (p. 223)—

would include study of major ethical thinkers, such as Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas,

Kant, and Mill, and major schools of ethical thought, such as relativism and

utilitarianism. Therese maintained that, "We do a great disservice in just limiting

ourselves to Catholic morality…and not giving them [students] a fuller view (p. 223). In

the following quote, she offered a more specific critique of the *Framework*'s limitations

with regard to Ethics:

> It gives coverage to the 10 Commandments. It gives coverage to the Beatitudes.
> It gives coverage to the virtues. It gives coverage to natural law…. But what it
> doesn't give coverage to are some of the predominant models and actual day-to-
> day decision making that's out there in the world. And our kids are not going to
> be in school forever. (p. 236)

Therese continued her critique by commenting that her proposed Ethics course would

permit students "to own moral decision-making much better than just continuing to spoon

feed" (p. 238). In the following exchange, the researcher sought to clarify the nature of

this remark:

> Carrie: Would you characterize the *Framework*'s approach to Morality or
> Ethics as spoon feeding?
> Therese: I think so. I mean it's much more about Morality than it is about
> decision making. So I think it's more about, "here's the way that
> you make moral decisions within a Catholic framework." And I
> think we might be shortchanging our juniors by taking that
> approach. (p. 238)

Therese concluded by emphasizing that study of secular, philosophical Ethics

does not detract from, but, rather, supports and enhances, study of theological Ethics and

religious Morality. Therefore, she asserted that students who are exposed to a broader

range of ethical thought are better equipped to understand key principles of Catholic

morality, such as the concept of the common good, and are truly "empower[ed] to be

better articulators of a Catholic position" (p. 237).

A vocations course is unnecessary.

Grace, Marshall, and Therese all maintained that the *Framework*'s elective course

E, "Responding to the Call of Jesus Christ," is unnecessary. Grace asserted that a chapter

on each vocation could comprise part of a course at St. Ann Academy addressing some

larger topic area, but that an entire course only on vocations would bore her students.

Marshall stated that every Catholic secondary school has a responsibility to provide

students with opportunities to consider their vocations, but that such consideration need

not happen within the purview of a Religious Studies course.

Therese characterized the *Framework*'s vocations course as "lightweight" (p. 222)

and recommended that it be replaced with an "applied spirituality" (p. 222) course which

would invite students to deep personal reflection:

> …how you find your call, how that *vocare*, comes out of finding out who you are
> as a person of faith, who you are as a spiritual being, and since it's senior year, try
> and empower kids with some tools to continue their faith journey as college
> students or out in the world. (p. 222)

In the following rather pointed remark, Therese speculated regarding the bishops'

rationale in including a vocations course within the *Framework* and sought to challenge

that rationale:

> Why are we wasting time with this fluffy nonsense stuff? I don't think a
> vocations class is going to increase priestly vocations, so if that was the intent, I
> don't think that's doin' it. I think bringing people more of a way to integrate who
> they are as people with their faith would increase priestly vocations. (pp. 223-
> 224)

"Audacity"

In the course of offering his thoughts about what, if any, elements of the

Framework he would alter, if given the opportunity, Marshall revealed a skeptical,

cautious attitude regarding the desirability of people who are not bishops making these sorts of recommendations. In his first interview, he stated that

> A lot of times I think people have, I don't know if we want to call it the ego, or the audacity or whatever it is, to claim that, "I know more than the bishops".… as educators and as believers, we feel a very real, I don't know if you want to call it credibility, or a right, entitlement, to be able to say that we could do this better. (p. 176)

In his second interview, Marshall continued to pursue this line of thought by cautioning that any criticism of the *Framework* must be neither "careless" (p. 204) nor "kneejerk" (p. 205). Rather, it must thoughtfully consider the education and background of the bishops—whom Marshall characterized as "obviously great thinkers" (p. 203)—and presume that the *Framework* emanated from good intentions. Regarding the former, Marshall urged that people who are examining the *Framework* recall

> …the amount of thought or prayerfulness or historical background or teachings or trainings that these people have underwent [*sic*] and gone through that gives light, that sheds light on their decision-making.…we as the laity have a tendency to trivialize somebody's decision-making to whatever it is we want to believe that their motives were. (p. 202)

Regarding the latter, he stated that "I think that if you were to look deep into the intentions [of the bishops] and deep into these things, you will see love at their basis. You will see an attempt at goodness at their roots" (p. 203).

Additionally, in the second interview, the researcher sought to clarify Marshall's use of the term "audacity" (p. 176):

Carrie:	So if educators were to offer feedback to the bishops on the *Framework*, would you characterize that as audacious, to use your word?
Marshall:	No, no, no. My perspective, mine was more targeting some individuals who I've encountered, who have been like "Oh, this is dumb".…
Carrie:	This, meaning the *Framework*?

Marshall: Yes, they're talking about the *Framework*—oh, "they're just trying to shove more of their blah blah blah down our throats"….Very much argumentative, and it's a very just matter-of-fact statement being thrown out there in critique of the *Framework*, negating, I'm guessing, a lot of thoughtful consideration and preparation and theological background and training and prayerfulness, that probably went into the production of this. (p. 206)

Marshall concluded his musings on this topic by affirming the design of the present study:

This is what I'm talking about, like what's happening here. This is what I mean, as far as like looking into some of these things, finding out, is it [the *Framework*] working? Is it appropriate? Do you think that it was meant to do this, meant to do that…versus the one-liner "oh, this is crap." That's what I'm saying. There's a lot of people out there who aren't taking the time to look into it, and to do this kind of study versus just throw out claims of their own. (p. 206)

Speculation and Questions Regarding the Bishops' Rationale and Process

All six participants in this study speculated regarding the bishops' rationale in developing the *Framework* and/or the process by which that development occurred. Rosa theorized that the bishops were motivated by concern over the phenomenon of people leaving the Catholic Church and joining other Christian denominations: "I just think they're just seeing the church shrink and shrink and shrink, and they think this is gonna be the answer. If you understand everything about Jesus, you're gonna stay a Catholic" (p. 53). She also did not find the bishops' stated rationale for promulgating the *Framework*—as a response to a mobile society, in which families may frequently relocate—to be compelling: "That's silly…How many kids really travel from one part of the country to another?" (p. 4).

In pondering the question, "What were they [the bishops] looking for in a secondary theological education?" (p. 103), Grace expressed sincere curiosity regarding the bishops' logic in developing the *Framework*'s content:

> I can't comment on their thoughts or purpose for how they organized this core curriculum and electives. I would be very interested to understand their thought processes and how they came to organize it as such…'cause all six of these courses pretty, pretty much read the same….I don't know if they felt like Jesus was getting lost, I don't know. (p. 102)

Similarly, Marshall postulated that the bishops developed such a Christocentric *Framework* in an effort to address their perception "that Religion classes at Catholic schools were becoming more academic and less faithful, or faith-filled" (p. 158) and that such classes tended to "downplay" (p. 176) the person of Christ. Therese asserted that the bishops' rationale for promulgating the *Framework* may be most evident in the content of the "challenges" sections which conclude each course. In those sections, the bishops address, in Therese's view, "cracks in the modern U.S. Church" (p. 245) as well as "attacks on or misperceptions of who we are as Catholics" (p. 245), which may originate from other faith traditions or from secularism.

Lanie stated that she has sought information—in the introduction to the *Framework* and on the USCCB website—regarding the bishops' motives in developing the *Framework* and the research they conducted, if any, to inform their approach to this task. This search yielded few results, leaving Lanie with more questions than answers. One set of questions relates to the bishops' rationale for promulgating the *Framework*:

> I don't know where their mindset was. I don't know if it was coming out of fear that they're losing Catholics in the pews, and so there's less money coming in, and so "we've gotta do something," "let's tighten up the belt," or "let's go back to the Baltimore Catechism." (p. 60)

Another set of questions relates to whether or not the bishops consulted Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools or other professionals in the course of developing the *Framework*:

> I would like to give them the benefit of the doubt, that they actually spoke to people in religious education….I'm hoping that they did….I didn't see any

evidence of that. It wasn't even in their introduction—that, "this *Framework* developed out of conversations with…." There was none of that. (p. 78)

Lanie concluded her musings on this matter by remarking that, "There's just a lot of questions and no place to find answers, because no research was done" (p. 83).

Julia stated, with clarity and certainty, her belief that "the *Framework* grew out of the bishops' concern that the students are moving away from basic Catholicism and understanding and knowledge and practice" (p. 129). She further asserted that "I understand the philosophy of having this [the *Framework*]" (p. 129). However, despite this certain understanding, Julia raised numerous, profound questions regarding what social, psychological, cultural, and ecclesial factors the bishops considered in developing the *Framework*, and what factors they excluded from consideration. Her lengthy articulation of these questions testifies to her own deep engagement with both theological and pedagogical matters:

> Did the bishops, in the *Framework*, did they take time to consider psychologically where the students are and what they need? Did they consider the faith development, where students are, what works for them? Did they consider the context of the culture that students are living in today, where they are in their Catholic faith? And where they want to be in their Catholic faith, versus where the bishops think they should be in their Catholic faith? Did the bishops research any of [the] current educational faith formative psychological adolescent trends? Did the bishops consider, why are students leaving our Church? Did they bring in anything to help keep them connected, and want them to grow in our church? Also, did the bishops consider the means with which students are making decisions, making choices, outside of school, what they're choosing to do, and why, and how can the *Framework* bring them closer, again, to the ethical and moral principles that Jesus taught us and wants us to be aligned with? Is the *Framework* interesting to them? Is it relevant to them? And then, finally, did the bishops consider what are some of the most important foundational, absolute, solid, foundational principles that any student who goes through a Catholic school should leave with? And do we have the opportunity to focus on those, to teach those, and in the depth that we know that they're going to come through our institutions with those basic principles? Those are my worries. Where are those things in the *Framework*? And perhaps the bishops did all of that, and included those things in the *Framework*, but do we have the research to see the reasoning why the things that the bishops have chosen [for] us to teach, why we're teaching

it? What's the rationale? Where's the research? What really are the real goals that the bishops want? Are they articulated? Those are open ends that I feel like if we had answers to those questions, or if the bishops explained them better in the *Framework*, then perhaps as teachers, as we're working with the *Framework* and trying to figure out what are the most important things to teach, that we'd have a better ability to connect the dots. I mean it's….the *Framework* is there, it does move through a logical manner. It hits on major Catholic dogma and Biblical theological sound principles, but was it constructed in a manner that is going to create changes and growth in our students?…. Did they consider, from the students' perspective, what the students need, where they're going, what's important, and that these students are going to grow up and choose to either stay in the Church or leave the Church? (p. 152)

When invited by the researcher to propose answers to some or all of the questions she had raised in those protracted remarks, Julia responded in this way:

The reason they're rhetorical, the reason I posed them as questions and not as answers, is because I don't know the answers. And maybe I haven't studied enough of the *Framework*, or asked the right people. But when you're, as a teacher, when you read through the *Framework*, and when you receive a textbook that has the *Framework* in it, the underlying foundational questions are these that I ask. Because they are not evident to me in the *Framework*. That's why I asked them. I don't have answers to those questions, and I think we need answers to those questions. (pp. 152-153)

A Qualifier: "It's Only Been One Year"

Five participants were careful to qualify the data that they shared with the researcher by acknowledging their limited experience with the *Framework*: just one academic year of classroom teaching. Therese conceded that "We really only have the freshmen year to go from" (p. 240), while Lanie stated that "I don't want to judge it too harshly right now, because it's only been the one year" (p. 72). Grace hoped that "next year I'll do another, better job" (p. 98). Julia expressed similar sentiments in remarking that "implementing any new curriculum is always difficult the first couple of years" (p. 148). She also suggested that ongoing immersion in the task of teaching *Framework* courses would continue to shape, and even transform, her own perspective and that of her

colleagues. Regarding herself, she indicated that "My answers will be very different years from now" (p. 142). Regarding her colleagues, she offered the following reflection:

> I think it will evolve into the teachers at my school becoming more comfortable with the curriculum and being able to implement all the different aspects of the curriculum in a manner that becomes real for the students and applicable and important for their lives and formative. We just haven't had time to let that take hold. (p. 140)

Lastly, Marshall expressed uncertainty regarding whether or not the transition to the *Framework* constitutes a dramatic and/or beneficial shift: "Whether or not it's a game-changer, and whether or not it's more beneficial than what was previously happening, I'm not sure" (p. 162). He also contextualized his perspective by acknowledging both his own limited experience and the resultant hypothetical nature of at least some of his speculations:

> I'm speaking all without any sort of real experience in this. This is all just perceived, could-be's, and so I guess it's important to state that. Both the gains and the losses, I think, are both potentials. I haven't seen them yet. I think they're potentials… right now, the water's very muddy. (p. 180)

Marshall concluded by stating bluntly, "I'm not too certain of anything at this point" (p. 181).

Plans for the Second and Subsequent Years of Teaching Framework *Courses*

Both Therese and Julia articulated some of their plans for teaching their second and subsequent years of *Framework* courses. Therese shared one general approach and one more specific idea. Generally speaking, she stated her intent to integrate Scripture throughout all four years of the *Framework*, even in courses or sections of courses in which it is absent. Regarding a specific goal, she plans to supplement the second-semester, tenth-grade Ecclesiology course with an examination of the Church as the sacrament of Christ in the world. She described herself as "surprised" (p. 239) by the

omission of this topic, because she believes that it constitutes an essential foundation for the eleventh-grade Sacraments course.

Julia offered detailed reflections on her desire to assist her students in developing a deeper relationship with Christ, a goal that she believes is not automatically attained simply by teaching the *Framework*, despite its Christocentric nature. Therefore, Julia identified three strategies that she intended to utilize in order make progress toward achieving this goal. First, like Therese, she expressed a desire to integrate Scripture into her students' daily classroom experience, with a particular emphasis on providing a stronger Scriptural foundation than the *Framework* stipulates during the first-semester, ninth-grade course. In the following quote, she outlined her plans for infusing all of her *Framework* courses with Scripture:

> To keep the students strongly connected to the Bible, meaning reading it on a regular basis, allowing the students to talk about it, analyze it, apply it…. having them connected to the Bible itself, each day, I think that's one of my responsibilities….To make sure that I'm assessing for their understanding of the Bible….in the text that we use, there's many references to the Bible….Rather than just kind of breeze by them to support the text or the *Framework*, we really have to see it as the essence of, this is what's driving the *Framework*. So to make sure that they keep that Bible-rich experience and understand the stories and the people and the images and everything that's in the Bible. So assessing for that knowledge. Having it present there, with them, in the classroom experience constantly. Giving them an appreciation for the Gospels and the stories that that are in the Gospels, the stories that are brought to life, the teachings that Jesus did. Having them appreciate them for the lessons, the teachings, the symbols. Everything that's in them, Jesus gave us to be using to enrich our lives. So to bring an appreciation to that is another way to keep that Christ-centeredness in there. (pp. 149-150)

Secondly, Julia stated her intent to assist her students in connecting the content of their Religious Studies courses with their retreats, service projects, and other programs sponsored by St. Catherine's Campus Ministry department, in order that students "can understand the reason that we do these faith experiences is because those are taught to us

by Jesus in the Gospels, as one of the most important aspects of living our faith and understanding why Jesus came" (p. 150). Lastly, Julia articulated her plans to create a Christ-centered classroom environment, including not only tangible elements such as pictures and quotes, but also an atmosphere that encourages conversation about the Gospel values embedded in Jesus's teachings and the impact those values should have on believers' daily lives. Regarding all three of these strategies, Julia expressed concern about the time required to execute them effectively while still teaching the *Framework*'s content.

Julia also briefly discussed her department's plans with regard to the *Framework*'s elective courses, even though those courses would not be implemented until more than two years following her participation in this study. She stated that she and her colleagues were "looking forward to teaching the Bible elective" (p. 133), that is, the *Framework*'s elective course A, "Sacred Scripture." She also indicated that they intended to examine closely the *Framework*'s elective course E, "Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues," in order "to make sure that they [religions other than Catholicism] are respectful and pure enough in their own rights, and not taught from a less-than perspective" (p. 133).

University of California Requirements

Three of this study's five participants who teach in Catholic secondary schools in the state of California commented on the *Framework*'s potentially negative impact on their students' ability to fulfill admissions requirements for the University of California (UC). Lanie explained that St. John's current World Religions course, a non-*Framework*

senior elective, is UC-certified as a college-preparatory elective.[21] Because maintaining

the "distinction" (p. 67) of UC-certification is important, St. John's will retain this course

rather than replace it with the *Framework*'s course on "Ecumenical and Interreligious

Issues." Similarly, the current, non-*Framework*, senior Religious Studies courses at

Ascension High School—Peace and Justice and World Religions—are UC-certified as

college-preparatory electives. In Rosa's view, this certification assists students not only

in completing the requirements for UC admission but also in remaining focused during

their senior year Religious Studies courses, rather than "just totally blow it off" (p. 19).

Moreover, it communicates a clear message to parents regarding the academic, college-

preparatory value of Religious Studies courses. Therefore, at the time of her participation

in this study, Rosa and her colleagues were petitioning their bishop to retain these UC-

certified electives even though they are not, strictly speaking, *Framework* courses. Rosa

was convinced that if the bishop directed them to replace, in particular, their World

Religions course with the *Framework*'s "Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues" course,

the latter would not attain UC-certification: "the *Framework* version is biased, and so it

can't be UC-accredited" (p. 19).

Lastly, in the following quote, Julia gave voice to her frustration regarding the

schoolwide implications of shifting from a Religious Studies curriculum in which at least

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[21] The University of California's admissions materials state that all secondary school courses seeking to attain UC-certification as college-preparatory electives must "be academically challenging, involving substantial reading, writing, problems and laboratory work (as appropriate), and show serious attention to analytical thinking, factual content and developing students' oral and listening skills" (Regents of the University of California, 2013, ¶ 1).

some courses were UC-certified to a curriculum in which many, if not all, courses are

ineligible for this certification:

> We're losing our UC-approved Bible—the Old Testament and New Testament courses that are currently UC approved. So, the way they're taught with the *Framework*, we're not sure we're going to get UC-approval.   So that takes out credits for students, which makes it very difficult for the students to make up those credits that they need to get UC, to get accepted into UC. That's really frustrating, and it's really having a major impact on our master schedule of our school. So we're having those conversations currently. (p. 134)

Catechesis and Evangelization

Both Therese and Marshall offered a perspective on the question of whether

Religious Studies courses in U.S. Catholic secondary schools should be primarily

directed toward catechesis or toward evangelization and the extent to which the

Framework may assist schools in attaining one or both of these goals. Therese

emphasized the *Framework*'s capacity to lead students to intimate knowledge of the

person of Christ, characterizing it as "the evangelization opportunity of the century" (p.

253).   Similarly, Marshall praised the *Framework*'s orientation toward "education for the

purpose of faith…for the purpose of belief" (p. 178). However, although he

acknowledged the *Framework*'s potential to evangelize students who are not Christian or

who are Christian only nominally, he highlighted the key role the *Framework* can play in

what he believes to be the primary purpose of Religious Studies courses; namely,

catechesis:

> The *Framework*….it's catechesis. I mean the whole point of these courses is catechesis…. I think as far as being a Catholic secondary institution, its main primary role should be the catechesis of the faithful who show up and who pay tuition to have their child go to a Catholic school…. I think one of the first responsibilities of these schools that do have Catholic in their name is that they are catechizing. They are teaching their faithful that are there about their faith. Versus watering it down so as to not offend those who chose to come here fully knowing that it was a Catholic school, not wanting to seem insensitive…. we have a responsibility I think to first not just go and try to not offend the students who

aren't believers, but to, again, catechize and to teach and to help grow those students who are, because, again, those are the ones who are gonna grow up and their actions are then going to evangelize. They're going to spread the Gospel, they're gonna spread the word, based upon how they act. Versus trying to create a whole bunch of lukewarmers who don't know what they're doing. (pp. 191-192)

Marginalization of the Religious Studies Department

Both Rosa and Julia commented on the trend of the Religious Studies Department being marginalized within the school community. Rosa explained that at Ascension High School, this phenomenon is manifested when various campus departments encroach upon Religious Studies, pressuring teachers to surrender class time:

Religion is already "oh, counselors need to come in, can we come into Religion? Oh, so and so needs to come in, can we come into Religion? Oh, we need this done, can Religion do it?" It's like Religion isn't important, or because everyone has to take Religion, you have a captive audience. And if you don't do it, you're not a team player, and you're the B word, so anything that needs to be done, we'll do it in Religion. (p. 12)

Specific examples of Ascension programs that are conducted during Religious Studies class time include the safe environment training to prevent sexual abuse, counseling appointments, and meetings and discussions related to the college application process. Rosa expressed concern that her colleagues in other campus departments think that "we don't teach anything" (p. 50).

Similarly, Julia drew attention to the persistence and pervasiveness of the misconception that the Religious Studies department lacks academic rigor: "I think it's a common thread in Catholic education to view the Religious Studies department as something other than an academic place" (p. 148). However, she stated that the situation at St. Catherine of Siena High School is far from dire: "I think we have some respect at our school….It's not quite the divide that some schools have" (p. 148).

"We're Stuck With It," So "How Do We Make it Sing?"

In her first interview, Therese stated that, regarding the *Framework*, "We're stuck with it" (p. 228). In the second interview, the researcher sought additional information regarding this statement; in particular, she inquired whether Therese intended to express a sense of resignation regarding the *Framework*. Therese responded that she intended to express not resignation vis-à-vis the *Framework*, but, rather, exasperation vis-à-vis teachers who resist changes in curriculum, particularly changes mandated by a higher authority: in this case, the U.S. bishops. Indeed, she postulated that some of the resistance to the *Framework* may lie in a reflexive rejection of anything originating from the ecclesial hierarchy: "'The guys in the little red hats did this, so I'm gonna hate it right off the bat, just because. There's some of that attitude, I feel" (p. 254). Therese, maintaining that she "never feel[s] horribly constrained by somebody saying, 'OK, here's the standard'" (p. 252), further articulated her perspective in the following quote:

> For me it's not resignation, it's like part of my job as a teacher because things change, standards change, what I'm supposed to teach changes. Part of my job as a teacher is to make that change….So I find that some of the resistance to change is also like not being able to teach your favorite things or what you've like[d] to teach. And I get that, but for me it's not so much resignation as—this is what we're supposed to do, let's just do it! Stop wasting time complaining about having to do it. Let's figure out how to do it, and how to do it so that kids learn well, so kids have a good experience doing this, so that you have a good experience teaching this. 'Cause we can spend the next five years of our lives complaining about this and finding holes in it, or we can just say, well, this is how we're gonna do it. So it's not resignation as much as sort of exasperation with what happens whenever change is imposed. (p. 252)

Therese offered two final remarks on this topic. First, she clarified that she would be less inclined to embrace the *Framework* "if there were something horribly objectionable in the theology of the *Framework* that I have a really visceral response to, like, oh, I can't stand this, there's no way I can teach this" (p. 252). However, she has

not found this to be the case: "There really isn't anything that I'm horribly upset about" (p. 252). Secondly, Therese urged that regardless of their attitude toward or perception of the *Framework*, teachers willingly and enthusiastically accept the challenge that the document presents: "How do we put flesh on it, and how do we make it sing?" (p. 254).

Reflections on the Experience of Having Participated in This Study

Grace, Lanie, Julia, and Marshall, without prompting from the researcher, all offered spontaneous reflections on their experience of having participated in the present study. Grace indicated that her efforts to respond to "very probing questions" (p. 119) caused her to ponder issues and topics related to the *Framework* that she had never before considered. Lanie, in reviewing the transcript of her first interview, came to realize how frequently she had expressed frustration and the sense of having been both personally and professionally disrespected by the U.S. bishops as a whole and by her own bishop in particular. In her second interview, she reflected on the clarity she gained through participating in this research process and the positive impact that she anticipates this clarity will have on her continued teaching of *Framework* courses:

> I'm glad we got another chance to follow up, especially the one about my own frustration or feeling disrespected, which I wasn't as aware of until I re-read the transcript. And then even now, talking about it, it becomes clearer to me exactly what it is that is kind of rubbing me the wrong way. So, that's a good thing that came out of this….It's an objective thing, the *Framework*, and working with my department on it, and just kind of focusing about it out here, and not really looking at, well, how's this gonna affect me and my vocation, my life? It wasn't really about me, but in the process of talking about this, all of a sudden, it's, oh, I do see how this is affecting me, and how it may be changing the way in which I teach, or my focus, and how do I really feel about that? And that's a good thing to know before going in to teach it. To have come to some kind of a resolve, so that I, standing before the students, that I am certain in what it is that I'm doing— like there's not ambiguity in me. (p. 87)

Julia shared two thoughts regarding her participation in this study. First, as the second interview commenced, she reflected on her experience of the first interview; in

particular, the feelings that interview incited in her—feelings that endured long after the

interview concluded:

> Julia: I wanted to mention that when the interview was over, the overall feeling I was left with was how negative I portrayed my experience….I just thought, you know, I didn't like that feeling. I didn't have a lot positive to say about it [the *Framework*], and that hung on me for probably the following week….I just didn't like that it seemed to be such a negative experience.
> Carrie: Did you feel like it wasn't accurate?
> Julia: No, I felt like it was accurate. I just didn't like that it being accurate was that it was a negative…I didn't have more positive to say about it, and that kind of bothered me. I wish it was different, but it is what it is. (pp. 141-142)

Secondly, as she shared her hypotheses regarding the reasons that the *Framework*'s

presentation of the Old Testament—interwoven with the New Testament rather than on

its own terms—is difficult for adolescents to comprehend, she expressed a desire to

continue to develop these hypotheses, perhaps eventually writing an article or paper on

the topic.

Similarly, Marshall noted that his musings on the relative importance of

catechesis and evangelization in U.S. Catholic secondary schools could be developed into

a paper, or perhaps even a Master's thesis. Marshall also stated that his involvement in

this study enabled him to understand the *Framework* more deeply and to clarify his own

views regarding it:

> For my own self this really helps me kind of think about things and to piece it together. Obviously talking about something helps you make sense of it, and so I guess I had never really thought this much about the *Framework*…. I just kind of formulated my own thoughts or opinions or feelings towards it, without any, I think, maybe real depth….I'm just happy to be a part of everything, and it's definitely helped me think of the curriculum and the *Framework* in a whole new light. Both in a way where I feel like I, again, can see places where I wish they would have done something differently, but I can also see the wisdom in what they did. (pp. 206-207)

Brief Additional Ancillary Findings

Two participants offered brief remarks regarding two additional, ancillary themes which pertain to the broad reality of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. Both Rosa and Therese commented on the lack of official standards or qualifications for teaching Religious Studies in a U.S. Catholic secondary school: neither a teaching credential, nor an undergraduate or graduate degree in the field, nor any background in Education is officially required. Additionally, Rosa explained the way in which she must often articulate to her students the nuances of her role as a Religious Studies teacher vis-à-vis the institutional Church:

> For me to stand up in front of you…we go into how when you speak about the Church, you can say privately, "I may disagree" or "I may not like," but you can't publicly stand up. Like I could not stand up in front of here and say "I think women should be priests, and I think the Church is wrong." You can't do that. You represent the Church. You represent the Church. And if you are going to misrepresent the Church—you can't do that. (p. 39)

On this same topic, Rosa further remarked that:

> If the principal comes in here and says "Mrs. X, you need to teach this," I may not like teaching it to you, but I will teach it. Because I stand for Ascension, I stand for my job, that's what I signed up for. And there are certain things we do and we accept and that's just the way it is. (p. 39)

Summary of Ancillary Findings

The participants in the present study generated a vast quantity of data, some of which were not directly relevant to this study's research questions but nonetheless deserved attention. In particular, they shared a variety of information regarding the ways in which the *Framework* has been implemented in their respective dioceses; they articulated specific suggestions to teachers, administrators, and the U.S. bishops; and they posed key questions to the bishops, particularly regarding their rationale for producing

the *Framework* and the process by which they completed this task. Acknowledging their limited experience with the *Framework*, they identified specific plans for improvement in their second and subsequent years of teaching *Framework* courses. They also contemplated other issues, some of which directly related to the *Framework*, such as the appropriate manner in which to offer feedback to the bishops on the *Framework,* and the implications in California of adopting a Religious Studies curriculum in which most, if not all, courses, are ineligible for certification by the University of California as college-preparatory electives. Other, broader, issues included the question of whether catechesis or evangelization should drive Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools and the marginalization of the Religious Studies department within the school community. Lastly, participants engaged in spontaneous reflection regarding their participation in this study, identifying the ways in which this experience deeply affected them, benefitted them, and/or prompted them to consider issues and questions that they had not previously pondered. These ancillary findings highlight the extent to which discrete research questions regarding a particular topic, such as the *Framework*, are inevitably embedded in a whole host of related topics and questions, as well as in the larger, complex context of participants' personal and professional lives.

<div align="center">Summary of Findings</div>

The six participants in the present study articulated their experiences, thoughts, questions, emotions, struggles, and hopes regarding the *Framework* in remarkably thorough detail. Their reflections were characterized by depth of feeling, clarity of thought, humility of spirit, and, above all, a profound dedication to and concern for their students. The moments of humor, pathos, and spiritual insight that occasionally

punctuated participants' thoughts testify to their willingness to engage the researcher's questions on many levels, both personal and professional. As a result, this study generated a large volume of rich, descriptive data that addressed the research questions.

Regarding their experience of teaching courses based on the USCCB *Framework,* participants articulated a wide variety of impacts—both positive and negative—that they believe the *Framework* has had on their schools, on themselves as teachers, and on their students. Their reflections highlighted the myriad, diverse ways in which adopting a new Religious Studies curriculum affects many constituencies within a school community. Participants discussed the many challenges that the *Framework* has presented to them as professionals, including teaching a large amount of content within a limited timeframe, managing repetitive content, and handling *Framework*-based course materials that do not take account of the diversity of students who occupy the classrooms of U.S Catholic secondary schools. They also shared the strategies that they have developed as they attempt to navigate those challenges successfully and provide a theologically and pedagogically rich classroom experience for all of their students. They offered insights and reflections on key aspects of the *Framework*'s structure and design, most notably on its apologetic approach. Lastly, participants offered their own philosophical analysis of the *Framework*, as they theorized about the implicit understandings that may undergird this document: understandings of the mission and identity of U.S. Catholic secondary schools, of the role of the Religious Studies teacher in such schools, and of the nature of the field of Religious Studies.

Regarding the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content they teach, participants' thorough reflections clarified the extent to which the *Framework* has

substantially and directly altered this content. Implementing the *Framework* has meant the loss of an introduction to Catholicism for ninth graders; the loss or curtailment of sexuality education; an altered approach to Scripture, most especially the Old Testament; and a presentation of other religions that some participants found to be problematic. These shifts in curricular content have placed new demands on teachers, as they attempt to navigate a curriculum that is more Christocentric; that contains much more advanced, detailed theological and doctrinal content; and that is infused with an apologetic perspective that emphasizes the Church's positive aspects and de-emphasizes its negative aspects. In order to meet these new demands while still maintaining their own integrity as Religious Studies teachers attempting to create a positive experience for all of their students, participants indicated that they routinely supplement the *Framework*'s theological content, most notably its material on Scripture. Moreover, all six participants voiced strong objections to the *Framework*'s assignment of elective status to one or more courses that they believe to constitute essential theological content for students in U.S. Catholic secondary schools: these courses include Scripture, Social Justice, World Religions and/or Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues, and Church History. Lastly, participants identified theological topics that receive less emphasis in the *Framework* than in their schools' pre-*Framework* curricula, particularly liturgy and sacraments, and, conversely, theological topics that receive greater emphasis in the *Framework*. The latter largely consisted of various fields of systematic Theology, including Trinitarian Theology, Christology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology. Clearly, in radically altering the theological content of which Religious Studies courses are comprised, the *Framework*'s

implementation has had a direct and profound impact on the daily lives of both Religious

Studies teachers and students in schools that have adopted it.

Regarding the *Framework*'s impact on the pedagogical methods they employ,

participants in this study offered both practical and philosophical reflections, all of which

suggest that a shift in curricular content may, in turn, induce a concomitant shift in

pedagogy. Practically, participants described the way in which the *Framework* has

prompted them to utilize more teacher-centered methodologies and more traditional

assessment strategies and has caused them to abandon particular activities, learning

experiences, and projects that they had utilized effectively in their pre-*Framework*

curricula. They articulated their struggles to teach *Framework* courses in a manner that

meets the needs of students with diverse learning styles, that balances the cognitive and

affective realms, that incorporates small-group discussions and personal sharing amongst

students, and that fosters higher-order thinking. Some participants also strained to work

within the *Framework*'s parameters while still providing prayer experiences for their

students and making connections with the real, everyday world. In detailing the creative,

engaging pedagogical methods that they have effectively employed in *Framework*

courses, including strategies to assist them in managing the *Framework*'s large volume of

material and the repetitive nature of that material, participants implicitly clarified their

willingness to attempt meet these many and varied pedagogical challenges with grace and

aplomb. Philosophically, participants theorized about the presence of an implicit

pedagogy embedded in the *Framework*'s content and structure and about the pedagogical

implications of the *Framework*'s approach to the Old Testament. Lastly, all but one

participant freely acknowledged their limited experience with the *Framework,* expressing

hope that their pedagogical ability vis-à-vis *Framework* courses would improve in future years.

The findings of this study were not only voluminous in quantity, but also, and, more importantly, deep, rich, multi-faceted, and thought-provoking. They illuminate the complex, diverse ways in which implementing the *Framework* has dramatically altered Religious Studies teachers' experience in the classroom, the theological content they teach, and the pedagogical methods they employ.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

On November 14, 2007, the 221 Catholic bishops of the United States

unanimously approved a document entitled *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum*

Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High

School Age (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCCB, 2008; hereafter,

Framework). According to Ostasiewski (2010), the promulgation of the *Framework*

constituted a watershed event: the first time that the bishops sought to establish a

uniform Religious Studies curriculum for all U.S. Catholic secondary schools. However,

because the *Code of Canon Law* (1983) protects each bishop's relative autonomy in the

diocese that he governs, the unanimous approval of the *Framework* did not bind any

individual bishop to implement it within any particular timeframe or even to implement it

at all. Therefore, the national situation with regard to the *Framework* can perhaps best be

described, in the words of Filteau (2010), as "uneven" (p. 1a), as some bishops have

moved forward with full implementation, others have established a timeline for future

implementation, and still others have not yet acted at all with regard to this matter.

The years since the *Framework*'s promulgation have been characterized by, on

the one hand, the release of a large quantity of textbooks aligned with the *Framework*'s

content, and, on the other hand, a relative dearth of material analyzing, critiquing, or

reacting to the document. Regarding the former, the USCCB's 2011 release of the

Secondary Level (SL) Protocol for Assessing the Conformity of Catechetical Materials

with the Catechism of the Catholic Church (USCCB, 2011b), clarified that the bishops

would only review for possible approval Religious Studies textbooks written for

Framework courses. Therefore, publishers, seeking to remain competitive in a crowded

marketplace, have focused their efforts on producing material eligible for episcopal

review; that is, *Framework*-based textbooks. Regarding the latter, only one dissertation,

several newspaper and journal articles, and one conference presentation have critically

assessed the *Framework*; moreover, none of these constituted empirical research.

The lack of empirical research regarding the *Framework*, and the fact that U.S.

Catholic secondary schools are currently in the midst of a transitional period with regard

to implementing this document, constitute the broad context in which the present study

was conducted. The researcher sought to capitalize on both of these realities. She

collected data which allowed her to produce the first empirical study examining the

Framework; specifically, exploring the perspectives of Religious Studies teachers who

have taught both before and after its implementation. The timing of this study during this

transitional period presented the opportunity to document these teachers' experiences,

reflections, insights, and perceptions at a unique and crucial juncture, before their

memory of their pre-*Framework* teaching considerably diminishes.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of six Religious Studies

teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools regarding their experience of teaching

courses based on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB, 2008)

Curriculum Framework. Specifically, the study investigated these teachers' experiences

of the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content they teach and on their pedagogy.

This study investigated the following research questions:

1.   How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe

their experience of teaching courses based on the *Framework*?

2.   How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe

the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content they teach?

3.   How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe

the *Framework*'s impact on the pedagogical methods they employ?

This qualitative study utilized Kvale's (1996) and Brinkman and Kvale's (2009)

approaches to research interviews in order to conduct semi-structured interviews with six

participants. In addition, the researcher incorporated elements of Participatory Action

Research (PAR) into the research design, in order to engage the participants in a

collaborative process of generating knowledge and considering potential avenues of

action rooted in that knowledge.

Each participant engaged in two face-to-face interviews with the researcher, the

first of which lasted approximately 70 minutes to 105 minutes and the second of which

lasted approximately 50 minutes to 105 minutes. Each interview was digitally recorded

and subsequently transcribed by the researcher. She emailed the participants the written

transcript following each interview, inviting their corrections, comments, and/or

clarifications.

The questions for the first interview were standardized for all participants. In

contrast, the questions for the second interview were uniquely crafted for each

participant, flowing from the researcher's close examination of the transcript of the first

interview. Both interviews were characterized by a conversational style, in which

participants freely raised their own concerns and questions, pursued tangential thoughts, and gave voice to their emotions, fears, and hopes.

Following the completion of the data collection, the researcher engaged in a rigorous coding procedure in order to identify themes and subthemes that addressed each of the research questions driving this study, as well as ancillary findings. In keeping with the principles of PAR, in which research is characterized by a collaborative approach and directed toward meaningful action and social change (Creswell, 2008; Maguire, 1987; Park, 1993), the researcher shared the resultant list of themes and subthemes—that is, the study's preliminary findings—with the participants via email, seeking their comments, reactions, questions, and ideas for an action plan rooted in the study's findings. Some, but not all, participants responded to this invitation with concrete ideas for potential avenues of action.

This study utilized as a theoretical rationale the approach to religious education developed by Schipani (1988, 1995): a model rooted in the theological emphases and pedagogical priorities of liberation theology. Schipani's work was particularly suited to the present study because it integrated both theology and pedagogy. Additionally, both Schipani's theory and PAR are grounded in the theory and praxis of Paolo Freire (1970, 1974), particularly his educational work among the rural poor in Brazil and Chile.

The present study generated a vast quantity of data, which, in turn, yielded numerous themes and subthemes pertinent to the research questions, as well as substantial ancillary findings. Regarding their experience of teaching courses based on the USCCB *Framework,* participants articulated a wide variety of impacts—both positive and negative—that they believe the *Framework* has had on their schools, on themselves

as teachers, and on their students. Participants discussed the many challenges that the

Framework has presented to them as professionals, including teaching a large amount of

content within a limited timeframe, managing repetitive content, and handling

Framework-based course materials that do not take account of the diversity of students

who populate the classrooms of U.S Catholic secondary schools. They shared the

strategies that they have developed as they attempt to navigate those challenges

successfully; offered insights and reflections on key aspects of the *Framework*'s structure

and design, most notably on its apologetic approach; and proposed theories about the

implicit philosophical understandings that may undergird this document.

Regarding the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content they teach,

participants' thorough reflections clarified the extent to which the *Framework* has

substantially and directly altered this content. Implementing the *Framework* has meant

the loss of an introduction to Catholicism for ninth graders; the loss or curtailment of

sexuality education; a deficiency in sacramental and liturgical education at the ninth

grade level; an altered approach to Scripture, most especially the Old Testament, as well

as diminished time in which to study Scripture; and a presentation of other religions that

some participants characterized as problematic. These shifts in curricular content have

placed new demands on teachers, as they attempt to navigate a Christocentric, apologetic

curriculum that emphasizes advanced, detailed theological and doctrinal content,

including Trinitarian Theology, Christology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology. Participants

indicated that they routinely supplement the *Framework*'s theological content, most

notably its material on Scripture. Additionally, all six participants voiced strong

objections to the *Framework*'s assignment of elective status to one or more courses that

they believe constitute essential theological content for students in U.S. Catholic secondary schools: these courses include Scripture, Social Justice, World Religions and/or Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues, and Church History.

Regarding the *Framework'*s impact on the pedagogical methods they employ, participants in this study offered both practical and philosophical reflections. Practically, participants described the way in which the *Framework* has prompted them to utilize more teacher-centered methodologies and more traditional assessment strategies and has caused them to adjust or curtail their use of certain pre-*Framework* activities, learning experiences, and projects. Participants encountered a variety of pedagogical challenges in teaching *Framework* courses, including meeting the needs of students with diverse learning styles, balancing the cognitive and affective realms, incorporating small-group discussions and personal sharing amongst students, fostering higher-order thinking, providing prayer experiences, and making connections with the real, everyday world. Yet, participants also detailed creative, engaging pedagogical methods that they have effectively employed in *Framework* courses, including strategies to manage the *Framework'*s large volume of material and the repetitive nature of that material. Philosophically, participants theorized about an implicit pedagogy embedded in the *Framework'*s content and structure and about the pedagogical implications of the document's approach to the Old Testament. Lastly, all but one participant freely acknowledged their limited experience with the *Framework,* expressing hope that their teaching of *Framework* courses would improve in the future.

The ancillary findings yielded by this study included data that addressed the ways in which the *Framework* has been implemented in the dioceses in which participants

teach; concrete suggestions for teachers, administrators, and the U.S. bishops; questions for the bishops; and specific plans for improvement in the second and subsequent years of teaching *Framework* courses. Participants also shared their perspectives regarding the appropriate manner in which to offer feedback to the bishops on the *Framework* and regarding the question of whether catechesis or evangelization should drive Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. Lastly, participants reflected on their involvement in this study, speaking of the ways in which this experience provoked thought, prompted reflection, and/or offered benefits to an extent that they had not anticipated.

<div align="center">Conclusions and Implications</div>

The present study has given rise to five major conclusions. First, the researcher has concluded that the bishops' promulgation of the *Framework* reveals a lack of awareness, on the part of the bishops, of various aspects of the present reality of U.S. Catholic secondary schools. Secondly, the findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the *Framework* directly and dramatically alters the theological content that students in U.S. Catholic secondary schools learn. Moreover, thirdly, the many pedagogical challenges presented by this alteration in content manifest the potential to diminish students' interest in Religious Studies, particularly if a teacher possesses limited abilities to meet these challenges. Fourth, the fact that all participants in this study are, at least to some extent, taking liberties with the *Framework*—for example, by omitting some aspects of its content and/or offering supplemental content—suggests the U.S. bishops' limited ability to control completely the Religious Studies curriculum of U.S. Catholic secondary schools. Lastly, in bringing the findings of this study into dialogue

with its theoretical rationale, the researcher has concluded that teaching *Framework* courses may present obstacles to teaching in a manner consistent with Schipani's (1988, 1995) model of religious education. The researcher will discuss each of these major conclusions, along with its accompanying implications, in turn.

The findings of this study indicate that the bishops' promulgation of the *Framework* manifests their lack of awareness of various aspects of the present reality of U.S. Catholic secondary schools. First, the bishops appear unaware of the abilities, limitations, and needs of secondary school students. The complex, and, according to some participants, obscure, theological material that the *Framework* contains lies beyond the cognitive reach of many secondary school students, particularly ninth graders, many of whom lack extensive prior background in Religious Studies. In addition to this intellectual disconnection, participants also maintained that the *Framework*'s content and structure fail to take account of students' needs to grow in faith and to develop their spirituality in an age-appropriate manner.

Secondly, in crafting a Christocentric *Framework* that focuses on Catholic systematic theology, the bishops appear unaware of the substantial number of students enrolled in U.S. Catholic secondary schools who are not Catholic; that is, 19% during the 2011-2012 academic year, according to McDonald and Schultz (2012).[22] Participants identified many challenges inherent in teaching the *Framework*'s content in religiously diverse classrooms. Third, in producing a lengthy document that encompasses a large volume of material, the bishops seem to lack understanding of the constraints of a secondary school curriculum and schedule, in which students are enrolled in multiple,

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[22] Percentages of non-Catholic students at some schools, including some of the schools at which the participants in this study teach, are considerably higher.

often demanding, courses and in which a particular course may not meet every day. Many participants experienced frustration and stress as they attempted to navigate successfully the vast quantity of material in the *Framework*. Finally, the bishops appear to have been unacquainted with several key topics that, for many participants, had been hallmarks of their respective schools' pre-*Framework* ninth grade Religious Studies curricula. These topics include basic introductory principles of Catholicism, the charism of the school and/or the school's sponsoring religious community, sexuality, and liturgy and sacraments. In omitting all of these subject areas from the *Framework* (with the exception of liturgy and sacraments, which they assigned to the junior year), the bishops manifested an unfamiliarity with the scope and sequence of Religious Studies courses prior to the *Framework*'s implementation and also, presumably, with the rationale undergirding this scope and sequence.

This conclusion implies that the bishops appear to lack background and information regarding secondary education, adolescent development, the present population of U.S. Catholic secondary schools, and the nature and focus of Religious Studies in those schools. A variety of professionals and practitioners—for example, teachers, administrators, researchers, and theologians—could have addressed these lacunae in the bishops' background; therefore, the reasons why the bishops appear not to have established a process for seeking out such expertise remain unclear. This conclusion also implies that the bishops may lack a formal, structured way in which to communicate with the faculty and administration of U.S. Catholic secondary schools, and that such teachers and administrators may lack a venue in which they may communicate with the bishops.

The findings of this study have led the researcher to conclude that the implementation of the *Framework* directly and dramatically alters the theological content that students in U.S. Catholic secondary schools learn in their Religious Studies courses. This shift in theological content may be observed in three primary areas. First, in comparison to schools' pre-*Framework* curricula, the *Framework* presents a truncated study of Scripture and a radically different approach to the Old Testament. Regarding the former, all six schools at which the participants in this study teach required a year-long Scripture course prior to the *Framework*'s implementation, whereas the *Framework* relegates all but the most basic Scriptural content to an elective course in which students study the entire Bible in one semester. Moreover, the *Framework* de-emphasizes exegesis, a stance with which some participants struggled. Regarding the latter, participants indicated that in their schools' pre-*Framework* curricula, they tended to teach the Old Testament on its own terms. In contrast, the *Framework* presents the Old Testament in continual juxtaposition with the New Testament and with numerous references to Jesus. Secondly, Christocentrism permeates the *Framework* to an extent that was not present in schools' former curricula. Participants expressed a variety of views pertaining to this situation, identifying both the benefits and the drawbacks of a Christocentric curriculum. Lastly, some of the courses designated as electives in the *Framework* were required in schools' pre-*Framework* curricula; these include Scripture, Social Justice, World Religions and/or Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues, and Church History. Shifting a course from required to elective status has the very practical, straightforward effect of reducing the number of students who will enroll in that course and learn the theological content it offers.

This conclusion implies the presence of a discrepancy between the manner in which the bishops think that students should manifest theological literacy and the manner in which U.S. Catholic secondary schools attempted to cultivate theological literacy amongst their students prior to the *Framework*'s implementation. The question of what constitutes theological and/or religious literacy lies at the heart of the *Framework*, for it was concern over perceived religious illiteracy that motivated the Synod of Bishops, in 1985, to call for the development of a new Catechism of the Catholic Church (Levada, 1990). This call put in motion a series of events that would lead, more than two decades later, to the promulgation of the *Framework*. The findings of this study imply that the U.S. bishops and U.S. Catholic secondary schools define religious literacy differently; that is, that the bishops value certain areas of theological content and religious knowledge, whereas schools and teachers value others. Additionally, given that schools generally attempt to align the curricular content of all academic departments, including Religious Studies, with the institution's overall desired learning outcomes for students, the presence of this discrepancy raises the specter of episcopal involvement in shaping, determining, and/or altering these learning outcomes. In other words, if the bishops are seeking, via the *Framework*, to determine the theological content that students learn in their Religious Studies courses, schools may justifiably wonder whether the bishops will also seek to exert influence over their schoolwide learning outcomes. Alternatively, a situation in which the *Framework*'s content does not support or contribute to a particular institution's schoolwide learning outcomes may further marginalize the Religious Studies department and/or create the perception that Religious Studies courses are academically unsound, unimportant, or expendable.

The findings of this study reflect the *Framework*'s potential to diminish students' interest in Religious Studies, particularly if a teacher possesses limited abilities to meet the many pedagogical challenges presented by the *Framework*'s content. These pedagogical challenges include managing the *Framework*'s repetitive material, engaging students both cognitively and affectively, creating time for personal sharing and in-depth discussions, relating the *Framework*'s content to students' everyday lives, cultivating students' intellectual curiosity despite the *Framework*'s cut-and-dried style, nuancing the confrontational language of the *Framework* and of *Framework*-based textbooks, allocating time to pursue tangential topics that students find to be important or meaningful, and utilizing student-centered rather than teacher-centered methodologies. In articulating their efforts to meet these challenges effectively, participants manifested a profound concern for their students. They do not want their students to become bored by repetitive content, offended or upset by language that seems directed only to Catholic students or that implies Catholicism's superiority vis-à-vis other religions, disappointed by the lack of time available for small-group discussions, or disengaged during long periods of lecture and note-taking. They want, instead, in the words of Grace, for students "to leave knowing everything and loving it, about Theology" (*Interview Transcript*, 2013, p. 109).

This conclusion implies that the *Framework*'s content, structure, and overall approach place substantial responsibility on the Religious Studies teacher to teach in a manner that effectively engages students and cultivates their interest in Religious Studies. Experienced, well-equipped, and skilled teachers can navigate the pedagogical challenges that the *Framework* presents by supplementing the *Framework*'s content, explaining

sensitive topics to students in a nuanced manner, and making strategic decisions about what material can be safely omitted in order to create time in which to examine other valuable topic areas. Teachers with less experience, or who lack formal background in Education and/or in Religious Studies, may be far less equipped to meet these challenges and to foster meaningful student engagement in the field of Religious Studies. The data produced by *The Next Generation* study (Cook, 2000, 2001), the only relatively recent, large-scale, generalizable, empirical study of Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools, indicate that a majority of those teachers may be ill-prepared for the enormity of the pedagogical task that the *Framework* presents. Regarding experience, at the time that study was conducted, 41.5% of Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools had taught for five years or less, and only 25.3% had taught for 16 years or more. Regarding academic background in Education and in Religious Studies, only 46.7% of these teachers held state certification or credentials in any subject area, and 57.1% held either an undergraduate or graduate degree in Religious Studies, Theology, or Religious Education. These data, although generated more than a decade ago, suggest that many Religious Studies teachers may lack some key elements, in their background and preparation, needed to navigate the *Framework*'s pedagogical challenges successfully and to engage their students effectively.

This study's findings indicate that despite the promulgation of the *Framework*, and its subsequent implementation in many dioceses, the bishops possess only a limited capacity to completely control the Religious Studies curricula of U.S. Catholic secondary schools. Every participant in this study was, at least to some extent, exercising individual and/or institutional autonomy with regard to the *Framework*. They were supplementing

content areas that they perceived to be inadequately addressed in the *Framework*,

incorporating non-*Framework* electives into their schools' scope and sequences,

adjusting the *Framework's* classification of courses as required or as electives, and

tailoring the curriculum to the particular needs of their school communities. Regarding

the latter, the identity of their schools—that is, diocesan or religious-order sponsored and

co-educational or single-sex—as well the religious demographics of their student bodies

informed their modifications of the *Framework's* content. Moreover, some participants

expressed their plans to continue adjusting the *Framework*, as needed, during the

academic year following their participation in this study. It is instructive to note that the

Framework itself grants neither teachers nor schools the discretionary agency to alter any

aspect of the document's content; neither does it explicitly forbid this liberty. The

teachers in this study appear to have interpreted this silence as permission to adapt, tailor,

amend, and revise the *Framework* to whatever extent deemed necessary, generally

without consulting the local bishop.

This conclusion yields several implications. First, it implies that the motivation of

Religious Studies teachers to do what they believe to be best for their students and for

their schools trumps any curricular mandate. Secondly, it implies that enforcing or

monitoring a national curriculum is unwieldy, and, perhaps, impossible. No one—neither

bishop, nor superintendent, nor school administrator—has directed those teachers who

participated in this study to cease tinkering with the *Framework*. These diocesan and

school officials may be unaware that teachers are adjusting the *Framework's* content, or

they may simply lack the time or desire to supervise every Religious Studies teacher

closely. Lastly, this conclusion implies that a "one size fits all" curriculum for all 1,205

U.S. Catholic secondary schools (McDonald and Schulz, 2012, p. 7) may be undesirable. A uniform national curriculum cannot take account of the unique needs, strengths, and limitations that characterize a particular school community. According to Ostasiewski (2010), the promulgation of the *Framework* constituted a milestone, for never before in the history of the U.S. Catholic Church had the bishops produced a national Religious Studies curriculum for any level of schooling. The findings of this study suggest the wisdom of the bishops from bygone eras, who entrusted matters of Religious Studies curriculum to the expertise of local communities and, in particular, to the professional capabilities of the religious orders serving those communities, many of which were comprised of educators.

Finally, this study's findings have led the researcher to conclude that teaching *Framework* courses may present obstacles to teaching in a manner that embodies the principles of Schipani's (1989, 1995) model of religious education, unless teachers supplement the *Framework*'s content extensively. This model's key aspects, as identified by the researcher, are a prophetic vision which takes account of the political and eschatological dimensions of Jesus's life and of the Gospel message; a praxis epistemology focused less on developing fluency in theological content and more on engaging in concrete acts of justice; critical reflection for personal and societal transformation, characterized by allowing the Scriptures to shape one's view of world events, and vice versa; and an emphasis on dialogue in the context of a community of learners.

Regarding the first of these, the *Framework* is clearly Christocentric; that is, focused on Jesus's life and on the Gospel he preached. However, participants

commented on the *Framework*'s emphasis on doctrinal matters related to Jesus, such as

the early Christological heresies, and ecclesial matters, such as apostolic succession.

This emphasis is distinct from the politically charged, liberating actions of Jesus that

move to the forefront in Schipani's (1989) model:

> Jesus Christ effects and models liberation in his active compassion and solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, and the marginal; in his prophetic and utopian proclamation and teaching about the reign of God; in his confrontation of worldly and spiritual powers; and in his overall work for transformation and humanization in love and justice. (p. 72)

The work of both Ostasiewski (2010) and Groome (2010) supports this conclusion;

namely, the divergence between the Christocentrism contained in the *Framework* and the

Christocentrism advocated by Schipani (1989, 1995). Ostasiewski (2010) maintained

that the *Framework* fails to portray accurately the ministry of Jesus as a "prophet-

teacher" (p. 109) who, at great risk to himself, shared meals with people marginalized by

society, healed people both physically and spiritually, and embodied a consistent

commitment to justice and compassion. Likewise, Groome (2010) critiqued the

Framework's overemphasis on Jesus's divine nature and corresponding lack of emphasis

on his humanity, including his active engagement with the very real concerns and

struggles that characterized people's lives during the time of his public ministry.

In discussing a praxis epistemology focused on engaging in concrete acts of

justice, Schipani (1995) stated that, in his model of religious education,

> *Orthopraxis* rather than orthodoxy becomes the true criterion for theology—that is, obeying the gospel rather than defining, prescribing, or even defending it…Christian faith must be viewed as committed participation in God's liberating and recreating work for the sake of the world. (p. 295, emphasis original)

Thus, for Schipani, the most authentic faith is manifested not in theologically correct

beliefs, but in liberating, just actions. However, the *Framework* appears to assume a

divergent stance, emphasizing abstract principles of Theology over concrete actions of justice. Regarding the former, it contains a large volume of theological material, presented in a level of minute detail that some participants in this study found to be obscure. Furthermore, some participants struggled to demonstrate the relevance of this content to their students' real lives. Regarding the latter, in addition to having only an elective Social Justice course and not a required one, participants also reported a lack of time to connect the *Framework*'s course content with Social Justice and to illuminate the theological and ecclesial underpinnings of the various charitable and service-oriented activities in which students engage. In other words, with the implementation of the *Framework*, students may continue to be involved in these activities, but they may fail to understand them as essential expressions of faith.

Concerning fostering dialogue between the Scriptures and world events in order to effect personal and societal transformation, the *Framework* has no required Scripture course, only an overview of basic Scriptural content and a one-semester Scripture elective. Participants reported spending less time on Scripture than they had in the years prior to the *Framework*'s implementation; in particular, they allocated less time to study the Old Testament and less time to learn methods of exegesis. As a result, they presented Scripture in a more superficial manner. Despite some participants' efforts to address these deficiencies by supplementing the *Framework*'s material on Scripture, the findings of this study suggest that the level of engagement with Scripture envisioned by Schipani's (1989, 1995) model is very difficult to attain within the *Framework*'s parameters.

Regarding the final element of Schipani's (1989, 1995) model, an emphasis on dialogue in the context of a community of learners, the participants in this study who reported utilizing more teacher-centered methodologies and traditional assessment strategies in *Framework* courses may find it more difficult to cultivate a sense of community amongst their students. Collaborative learning experiences, small-group discussions, and personal sharing are constitutive pedagogical elements of a school or classroom seeking to embody Schipani's model; yet, some participants struggled to incorporate such elements into *Framework* courses. Participants described pre-*Framework* learning experiences that allowed students to work together in an enjoyable and collaborative manner; however, time constraints have necessitated the abandonment of some or all of these activities. Moreover, some participants reported that the implementation of the *Framework* caused them to curtail their use of small-group discussions and other opportunities for students to share their personal experiences and perspectives with one another.

This conclusion implies that the bishops' understanding of Religious Studies differs from that of Schipani (1989, 1995), and from that of teachers who would locate their own theological emphases and pedagogical priorities within the realm of Schipani's model; that is, the realm of liberation theology. Moreover, it implies the presence of an inherent connection between theology and pedagogy, a connection that is clearly expressed in the enterprise of teaching Religious Studies but that is not fully exploited in the *Framework*. Schipani's work presents an integrated model, in which theological content and pedagogy mutually reinforce and support one another. In contrast, the

Framework, in presenting only theological content, fails to acknowledge the pedagogical implications of that content.

<div align="center">Recommendations</div>

<div align="center">*Recommendations for Future Research*</div>

In the interest of building on the present study's findings, conclusions, and implications, and of increasing the knowledge base regarding Religious Studies in U.S. secondary schools, in general, and the *Framework*, in particular, the researcher recommends the following avenues for future research:

- The researcher recommends that a qualitative study be conducted regarding students' experience of *Framework* courses, particularly that of students who have experienced both pre-*Framework* courses and *Framework* courses. Such a study would aim to explore what courses have more effectively held students' interest, engaged them intellectually, fostered their spiritual growth, and prompted their involvement in other areas of school life related to spirituality, service, and justice, such as liturgical ministry, retreats, and service-immersion programs. This recommendation carries a particular, time-sensitive, urgency, for once the *Framework* has been implemented in a particular school over four years, no students will remain who can testify to any perceived differences between non-*Framework* and *Framework* courses.

- The researcher recommends that a qualitative, longitudinal study of graduates of U.S. Catholic secondary schools—both those that have implemented the *Framework* and those that have not—be conducted. This study would seek to compare the long-term effects of both the *Framework* curriculum and the pre-

Framework curriculum in shaping students who, following their secondary school careers, remain actively engaged in Church-related ministries, service, and social justice activities, as well as in the academic field of Religious Studies.

- The researcher recommends further research, in the form of a national survey, regarding the parameters of Religious Studies curricula in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. Such a survey would endeavor to ascertain the number of schools that are implementing the *Framework* and the number that are not. Regarding the former, the study would illuminate the complexities and contours of implementation, including the extent to which flexibility is permitted in some dioceses but not in others. Regarding the latter, the study would establish what courses comprise their Religious Studies curriculum, as well as the rationale for this scope and sequence. The researcher further recommends that such a survey be conducted by an independent research firm without official ties to the U.S. bishops, in an effort to ensure that respondents answer honestly, without fear.

- The researcher recommends that the present study be utilized as a baseline for a longitudinal study of teachers' experiences of teaching *Framework* courses; that is, she recommends that this study's six participants be re-interviewed by the spring of 2015. This would allow a researcher to ascertain the extent to which these teachers' pedagogical and theological perspectives on the *Framework* have shifted as a result of additional years of experience in teaching *Framework* courses.

- The researcher recommends that this study's findings be used to construct a survey instrument which would then be utilized to launch a national survey of a

random sample of Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. This survey-based study would investigate the extent to which this study's findings are consistent across the country. The researcher further recommends that data from this survey be disaggregated in order to investigate the extent to which any or all of the following factors correlate, at a statistically significant level, with the nature of respondents' experience of teaching courses based on the *Framework*:

- o The respondent's sex, educational background, and number of years spent teaching Religious Studies in a U.S. Catholic secondary school

- o The type of school at which the respondent teaches: co-educational, all-boys, or all-girls; diocesan or religious-order sponsored

- o The school's religious demographics; that is, percentages of Catholic students, students of other faith traditions, and students of no faith tradition

- The researcher recommends that the *Next Generation* study (Cook, 2000, 2001) be replicated. Given the present study's implication that the *Framework* places substantial responsibility on the Religious Studies teacher to present this material in a pedagogically engaging manner, the replication of this study would seek to ascertain the extent of teachers' qualifications, skills, and background to meet these challenges. Moreover, it would explore the question of whether U.S. Catholic secondary schools will continue to have a ready pool of highly educated, well-qualified individuals prepared to teach Religious Studies, including *Framework* courses, for many years into the future.

Recommendations for Future Practice

In the interest of encouraging the utilization of the present study's findings to shape policy and practice at both national and local levels, the researcher offers the following recommendations for future practice, directed to the U.S. bishops, to diocesan education departments, and to U.S. Catholic secondary schools.

Recommendations for the U.S. Bishops

- The researcher urges that the U.S. bishops sponsor and fund ongoing research regarding the *Framework*, including, but not limited to, the recommendations for future research articulated above. Such research should aim to investigate and document the experiences and perspectives of both students and teachers.

- The researcher recommends that the U.S. bishops launch a major, nationwide evaluation of the *Framework* within ten years of its promulgation; that is, by the fall of 2017. This evaluation would aim to solicit feedback on the *Framework*'s content, structure, effectiveness, strengths, and weaknesses from students, teachers, and administrators in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. The researcher further recommends that the results of this evaluation be shared with the Catholic educational community via the USCCB website and be utilized to revise the *Framework*; that is, to produce a second version of the *Framework* that is solidly rooted in a decade of lived experience and in sound, empirical research.

- The researcher recommends that every bishop with Catholic secondary schools located in his diocese establish some means of communicating regularly with those schools' Religious Studies teachers, or with a representative sample of these teachers. Such communication, which may take the form of quarterly or semi-

annual meetings, must be dialogic in nature, in which the bishop may share his
goals and expectations regarding Religious Studies at the secondary level and
teachers may articulate their needs and concerns without fear of reprisals.
Regular and open communication may foster a productive exchange of ideas
regarding broad topics, such as the purpose of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic
secondary schools, as well as more specific, *Framework*-related topics, such as
the gains and losses precipitated by the *Framework's* implementation.

- The researcher recommends that the U.S. bishops sponsor and fund the formation
of a national professional association for Religious Studies teachers in U.S.
Catholic secondary schools. Such an association could engage in a variety of
activities aimed to boost the professional competencies of its members, including
sponsoring a journal, an annual or bi-annual national conference, and regional
gatherings. In these venues, members could share best practices regarding
teaching *Framework* courses, adapting the *Framework* to the unique needs of a
particular community, and other topics pertinent to the exercise of this
professional ministry. The researcher further recommends that the bishops entrust
the oversight and governance of such an association to an independent board, in
order to ensure that Religious Studies teachers' professional autonomy is
preserved and respected.

- The researcher recommends that, in a spirit of professional collaboration, and
with trust in the abilities of those whom school administrators hire to teach
Religious Studies, the bishops allow, and even encourage, flexibility and
adaptation as schools implement the *Framework*. While the bishops may choose

to designate certain elements of the *Framework* as essential and, therefore, non-negotiable, the researcher urges that the bishops, to the greatest extent possible, delegate to each school site the responsibility to craft a Religious Studies curriculum that best meets students' intellectual and spiritual needs, upholds the school's mission, and supports the attainment of the school's expected schoolwide learning outcomes.

Recommendations for Diocesan Education Departments

- The researcher recommends that diocesan education departments facilitate a process by which Religious Studies teachers in Catholic secondary schools may document their experience of the *Framework*—its strengths as well as its weaknesses, the benefits it bestows as well as the challenges it presents—via a blog, online journal, or website. The researcher further recommends that this documentation be shared with the diocesan bishop, in order to afford him a glimpse into the realities and complexities of teachers' professional endeavors regarding the *Framework*.

- The researcher recommends that diocesan education departments provide Religious Studies teachers in Catholic secondary schools with professional development opportunities regarding the *Framework*, most especially with resources regarding how to teach *Framework* courses in a pedagogically appropriate manner that nurtures student interest, engagement, and enthusiasm. For example, a diocesan education department may convene a diocesan-wide gathering of Religious teachers in which, minimally, teachers could share best practices, struggles, concerns, and strategies in small groups. A large diocese, or

a diocese able to muster funding or sponsorship for such an event, may host something akin to a small-scale conference, with keynote speakers and breakout sessions designed to provide teachers with practical, user-friendly support.

Recommendations for U.S. Catholic Secondary Schools

- The researcher recommends that U.S. Catholic secondary schools that have implemented the *Framework* establish a means of ensuring that students develop literacy in Scripture and Social Justice. For example, they may choose to require these courses, even though the *Framework* designates them as electives, or they may supplement the *Framework*'s limited treatment of these topics. Although these topic areas may pervade other aspects of the school, such as the Campus Ministry and Community Service programs, academic study of both Scripture and Social Justice constitutes an essential foundation for further study, prayer, service, and action.

- The researcher recommends that U.S. Catholic secondary schools establish mentoring programs, through which experienced Religious Studies teachers may serve as mentors for new Religious Studies teachers, with a particular emphasis on supporting those new teachers in presenting the *Framework*'s content in a pedagogically suitable manner.

- In the interest of ensuring that Religious Studies teachers are well-prepared to teach *Framework* courses, the researcher recommends that U.S. Catholic secondary schools—perhaps in collaboration with dioceses and/or with schools' sponsoring religious communities—fund Religious Studies teachers' formal

academic study, especially their pursuit of advanced degrees in Religious Studies and/or in Education.

- The researcher recommends that U.S. Catholic secondary schools that have implemented the *Framework* establish a process to gather site-based data from their students regarding their experience of *Framework* courses. This may take the form of a senior exit survey administered prior to graduation, student interviews, or student focus groups. The data generated by these efforts would enable schools to gauge and evaluate the *Framework*'s effects on their students.

Action Plan: Ideas Generated by Participants

Because this study was philosophically grounded in the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), participants were given the opportunity to review the study's preliminary findings and to offer comments, reactions, questions, and ideas for an action plan rooted in those findings. Of the four participants who responded to this invitation, Lanie and Julia offered the most substantive proposals. In order to determine "how pervasive these findings are across the country" (personal communication, January 1, 2013), Lanie recommended creating an online survey based on this study's findings. She advocated sending this survey instrument to the Religious Studies departments of every U.S. Catholic secondary school. She also stated her belief that it is in the area of theological content "where I think the lack of comprehensive input from teachers to the Bishops" (personal communication, January 1, 2013) is most evident. Therefore, she proposed sending this dissertation to the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) and to the USCCB in order to solicit a response from these bodies. If this were to prove unfeasible or unproductive, she suggested that this study's findings could be

shared with regional or diocesan groupings of Catholic schools. Teachers and/or administrators at those schools may then wish to prepare a statement for their local bishop(s) regarding the *Framework* and/or regarding this study's findings.

Julia identified two primary needs as emerging from the study's preliminary findings. First, citing a "disconnect" (personal communication, January 28, 2013) between the material that the *Framework* presents and the material that teachers perceive that their students need in order to grow in faith, she stated that, "I see a need for dialogue between the Bishops and the educators" (personal communication, January 28, 2013). Secondly, she maintained that "There seems to be a need for more flexibility within the *Framework*. Different schools, populations, and cultures have different needs for educating their students. The curriculum does not allow for these differences to [be] addressed" (personal communication, January 28, 2013). Julia offered three concrete ideas for actions that would help to address these needs. She proposed the formation of discussion panels composed of educators and bishops, preferably those bishops who played key roles in authoring the *Framework*. She also suggested that dioceses organize discussion groups in which educators could share their struggles and strategies regarding the *Framework*. Lastly, she urged "continued research on the effects of the *Framework* on the youth and the development of their faith, spirituality and religious practices….so that our youth get what they need to grow in a life-long faith journey" (personal communication, January 28, 2013). Julia concluded her remarks with a personal reflection on the experience of seeing many of her own views mirrored in those of the other study participants:

> I was pleased to see that my thoughts, feelings and experience with the Bishops'
> *Framework* were in-line with the comments of the others who took part in your

research. It was refreshing to read the articulation of others who have worked with the *Framework*. My frustrations and positive experiences seemed to be similar to the experiences of the other teachers. (personal communication, January 28, 2013)

Grace and Rosa offered more cursory remarks. Like Julia, Grace also observed that at least some of the teachers who participated in this study appeared to share perspectives and experiences regarding the *Framework* that were similar to her own. She stated that "[There's] something to be said about that, but to whom? Would [the] Bishops listen?" (personal communication, January 26, 2013). She also affirmed that teachers do have a voice regarding the *Framework* "on the grassroots level" (personal communication, January 26, 2013), as they engage in teaching this material in their own classrooms on a daily basis. However, she pondered the extent to which "we really have a say in ways to address its weaknesses" (personal communication, January 26, 2013), if, in fact, "the Bishops are firmly established in implementing this Curriculum [*sic*] long term" (personal communication, January 26, 2013). Lastly, Rosa offered only a very brief remark in which she observed that some of the study's findings are dichotomous: she wondered how the researcher would report and/or interpret such findings.

The online conversation regarding a collective action plan that the researcher had originally envisioned as the final phase of this study did not occur, primarily because not every participant responded to the request to generate ideas for an action plan. Moreover, of those who did respond, some did not wish to participate in an online conversation and/or did not want their ideas for action shared with the other participants. However, the researcher hopes that the experience of having been involved in this study may, in either the short term or the long term, empower participants to take action in a manner that is meaningful, appropriate, and transformative in their own particular localities.

Researcher's Reflections on Methodology

In reflecting on the experience of having designed and conducted this study, the researcher wishes to highlight several key aspects of the research design that proved to be particularly effective in addressing the research questions driving this study. First, conducting two interviews with each participant yielded rich, descriptive data. As the participants grew more comfortable with the researcher, they offered profoundly honest reflections, exploring not only their experience of the *Framework* with regard to Theology and pedagogy, but, more broadly, the complexities of their profession and vocation as Religious Studies teachers. Almost certainly, this depth of reflection would not have been attained if only one interview per participant had been conducted. Secondly, creating unique questions to address in each of the second interviews—questions that were derived from a close reading of the transcript from the first interview—permitted the researcher to capitalize on each participant's distinct perspective as well as the particular challenges presented by the unique research context of each of their schools. Lastly, incorporating aspects of PAR into the research design enabled the researcher to engage the participants in a collaborative model of research characterized by dialogue and action-oriented strategizing. Although a fully developed collective action plan did not emerge by the time this study was completed, the researcher believes that the action plan ideas that the participants did generate testify to their positive, and, perhaps, transformative experience of having participated in this study. This experience validated their professional expertise, provided them with an opportunity to articulate their needs and concerns, and, hopefully, encouraged them to, at some future time, engage in meaningful action within their own local context.

Closing Remarks

On September 9, 2012, the Cathedral of Christ the Light in Oakland, California hosted a diocesan-wide symposium in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the 50th Jubilee of the Oakland Diocese. Open to the public and widely advertised in parishes throughout the diocese, approximately 700 people—including the researcher—attended this event, filling the pews of the newest cathedral in the world. The audience was comprised of both lay and ordained ministers, vowed religious, interested parishioners, and two bishops, the latter seated prominently in the front pew. During the evening, a variety of speakers addressed topics such as the history of the formation of the diocese, ways in which the diocese has sought to embody the call to social justice issued by Vatican II, and the hopes and challenges presented by living and ministering in a post-Vatican II Church. One speaker, an educator in a Catholic secondary school, identified the implementation of the *Framework* as one of three primary challenges she is facing in her professional ministerial life:

> I worry about our youth and about education, where we're being asked to implement a curriculum without consultation of wide expertise of educators who are really committed to teaching a curriculum that's solid, appropriate, relevant and engaging for youth. We need, we desperately need, to be conscientious about not losing a whole generation, and therefore our future, because we are not providing a framework that helps students in search of meaning, for moral values that will help them create norms which are both demanding and realistic, as well as relevant to their own times. (Mattos, 2012)[23]

To the researcher's great surprise, these remarks were punctuated by sustained, spontaneous applause from the audience.

That applause was revelatory in several key ways. First, it implied a widespread awareness of the *Framework*, even in a diocese in which it has not officially been

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[23] Podcasts of all presentations offered at the symposium appeared on the Diocese of Oakland's website the week following the event. The researcher transcribed the portion quoted in this chapter.

implemented and even among a diverse audience that did not consist primarily of Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools. Secondly, the applause indicated the audience's affirmation and endorsement of the speaker's concern about the *Framework*'s effects on young people and the challenges involved in navigating it successfully; that is, without sacrificing students' intellectual and spiritual needs. Lastly, the audience's spontaneous and clear response to the speaker embodied great courage. Even in the cathedral, and even with two bishops seated in the front row, this audience expressed what they knew to be true: that the speaker's commitment to Catholic education, and her desire to serve her students well, was being seriously undermined by the *Framework*. Applause at a public event may not alter the course of the *Framework*, but it certainly reflects people's desire to make their voices heard. Perhaps with no other venue in which to express their views, they seized this opportunity, powerful if only for its symbolic value.

This research study has sought to offer Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools an opportunity to share their experiences and articulate their perspectives regarding the *Framework*. The great volume of data generated by this study indicates that these teachers do have numerous thoughts and insights to share on this matter; yet, they may have access to few venues in which to do so. As implementation of the *Framework* continues to proceed throughout the country, it is essential that Religious Studies teachers create innovative ways to make their voices heard. Their expertise, wisdom, and profound commitment to their students and to the Gospel must reach the ears and the hearts of bishops, diocesan officials, school administrators, and all

those with the power to chart the course of Religious Studies in U.S. Catholic secondary

schools for many years to come.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

ABBREVIATIONS AND FULL NAMES OF UNIVERSAL AND LOCAL

ECCLESIAL OFFICES

Full Name	Abbreviation
Congregation for Catholic Education	CCE[a]
Congregation for the Clergy	CC
National Catholic Educational Association	NCEA
National Conference of Catholic Bishops	NCCB
Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education	SCCE
United States Catholic Conference	USCC
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops	USCCB[b]
Western Catholic Educational Association	WCEA

[a]Prior to 1988, the Congregation for Catholic Education was known as the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. [b]In July 2001, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United States Catholic Conference merged to form the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

APPENDIX B

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS (USCCB)

AMENDMENT FORM

INVITING COMMENTS ON

NATIONAL DOCTRINAL GUIDELINES FOR HIGH SCHOOLS

NATIONAL DOCTRINAL GUIDELINES FOR HIGH SCHOOL
DRAFT CONSULTATION

AMENDMENT FORM

<u>SPECIFIC COMMENT ON PROPOSED OUTLINE</u>

THEME: PAGE(S):   LINE(S):

Please duplicate as need[24] to use a separate sheet for each comment. State the suggestion using one or both spaces below as applicable.

STRIKE: (Indicate exact wording or passage)

INSERT, ADD, OR SUBSTITUTE: (State new wording or passage, giving a precise location if it is not meant to replace stricken language in the same place.)

_____   _____
Name of Bishop (or designate)   (Arch)Diocese

Please return by July 1, 2005 to: USCCB Committee on Catechesis
3211 4th Street, NE
Washington, DC 20017

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[24] Typographical error appeared in the original document.

APPENDIX C

INITIAL E-MAIL TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Dear X,

My name is Carrie J. Schroeder, and I am a doctoral student in the University of San Francisco's doctoral program in Catholic Educational Leadership. For my dissertation, I am conducting a study on the U.S. Conference Of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age* (hereafter, *Framework).* I am seeking to explore the perspectives of Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools regarding their experience of teaching courses based on the *Framework.* More specifically, I am seeking to investigate these teachers' experiences of the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content they teach and on their pedagogy.

Because you teach Religious Studies in a U.S. Catholic secondary school in a diocese or archdiocese in which the *Framework* has been implemented, I am writing to ask if you would consider participating in my study. This would involve participating in two face-to-face interviews with me, the first of which would last for 60 to 90 minutes, the second of which would last from 30 to 45 minutes. Following the completion of both interviews, you would be invited, if you wish, to engage in dialogue with me and with the other participants regarding developing an action plan rooted in the study's findings. Your participation in developing and/or implementing such an action plan would be entirely voluntary. Throughout the study, your identity and the identity of the school at which you teach would be kept confidential to the greatest extent possible; in all written reports, both you and your school would be referred to with a pseudonym.

Please note, as well, that although I have published a student textbook and two teaching manuals designed for *Framework*-based courses, this study is not in any way connected with that work.

Please respond to this email indicating whether or not you would like to consider participating in my study. If you indicate that you are not interested, you will receive no further correspondence from me. If you indicate that you are interested, I will provide you with further information about the study which will enable you to make an informed decision as to your participation.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,
Carrie J. Schroeder
cschroeder@mercyhs.org
Mobile phone: 510 325 9706

APPENDIX D

FOLLOW-UP E-MAIL TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Dear X,

My name is Carrie J. Schroeder, and I previously contacted you regarding your possible participation in a research study I am conducting regarding the U.S. Conference Of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*. Please see the prior email from me below.

Please do contact me, via email (cschroeder@mercyhs.org) or mobile phone (510 325 9706), if you wish to consider the possibility of participating in my study. If you are not interested in participating, you will receive no further communication from me.

Thank you very much for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,
Carrie J. Schroeder
cschroeder@mercyhs.org
Mobile phone: 510 325 9706

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANTS' INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Purpose and Background

Ms. Carrie J. Schroeder, a doctoral student in the Catholic Educational Leadership program in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, is conducting a study on the U.S. Conference Of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age* (hereafter, *Framework)*. She is seeking to explore the perspectives of Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools regarding their experience of teaching courses based on the *Framework*. More specifically, she is seeking to investigate these teachers' experiences of the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content they teach and on their pedagogy.

I am being asked to participate because I am a Religious Studies teacher in a U.S. Catholic secondary school who meets both of the following criteria:

1. I am currently teaching or have taught within the past 2 academic years at least one *Framework*-based Religious Studies course in a U.S. Catholic secondary school

2. I am currently teaching or have taught within the past 2 academic years at least one non-*Framework* Religious Studies course in a U.S. Catholic secondary school.

Procedures

If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will participate in two face-to-face interviews with the researcher. The first interview will last one to one and a half hours; the second interview will last 30 to 45 minutes. Both interviews will be digitally recorded by the researcher using a digital recording device. The interviews will occur approximately two to four weeks apart. The interviews will occur at a location that is mutually agreeable to me and to the researcher. I will receive the questions which will guide the interviews approximately one week prior to each interview. These questions will focus on my experience of teaching courses based on the USCCB *Framework*.

2. Following each interview, I will receive a written transcript of the interview. I will be asked to review the transcripts, offering comments, corrections, and clarifications.

3. Following the completion and transcription of both interviews, I will be invited, via email, to consider possible avenues of collective action in which to engage with other study participants. The extent to which I participate in such action will be entirely voluntary.

Risks and/or Discomforts

1. Depending of the nature of my views regarding the *Framework*, it is possible that some of the interview questions may be unsettling or upsetting to me. I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

2. Because the *Framework* has provoked controversy in some Catholic educational settings, expressing negative views regarding it could potentially jeopardize my job security as a Religious Studies teacher in a U.S. Catholic secondary school. Therefore, the researcher will, to the greatest extent possible, seek to protect my identity and the identity of the school at which I teach.

3. I understand that participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality; however, study records will be kept as confidential as is possible. At the beginning of the first interview, I will be asked to select a pseudonym to which I will be referred in all written records related to this study, as well as a pseudonym for the school at which I am employed. Neither my own individual identity nor the identity and specific location of my school will be used in any reports or publications resulting from this study. All digital recordings of interviews and digital copies of written transcripts will be kept in password-protected computer files to which only the researcher has access. Paper copies of the written transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home.

Benefits

The chief benefits to me from participating in this study will be the knowledge that I have contributed to research, the opportunity to reflect deeply and critically on my experiences regarding the *Framework*, and, if I wish, the chance to consider possibilities for collective, transformative action in collaboration with other study participants.

Costs/Financial Considerations

Financial costs to me will be limited to the cost of transportation to and from the site at which the interviews will be conducted and the cost of accessing the internet in order to review the written transcripts of the interviews.

Payment/Reimbursement

I will not be financially or materially compensated for my participation in this study, nor will I be reimbursed for any expenses I may incur as a result of my participation.

Questions

I have talked to Carrie J. Schroeder about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may call her at (510) 325-9706 or email her at cschroeder@mercyhs.org.

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with the researcher. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

Consent

I have been given a copy of the "Research Subject's Bill of Rights" and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on my present or future status as a student or employee at the University of San Francisco.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

_____

Subject's Signature   Date of Signature

_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date of Signature

APPENDIX F

FIRST INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Preliminary matters:

- Collect the signed informed consent form from the participant.
- Assure the participant of the confidentiality of his or her own identity and the identity of the school at which he or she teaches.
- Tell the participant that the questions to guide the first interview are springboards for discussion. He or she is free to raise other topics, within the general focus area, that he or she wishes to discuss or believes to be important.

Prior to turning on the digital recording device, inquire about pseudonyms if these have not already been established:

- What pseudonym would you like to use for yourself during the course of your participation in this study?
- What pseudonym would you like to use for your school?

Turn on the digital recording device, and begin the interview with the demographic questions.

- What is your educational background? Please include all of your academic degrees and the institutions at which you earned them.
- How many years have you taught Religious Studies in a U.S. Catholic secondary school?
- What Religious Studies courses have you taught within the past two academic years? Please distinguish between *Framework*-based courses and non-*Framework* courses.

Continue with the interview, posing the questions in the following order:

1. Please tell me about the impact the *Framework* has had on the theological content that you teach.

   - What content did you formerly teach in non-*Framework* courses that you now do not teach?
   - In contrast, what content are you now teaching that you did not teach prior to the *Framework*'s implementation?
   - What do you think about these changes?
   - How do you feel about these changes?

2. Please tell me about the impact the *Framework* has had on the pedagogy you utilize in the classroom. In comparing the way in which you teach *Framework* courses and the way in which you teach, or have taught, non-*Framework* courses, what is different?

   - What do you think about these differences?
   - How do you feel about these differences?

3. If you could change anything about the *Framework*'s content—such as adding something, deleting something, or altering the placement of a course as required or as an elective—what, if any, changes would you make?

4. Please tell me more about your experience of making the transition to teaching courses based on the USCCB *Framework*.

   - What has been positive about the transition?
   - What has been challenging?

5. In implementing the *Framework* in your school, what do you think has been gained:

   - For yourself?
   - For your students?
   - For the wider mission and identity of your school?

   What do you think has been lost:

   - For yourself?
   - For your students?
   - For the wider mission and identity of your school?

6. What else would you like to say about your experience of teaching both *Framework* courses and non-*Framework* courses that we have not yet had a chance to discuss?

APPENDIX G

E-MAIL TO PARTICIPANTS PRIOR TO THE FIRST INTERVIEW

Dear X,

I am looking forward to seeing you for our first interview, on (*insert date*) at (*insert time and place*).

Prior to this interview, please give some consideration to the pseudonym by which you would like to be identified in written documentation related to this study, as well as the pseudonym by which you would like your school to be identified. If you have something in mind for one or both of these, you may share that with me via email, or we can discuss it at the beginning of the interview.

Please find attached two documents:
1. The questions to guide our first interview: Please give some consideration to these prior to the interview.
2. The participants' informed consent form: You received a copy of this in a prior communication from me. Please do read and review this, email me if you have any questions or concerns regarding it, and bring a signed copy of it to our first interview.

Finally, here is a link to the full text of the *Framework*, which is available online:

http://www.usccb.org/about/evangelization-and-catechesis/catechesis/upload/high-school-curriculum-framework.pdf

Depending on your degree of familiarity with the *Framework*, you may wish to review the document prior to our interview. I will also bring a paper copy to the interview so that we may easily refer to it, if needed.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns; otherwise, I look forward to seeing you soon. Know that I am deeply grateful for your time and effort in participating in my study.

Sincerely,
Carrie J. Schroeder
Mobile phone: 510 325 9706

APPENDIX H

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE FIRST INTERVIEW

1.   Please tell me about your experience of making the transition to teaching courses based on the USCCB *Framework*. What has been positive about the transition? What has been challenging?

2.   In implementing the *Framework* in your school, what do you think has been gained—for yourself, for your students, and/or for the wider mission and identity of your school? What do you think has been lost?

3.   Please tell me more specifically about the impact the *Framework* has had on the theological content that you teach. For example, what content did you formerly teach in non-*Framework* courses that you now do not teach? In contrast, what content are you now teaching that you did not teach prior to the *Framework*'s implementation? What do you think, and how do you feel, about these changes in the theological content you teach?

4.   If you could change anything about the *Framework*'s content—such as adding something, deleting something, or altering the placement of a course as required or as an elective—what, if any, changes would you make?

5.   Please tell me about the impact the *Framework* has had on the pedagogy you utilize in the classroom. In comparing the way in which you teach *Framework* courses and the way in which you teach, or have taught, non-*Framework* courses, what is different?   What do you think, and how do you feel, about these differences?

6.   What else would you like to say about your experience of teaching both *Framework* courses and non-*Framework* courses that we have not yet had a chance to discuss?

APPENDIX I

EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS FOLLOWING THE FIRST INTERVIEW

Dear X,

I very much enjoyed meeting and talking with you during our first interview. Please find attached a transcript of our conversation.

Prior to our second interview, please review this transcript and email me concerning any or all of the following items. First, please offer any feedback, comments, clarifications, or corrections you may have regarding the content of the transcript. Secondly, if you have any further thoughts or reflections regarding either the content of the transcript or the interview process, please document those in an email. Finally, please consider what questions and topics you would like to explore in our second, follow-up interview. I will organize your suggested questions, along with questions that I wish to explore based on my own review of the transcript, and send this list of questions to you not less than one week prior to our second interview.

Please do not hesitate to contact me via email or mobile phone with any questions or concerns. I look forward to seeing you again for our second interview. In the meantime, please know that I am very grateful for your continued time and effort in participating in my study.

Sincerely,
Carrie J. Schroeder
cschroeder@mercyhs.org
Mobile phone: 510 325 9706

APPENDIX J

SECOND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: GRACE

Grace: St. Ann Academy
Questions for Interview #2

1.   Is there anything from the first interview that you would like to correct, expand upon, or comment upon?

2.   At one point during the first interview, you stated, "If this is what we have to do, oh well, pity. Pity, because it [the *Framework*] seems limiting in its theological scope." In what ways is the *Framework*'s theological scope limiting? If you had the opportunity, how would you broaden its scope?

3.   You described your pre-*Framework* 9th grade Religious Studies course as making "better use of Scripture." When I asked you for more information about this, you stated that the pre-*Framework* course contained more content and more chapters on Scripture. What further information can you share regarding this? What was better about the way in which your prior curriculum dealt with Scripture in contrast to the way in which the *Framework* deals with Scripture?

4.   At several points during the interview, you expressed what sounded to me like a sense of resignation regarding the *Framework*:

   - "If this is how it is, you can't fight this."
   - "I just said, well, if this is what we have to do, I'm going to. That was my approach….when I do encounter a *Framework*/non-*Framework* content or curriculum difference, I just go with it, with the *Framework*. I just go with it, and say, well, that's what I have to do."
   - "If this is what we have to do, then just do it. I'm not gonna stick it to the man, or fight the man."

   Is resignation the word that you would use to describe the feeling you were trying to convey in these quotes? If so, what else, if anything, would you like to say regarding this? If not, what word would you use instead, and why?

5.   In describing your classroom style as one in which "you [your students] can ask questions, and…there's nothing that can't be talked about," you made several observations regarding the ways in which the *Framework* seems to discourage students' thinking and questioning. For example, you commented that the *Framework*, in providing ready-made, doctrinal answers, "didn't teach the student to think or question, just for the sake of thinking." Near the end of the interview, you also responded affirmatively to my question of whether the *Framework* is failing to move students to higher order thinking. Based on these observations, what effect has implementation of the *Framework* had on your own classroom? To what extent have you been able to maintain a classroom in which students "can ask questions, and…there's nothing that can't be talked about?"

6.   You talked about how you teach the content that the *Framework* requires but then, once that is done, you think to yourself, "I'm just gonna do what I want anyway.

I've followed what they told me, and I'll just…I know that's wrong, but…you know, I'm just gonna do this anyway, I don't care what they say." When I asked for an example of something like this that you might do, you said that you might have students "study theologians that the church says are not in proper communion with the church." In order to concretize this, would you be willing to give examples of theologians whom you might invite or assign your students to read and study? Also, could you say more about what you are trying to accomplish, theologically and/or pedagogically, in supplementing the *Framework*'s content in this way?

7.   When I asked about, in implementing the *Framework* at your school, what had been gained and lost regarding your school's identity and mission, you maintained that the *Framework* did not have much influence either way: in your estimation, it represents neither a gain nor a loss with regard to the school as a whole. However, since your school is sponsored by a religious community, I did want to ask about any effect you perceive the *Framework* to be having on the realization of the charism of the religious community which sponsors your school. To what extent is the *Framework* helping or hindering the process of sharing that charism with the students and helping them to take ownership of it?

8.   Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

APPENDIX K

SECOND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: JULIA

Julia: St. Catherine of Siena High School
Questions for Interview #2

1. Is there anything from the first interview that you would like to correct, expand upon, or comment upon?

2. Near the beginning of the first interview, I had asked for examples of theological content that you are now teaching with the *Framework* that you would not have taught prior to the *Framework*'s implementation. You had asked to skip the question at that time, but I'd like to return to it now. What examples that fit this description can you think of?

3. You had mentioned that you and your department members may need, in the coming academic year, to lecture more and to utilize "more of a delivery of information style" of teaching. You described this shift as "kind of a backwards place from where teaching Religion has evolved to." It sounds like you were saying that the *Framework* is pushing the pedagogy utilized in teaching Religious Studies "backwards" towards more teacher-centered methodologies. Is this what you intended to say? If so, what do you think may be the larger effects of this shift—for example, on your students, on yourself as a teacher, and on the way in which the Religious Studies department is viewed by other academic departments in the school?

4. At several points during the interview, you praised the *Framework*'s focus on Christ. Yet, you also either implied or directly stated that the *Framework* may not accomplish what the bishops intended—that is, that students grow into a deeper faith in and relationship with Christ—and may even move students *away* from attaining this goal. For example:

    - You mentioned your fear that in moving into *Framework*-based content right away in the 9th grade, students may lose their "stronghold" on the Bible and "even some of their basic spirituality that they've come in with."
    - You identified the biggest struggle you face on the 9th grade level as maintaining Christ-centeredness, even stating that "with everything else that goes into teaching this *Framework*, I think it [Christ] gets a little lost." You described this situation as a "paradox."
    - Near the end of the interview, you stated that the *Framework* will not "translate into the students having a…stronger Christ-centered faith than what they came in with or what they were getting in years past."

    In all of these quotes, you seem to be saying that the bishops' goal is a worthy one, but their means of attempting to achieve it is not effective, and may even be counterproductive. Is this accurate? If so, what do you think would be the best way to attain the goal that the bishops desire?

5.   You spoke about the *Framework*'s way of presenting the Old Testament; that is, with an examination of how Old Testament events foreshadow Jesus or relate to Jesus in some way. As you stated, "there's always that Christology in there." You characterized this approach as confusing for your students and for you as a teacher--so this approach is not working *practically*. I'm wondering what you think of this approach *philosophically* (i.e. in principle) and/or theologically. To what extent would you support or encourage this approach, if the practicalities and logistics could be worked out? To what extent do you believe this to be a theologically sound way of teaching the Old Testament?

6.   In discussing the *Framework*'s electives, you mentioned that your department would take a closer look at the "comparative religions" course (i.e. elective course E, "Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues") to ensure that other religions are presented in a respectful manner, "pure enough in their own rights," and not "from a less-than perspective." If you are able to look over the outline for elective course E, I would be very interested in your thoughts regarding the extent to which you believe the course meets the criteria which you articulated.

7.   Near the end of the interview, you stated that "I really don't like the idea of using the *Framework* as an excuse for our kids not to get what we think they need in their faith and in their faith walk, because I think it's our responsibility to work it in there. It doesn't matter what they give us to teach. That's what we need to do." How would you articulate what your students need to continue to grow as people of faith? To what extent is this different from what the *Framework* offers?

8.   Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

APPENDIX L

SECOND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: LANIE

Lanie: St. John's High School
Questions for Interview #2

1. Is there anything from the first interview that you would like to correct, expand upon, or comment upon?

2. In commenting on the Christocentrism of the *Framework*, you expressed a fear that this focus may actually end up being counterproductive: "I hope we're not going to be turning our students off to Jesus. Because it's like we're hitting them over the head with it." It sounds like you were saying that the bishops' goal— bringing students to a deep relationship with Christ—is a good one, but that the *Framework* may not be the best way to achieve this goal. Is this what you intended to say? If so, what do you think would be a more effective way to achieve that goal?

3. How have your non-Catholic students responded to the *Framework*'s content, especially its Christocentrism? To what extent do you believe that the content of the *Framework* meets the needs of these students?

4. You described the curriculum and scope and sequence that you had been using, prior to the *Framework* as "age-appropriate," and, in contrast, expressed concern that the *Framework* has not "taken into account the different modalities of learning, adolescent development, those kinds of things." Would you describe the *Framework*'s content and/or overall approach as inappropriate for adolescents? If so, in what way(s)?

5. You spoke about how, in implementing the *Framework*, you have lost the unit on the history and charism of your school's sponsoring religious community that you used to teach the freshmen. I'm wondering if you could say more about your thoughts and/or feelings regarding this change. For example, to what extent are you concerned that the loss of this unit may dilute your school's unique identity and mission, or cause the 9th graders to feel less ownership of this aspect of your school?

6. At several points during the interview, you expressed frustration:

    - Frustration that "those of us who are in the trenches were not asked" [for input regarding the *Framework*].
    - Frustration that in your 24-year career in this diocese, neither the bishop nor the superintendent has ever spoken with you or attempted to contact you: "not a phone call, nothing."
    - Frustration with having to revise a curriculum that had been effective: "we were not doing a bad job before…It wasn't broke, and the curriculums that we had developed were working. The students were learning."

In all of these quotes, it sounds to me like, during the process of moving toward implementation of the *Framework*, you have felt disrespected as a professional and as an educator. Is this accurate, and, if so, what else, if anything, would you like to say regarding this?

7.   In observing how repetitive the content of the *Framework* is, you commented that the *Framework* has "a little feel" of the Baltimore Catechism to it: "they're kind of asking the same things over and over again so that it's almost like the students would, you know, be able to regurgitate an answer if asked." To what extent do you believe that the *Framework* nudges teachers toward utilizing this sort of pedagogy—i.e., students memorizing and then "regurgitating" answers?

8.   Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

APPENDIX M

SECOND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: MARSHALL

Marshall: St. Michael's High School
Questions for Interview #2

1.   Is there anything from the first interview that you would like to correct, expand upon, or comment upon?

2.   I wanted to ask a couple of questions to follow up on your remarks about the *Framework*'s approach to Scripture, especially that it is "very non-Old Testament…we no longer teach the first part of the Scripture" and that Scripture itself is an elective, rather than a required course.

      a.   You stated that in studying the Old Testament for a full semester in the prior curriculum, students were able to "see this more as salvation history" rather than "just Christianity and the New Testament functioning all alone by itself." What do you see as the pros and cons of the *Framework*'s approach; that is, presenting Christianity and the New Testament "all alone?"

      b.   You also mentioned that in the prior curriculum, you would teach students more about how to read Scripture, including "that this is not all meant to be read literally." It sounded like you were saying that you no longer have the opportunity to teach students about Biblical fundamentalism, and about how this is different from a Catholic approach to Scripture. Is this accurate? If so, to what extent would you characterize this as a significant loss to yourself, to your students, and/or to your school?

      c.   In discussing your own spiritual journey, you stated that, "I think the biggest strength in my personal faith was when I took a Scriptures course." Since, in the *Framework*, Scripture is an elective and not required, to what extent have you been able to provide some kind of a similarly transformative encounter with Scripture for your own students? If you have not been able to do this (or do it to the extent that you might prefer), how do you feel about not having that opportunity?

3.   In discussing the *Framework*'s apologetic approach, you stated your belief that this approach is good for students who are trying to hold onto their faith: "when they get some apologetics I think it provides them somewhat, for those who are holding onto their belief, with a bit of artillery: something to combat the doubts that are kind of arising."

      a.   If apologetics provides good support for students who are holding onto their faith, I wanted to ask about students who have put their faith aside or drifted away from their faith, or students who have not had Catholic or Christian faith to begin with. What effect(s) does the apologetic approach have on these groups of students? What does the apologetic approach provide for these students?

b.   I'm curious about your use of the term "artillery." Did you intend to imply any deeper meaning with the use of this term? For example, did you intend to imply that students are engaged in a kind of battle with cultural forces that challenge their faith?

4.   You observed that "the Church is obviously under heavy scrutiny from just about every angle today," and you characterized some, but not all, of that scrutiny as "deserved." Within this same context, you stated that you want your students "to realize that the Church is not free from sin;" rather, that "the Church is full of human beings who are capable of mistakes and who are sinful." To what extent do you believe that the *Framework*'s apologetic approach allows for students to learn about these less-than-perfect aspects of the Church?

5.   In discussing how your department supplements the *Framework*'s content, you stated that you view your curriculum as an "80/20 kind of thing"—with 80% of your curriculum's content coming from the *Framework* and 20% coming from other sources. Regarding that 20%, you mentioned that you cover formation themes relevant to your school's sponsoring religious community as well as Mariology. What other material and/or content do you use to supplement the *Framework*? For example, do you cover sexuality education in your Religious Studies courses? Have you had to pare down the *Framework*'s content in order to allow time for these other topics which your school and/or department deem to be important?

6.   You discussed how, in teaching *Framework* courses, you have sought to connect the course content to "modern culture," "pop culture," and "current affairs" to order to break down the barriers between faith and life, or between the life of faith and the rest of life. You did give one example of how you have done this: having students read a news article about society being critical of the Church, or viewing the Church as "archaic," and then explaining to the students why the Church operates in this way. What other concrete examples can you share of pedagogical strategies which have enabled you to connect the *Framework*'s content with the wider culture and/or with students' real lives and concerns?

7.   Near the end of the interview, when I asked what, if anything, you would change about the *Framework* if you had the opportunity, you prefaced your response by commenting that "a lot of times I think people have…the ego" and "the audacity" to claim to "know more than the bishops."   You stated that "as educators and as believers…we feel a very real…credibility, or a right, entitlement to be able to say that we could do this better," but that "there's a fine line." Who are the "people" to whom you were referring? If educators were to offer feedback to the bishops on the *Framework*, would you characterize that action as audacious? Where does the "fine line" to which you referred lie?

8.   Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

APPENDIX N

SECOND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: ROSA

Rosa: Ascension High School
Questions for Interview #2

1.   Is there anything from the first interview that you would like to correct, expand upon, or comment upon?

2.   I wanted to follow up on the comment you made to me after our first interview. You mentioned not having time to teach about liturgy anymore. Could you say more about that? What did you used to teach regarding this topic that you no longer teach? Would you describe this shift as a gain or a loss? Perhaps it's a loss because the content you used to teach was important, or perhaps it's a gain because you now have time to teach something else that you didn't teach before.

3.   Near the end of the first interview, you stated that "the main thing that it [the *Framework*] is missing is respect for women." You also spoke about the importance of helping your students "to understand, especially as women, there is a hierarchy and it's not always the greatest thing." Based on these statements, I am wondering:

    a.   What unique challenges or problems do you think the *Framework* poses in an all-girls environment?

    b.   Would you describe the *Framework* as supporting or undermining what you're trying to accomplish as an all-girls school? For example, you spoke about your school's focus on empowering women to be moral and ethical leaders. Do you think that the *Framework* helps or hinders you in attaining that goal?

    c.   It sounded like you were saying that you perceive a need for women and girls to think critically about certain aspects of the Church, such as the hierarchy. Is this accurate, and, if so, do you think that the *Framework* helps or hinders you in attaining that goal?

4.   You talked about how you try to utilize different learning modalities in an effort to reach students with diverse learning styles. You mentioned that you aim to use oral, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic experiences in every lesson. Did teaching a *Framework*-based course make this easier to do, or harder to do, than it was before?

5.   On several occasions during the first interview, you described the *Framework* as containing "propaganda" and "biased" content. You did mention that these aspects of the *Framework* made you "uncomfortable," but I'm wondering if you would like to say anything else regarding your experience of teaching the content that you described in this way. What was this experience like for you? How did it differ from your experience of teaching non-*Framework* courses?

6.   You talked about the *Framework*'s Christocentrism—even how your students joke about "What are we going to learn about today—oh, that's right, Jesus." To what extent is this Christocentric curriculum different from the non-*Framework* courses you have taught? What do you think, and how do you feel, about this difference?

7.   Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

APPENDIX O

SECOND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: THERESE

Therese: St. Martin de Porres High School
Questions for Interview #2

1.   Is there anything from the first interview that you would like to correct, expand upon, or comment upon?

2.   I'm interested in hearing just a little more about your pilot year with the *Framework*. What characterized this as a pilot year, as opposed to just implementation that occurred a year early? Did all the 9th grade Religious Studies classes participate in the pilot?

3.   In discussing the additional electives that you are submitting to your bishop for approval, you described the *Framework*'s five electives as "recommended," not "mandated." You stated that "only the six semesters are mandated." So, when the *Framework* was implemented in your diocese, did your bishop (or other diocesan official) make clear that he was open to non-*Framework* electives? If so, what information do you need to submit to him in petitioning for the approval of non-*Framework* electives?

4.   In discussing the elective Ethics course that you are submitting to your bishop for approval, you stated that, "I think we do a great disservice in just limiting ourselves to Catholic morality and moral decision-making…and not giving them [students] a fuller view." Can you say more specifically what is limiting about the *Framework*'s approach to and presentation of Morality/Ethics? What, if any, other aspects of the *Framework* would you describe as "limiting?"

5.   I wanted to revisit the topic of your religiously diverse student body—56% are Catholic, at least on paper, and you described this number as relatively low compared to other Catholic high schools in your diocese. You also stated that among the non-Catholic population at your school are found evangelicals and members of other Christian denominations, as well as Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and a group you characterized as "unchurched."

    a.   How have your non-Catholic, and maybe especially your non-Christian, students, responded to the *Framework*'s theological content?

    b.   To what extent do you believe that the *Framework* meets these students' needs and/or is relevant to their lives?

    c.   You stated that "given our financial need to have that percentage [of non-Catholic students] be there, to stay viable, I think our Religion curriculum should be respectful of that." To what extent do you find the *Framework* to be respectful of non-Catholic students? How does the *Framework* demonstrate this respect, or manifest a lack of it?

6. Although we talked a lot in the first interview about Scripture—both the way in which the *Framework* presents it, and the way in which your department teaches it—I wanted to follow up by asking more specifically about the Old Testament.

    a. You stated that in teaching the first semester *Framework* course, you present the Old Testament as "this backdrop for the fulfillment of the covenant in the New Testament." To what extent do you believe this to be a theologically and/or pedagogically sound way to present the Old Testament?

    b. You also mentioned that some Old Testament time periods, like the monarchy, get scant attention in that freshmen year course—students would study such time periods in greater depth "if they take a Scripture class as an elective senior year." Are there some aspects of the Old Testament that are not covered in the *Framework*'s required courses that you think all students should learn about, whether or not they take the Scripture elective in their senior year? If so, what are those?

7. Twice during the first interview, you expressed what sounded to me like a sense of resignation regarding the *Framework*. You stated that "we have this new stuff that we have to teach, so we've got to figure out how to do this" and, later, that "we're stuck with it, we're going to have to implement [it]." Is resignation the word that you would use to describe the feeling you were conveying in these brief quotes? If so, what else, if anything, would you like to say regarding this? If not, what word would you use instead, and why?

8. Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

APPENDIX P

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS: THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

EMAILED TO PARTICIPANTS

Carrie J. Schroeder—Dissertation Study—Preliminary Findings (11/30/12)
Research Question 1: How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe their experience of teaching courses based on the *Framework*?

Preliminary Themes and Subthemes

Standardization of RS curriculum across the country, just as other disciplines have standards

Positive impact on schools and/or teachers

- Standardization of curriculum within the school, so a student taking the same course with a different teacher is in fact taking the same course
- Giving legitimacy to the RS curriculum
- Departmental discussion

Perceived positive impact on students

- Fosters religious literacy
- Students get the opportunity to see how an RS course develops
- Greater ecclesial focus is helpful to students
- Christocentrism is important
- Students able to navigate the Bible

The *Framework* does not meet adolescents' various developmental needs

- Academic standards of the *Framework* are high, perhaps too high for the developmental level of the students
- Particular concern about the *Framework*'s 9th grade curriculum
- *Framework* doesn't match students' spiritual/religious developmental needs

Too much content, not enough time—a rush

- Needing to pick and choose what *Framework* content will actually be covered
- Not enough time to pursue interesting, tangential topics
- One department chair's ways of dealing with the *Framework*'s large quantity of content

  ➢ Rearranging the *Framework*'s content
  ➢ Caution about supplementing the *Framework*—not adding to students' stress
  ➢ Need to compact curriculum
  ➢ Spiral analysis

Repetition of content

Stressful, not as much fun for the teachers or the students

More work for teachers in preparing lessons

Mission/identity of the school and the role of the *Framework*

- Confidence that the *Framework* is helping the school to be true to Catholic tradition
- *Framework* is just one piece of the puzzle

The *Framework*'s implicit understanding of the role of the teacher

Negative impact on teachers

- Letting go of content that teachers enjoyed teaching
- Feeling frustrated and disrespected
- Loss of autonomy, creativity, and passion
- Concern over job security if students do not learn the material of the *Framework* well enough to pass the ACRE test and/or if the *Framework* isn't taught according to parental expectations
- Other potential losses

Perceived negative impact on students

- The *Framework* may be less effective than the prior curriculum
- A "bouncy" or "jumpy" curriculum—creates confusion for students and teacher
- All-girls environment: particular difficulties

An experiment, a work-in-progress

Reactions to the *Framework*'s apologetic approach

- Apologetics and students who are not Catholic or not Christian

Commitment to continue using the *Framework* only if it is effective

The *Framework* doesn't take into account the realities and constraints of U.S. Catholic secondary schools

Framework presents clear-cut answers, even though RS doesn't necessarily lend itself to that approach

The *Framework* as a middle ground

"You can't fight this," so "just do it, and then do whatever you want"
Not an overwhelming change—"it could be worse"

Counterproductive

Making the *Framework* relevant can be a challenge

Overall attitude: positive or negative

 "Softening" or nuancing the *Framework*'s language, and the language of *Framework*-based textbooks

Teaching the *Framework* getting easier over time

The *Framework* is not written in standards language

Research Question 2: How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe the *Framework*'s impact on the theological content they teach?

Preliminary Themes and Subthemes

No longer teach an introduction to Catholicism for 9th graders

Less time for sexuality education, and the corresponding need to develop creative ways to ensure that this content is still covered

A different approach to the Old Testament

- Less time spent on the Old Testament; therefore, less content in this area is covered
- Teaching the Old Testament along with the New Testament rather than in its own right
- The *Framework*'s approach to the Old Testament and respect or disrespect toward Judaism

Different approach to other religions—challenging with diverse student body

Much more advanced, detailed theological content and vocabulary

- This content can pose a particular challenge for students who are not Catholic

A Christocentric curriculum

- Potentially positive aspects of Christocentrism
- Potentially negative aspects of Christocentrism

Courses which teachers perceive to be important—some of which were required in schools' pre-*Framework* curricula—are given elective status in the *Framework*

- Church History
- Social Justice
- Scripture
- World Religions and/or interreligious dialogue and ecumenism

Mary—attention/time given

- *Framework* allows more time for Mary than the prior curriculum
- *Framework* does not allow enough time for Mary

Apologetic content which emphasizes the positive aspects of the Church and de-emphasizes its negative aspects (both historically and present-day)

Different approach to Scripture

- Frequently used/referred to, but not in the depth that was formerly possible in a full-year course
- Less content on historical-critical method and other methods of exegesis
- Literal and spiritual senses of Scripture—more emphasis
- Scriptural foundations of Catholic beliefs

Androcentric content

Charism/heritage—needing to be creative with how still to teach this material

Incorporating supplemental content into *Framework* courses

- Scripture—supplemental content
- Other supplemental content
- The impact of supplemental content on the time remaining to teach the *Framework*'s content

More content, less depth

Trinity presented earlier in the *Framework* than in the prior curriculum

Theological topics which receive greater emphasis in the *Framework*

- Emphasis on humans as searchers—and God as the answer to that search
- Emphasis on early Christological heresies
- A greater ecclesial focus
- Eschatology—greater emphasis

- Emphasis on apostolic succession
- Focus on universal call to discipleship

Theological topics which receive less emphasis in the *Framework*

- Less time to address students' real-life issues and struggles, and/or theological topics in which they have a natural interest
- Less time to study and experience prayer
- Less content on the Holy Spirit
- Little or no time to teach about Catholic liturgy and sacraments, especially at the 9th grade level
- Less attention to social justice

Research Question 3: How do Religious Studies teachers in U.S. Catholic secondary schools describe the *Framework*'s impact on the pedagogical methods they employ?

Preliminary Themes and Subthemes

More teacher-centered methodologies

- Teaching with an emphasis on getting students to pass the course and pass the ACRE test
- More teacher lecturing and student note-taking
- Greater use of and reliance on the textbook

More traditional assessment strategies

Examination of word parts, such as the Latin roots of English words

Memorization: some used before the *Framework*, but more with the *Framework*

Emphasis on cognitive skills, less emphasis on the affective or spiritual

Small-group discussions and sharing of students' personal perspectives, experiences, and questions

- The *Framework* allows less time for this type of classroom experience than the prior curriculum did
- The *Framework* allows adequate time for this type of classroom experience

Prayer experiences

- The *Framework* allows less time for in-class prayer experiences than did the prior curriculum
- The *Framework* allows adequate time for in-class prayer experiences

Activities, learning experiences, and projects that were used in the pre-*Framework* curriculum and are not being used in the *Framework* curriculum

Less able to meet the needs of students with diverse learning styles

Using creative, engaging pedagogical methods with the *Framework*

Pedagogy that aids in students' spiritual and religious formation

- Helping students to develop a relationship with Christ
- Pedagogy designed to help students accept Church teaching

Less focus on the big picture, more focus on details

Relating the content of the *Framework* to the real, everyday world

- It is difficult to relate the content of the *Framework* to the real, everyday world
- It is possible, and even easy, to relate the content of the *Framework* to the real, everyday world

Basic level of comprehension, without being able to move to higher-order thinking

Challenge of covering the amount of content in the *Framework* in a pedagogically appropriate manner

Strategies for dealing with the *Framework*'s repetitive content

- Teaching two semester-length *Framework* courses as one, integrated year-long course
- Pre-assessment
- Looking at content more deeply each time it is repeated
- Recognizing the value of repetition

Having students use out-of-class time or school vacations for research projects, to minimize the impact of such projects on class time

The *Framework*'s implicit pedagogy

Soliciting student input on what topics will be covered from a given chapter

Little to no pedagogical differences between the prior curriculum and the *Framework*

Greater use of primary ecclesial sources

Developing students' critical and logical thinking skills

Reflections of a department chair—impact on pedagogy utilized by department members

Recontextualizing activities that were done in pre-*Framework* curricula

Pedagogical implications of teaching the Old Testament along with the New, rather than in its own right

Hopes that pedagogy will improve in future years of teaching *Framework*-based courses

Preliminary Ancillary Findings

How the *Framework* is being implemented

- The *Framework* sales pitch
- Making adjustments to the *Framework* without consulting the diocese
- A course for only Catholics
- Lack of an absolute, rigid message regarding implementation from the bishop
- Concern about textbook selection
- Implementing the *Framework* "as is"
- Submitting non-*Framework* electives to the bishop
- Perceived greater flexibility at a religious order school
- A pilot year
- Diocesan restrictions on modifications to the *Framework*

Lack of official standards or qualifications for teaching RS in a Catholic secondary school

Marginalization of the RS department within the school

Suggestions/recommendations

- For teachers and administrators
- For the bishops
- For publishers
- Regarding the *Framework*'s scope and sequence

    - Need for a broader approach to Ethics than the *Framework* provides
    - A vocations course is not needed

University of California requirements

Potential tensions RS teachers experience

Speculation about the bishops' rationale in writing the *Framework* and the process by which they did so

Need for schools to conduct ongoing research as the *Framework* is implemented

Reflections on the experience of having participated in this study

Placement of important non-*Framework* content that was lost once the *Framework* was implemented

Remarks prefaced with the qualifier "it's only been one year"

Plans for the second and subsequent years of teaching *Framework*-based courses
Questions for the bishops

"Audacity"

Catechesis or evangelization

 "We're stuck with it," so "how do we make it sing?"

APPENDIX Q

EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS ACCOMPANYING THE PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

November 30, 2012

Dear X,

Greetings! I trust that all is well with you, and that this first semester of the school year has gone smoothly.

Once again, I wish to thank you for the time and effort that you have invested in participating in my doctoral dissertation study on the USCCB *Framework*. I am deeply grateful for the extent to which you were willing to share your experiences and perspectives with me during both of our interviews, and for your attention to reviewing the transcripts.

At this point, I have completed both my data collection (interviewing and transcribing) and data analysis (coding of the transcripts for themes and subthemes). Please find attached to this email a document that contains a preliminary list of all of the themes and subthemes that have emerged in the data analysis process, organized according to my research questions.

As you review this document, please bear in mind that in a qualitative study, all themes are reported, even those which only one participant articulated. Therefore, you will recognize your own views in some, but not all, of the themes.

You may recall that the methodological design of my study incorporated some aspects of Participatory Action Research (PAR). Therefore, I am now coming to you in this, the final phase of the study, hoping to engage with you in a shared, online conversation regarding a potential action plan rooted in the study's findings, that is, rooted in the knowledge that we have generated together. As a way to begin this conversation, I would like to invite you to consider the following questions:

1.   What comments do you have on the study's preliminary findings?
2.   Based on the study's preliminary findings, what needs can you identify?
3.   What are your ideas for avenues of action that could potentially address some of these identified needs?

I would be very grateful for any thoughts—lengthy or brief—which you could share with me, via email, regarding these questions.

In addition, I would like to ask that you consider whether you are willing to have your email address revealed to the other participants in this study. This would facilitate our collective engagement in a shared online conversation regarding a potential action plan.

- If you are *willing* to have your email address revealed to the other participants, please let me know which email address you would like me to use in further communication with the group.
- If you do *not* wish to have your email address revealed to the other participants, then you can still participate in dialogue regarding an action plan. Please simply

> email me your thoughts, and, if you are willing, I will share them, anonymously, with the other participants.

I look forward to hearing from you at your convenience; ideally, by January 1, 2013. Please know that I do recognize that this is a very busy time of year.

Thank you, again, and do not hesitate to contact me, via email or mobile phone, with any questions or concerns. Wishing you a joyful holiday season!

Sincerely,

Carrie J. Schroeder
cschroeder@mercyhs.org
Mobile phone: 510 325 9706

APPENDIX R

FOLLOW-UP EMAIL REGARDING AN ACTION PLAN

December 16, 2012

Dear X,

Greetings! I trust that you are well as you wrap up things at school and prepare for a well-deserved break!

I would just like to remind you, when you have a moment in this very busy season, to please look over the preliminary findings of my dissertation study, which I had emailed to you approximately two weeks ago. You will find the original email reprinted below; please refer to it for specific questions about which I am seeking your feedback. In addition, the original document containing the preliminary findings is attached to this email.

If possible, I would love to hear your thoughts regarding the preliminary findings and a potential action plan rooted in those findings on or before January 1, 2013. If you need additional time, please simply let me know; that will not be a problem.

In any case, please do confirm receipt of this email, in order to ensure that this contact information is still valid for you.

Many, many thanks for your generosity of time and effort in participating in my study! I wish you every blessing in these holy days, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Carrie J. Schroeder
cschroeder@mercyhs.org
Mobile phone: 510 325 9706

APPENDIX S

FINAL EMAIL REGARDING AN ACTION PLAN

January 13, 2013

Dear X,

Greetings and Happy New Year to you!

I am contacting you one final time in order to invite you to review the preliminary findings of my dissertation study, which I had emailed to you on November 30 of last year. You will find the original email reprinted below; please refer to it for specific questions about which I am seeking your feedback. In addition, the original document containing the preliminary findings is attached to this email.

Please share any thoughts with me regarding the preliminary findings and a potential action plan rooted in those findings on or before January 25, 2013. This will allow time for us, if you agree and if there is interest, to engage in a shared, online conversation regarding such an action plan, and for the substance of that conversation to be included in the final chapter of my dissertation.

If I do not hear from you in response to this email, I will not be contacting you again until my dissertation is completed, in order to determine if you would like to receive a copy of it.

Many thanks, again, for your participation in my study. Know that I am very grateful for all that you have contributed to my work, and that I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Carrie J. Schroeder
cschroeder@mercyhs.org
Mobile phone: 510 325 9706

APPENDIX T

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN

SUBJECTS (IRBPHS) APPROVAL

March 5, 2012

Dear Ms. Schroeder:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #12-015). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.

2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS. Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.

3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
----
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