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An Exploration of Catholic High School Religious Studies Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences of Their Role and Practice

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AN EXPLORATION OF CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL RELIGIOUS STUDIES TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF THEIR ROLE AND PRACTICE

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Dissertation Abstract

An Exploration of Catholic High School Religious Studies Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences of Their Role and Practice

Research literature has demonstrated that Catholic high school religion teachers face a number of possible challenges or tensions as they go about the preparation and practice of teaching religion. One challenge that emanates from the literature is that religious studies teachers are expected to be as professional as their counterparts in other disciplines, yet they lack the structural resources for developing that teaching professionalism (Cook, 2001; Cook & Hudson, 2006; Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, SCCE, 1988; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCCB, 2005). A second challenge is the expectation that religious studies teachers must meet the needs of students who desire religious instruction, students who are indifferent to religious instruction, and students who may lack knowledge of Catholicism, who may be non-Catholic, or who even may be cynical about religion altogether (Donlevy, 2007; McDonough, 2011; Rossiter, 1982; SCCE, 1988; USCCB, 2005). Religious studies teachers may also experience a third challenge in their approach to instruction: to teach in a constructivist or student-centered manner or to follow the expectations of the U.S. Catholic bishops to teach orthodox content and to correct faulty student knowledge (Groome, 1980, 2011; Manning, 2012; Ostasiewski, 2010; Rossiter, 1982; SCCE, 1988; USCCB, 1972, 2008).

A review of the literature on Catholic high school religious studies teachers revealed that there is a lack of research in the area of religious studies teachers'

perceptions of their role and in the area of the "what" and "how" of teachers' praxis as they navigate the challenges they experience. This study sought to explore these areas in a small group of religious studies teachers in order to add to the limited research that exists. The researcher conducted two semi-structured, in-depth interviews with four participants.

The study revealed that the participants view themselves as being and representing Church for their students and that they may be the only Church the students encounter. The participants did not experience tensions, so much as challenges. They did not experience the bishops' *Framework* as a tension as it had not yet been implemented in their dioceses. It also revealed that they face a variety of common challenges such as meeting the needs of both Catholic and non-Catholic students, making the classes relevant for their students, and including academic rigor without academic oppression. They have adapted their pedagogy to meet those challenges.

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.

Laura Witter Ramey	July 30, 2014
Candidate	Date

Dissertation Committee

Dr. Gini Shimabukuro	July 30, 2014
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Dr. Dan McPherson	May 6, 2014
Dr. Peter Williamson	May 6, 2014

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CHAPTER I

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

Catholic high school religion teachers face a number of possible challenges or tensions as they go about the preparation and practice of teaching religion. One challenge is that religious studies teachers are expected to be as professional as their counterparts in other disciplines, yet they lack the structural resources for developing that teaching professionalism (Cook, 2001; Cook & Hudson, 2006; Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, SCCE, 1988; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCCB, 2005). For instance, religious studies teachers do not receive pre-service training in pedagogy, methodology, content, or student teaching that is equivalent to their counterpoints in mainstream curriculum areas.

A second challenge is the expectation that religious studies teachers must meet the needs of students who desire religious instruction, students who are indifferent to religious instruction, and students who may lack knowledge of Catholicism, who may be non-Catholic, or who even may be cynical about religion altogether (Donlevy, 2007; McDonough, 2011; Rossiter, 1982; SCCE, 1988; USCCB, 2005). Religious studies teachers may also experience a third challenge in their approach to instruction: to teach in a constructivist or student-centered manner or to follow the expectations of the U.S. Catholic bishops to teach orthodox content and to correct faulty student knowledge (Groome, 1980, 2011; Manning, 2012; Ostasiewski, 2010; Rossiter, 1982; SCCE, 1988; USCCB, 1972, 2008). In their *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the*

Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age,[1] the U.S. Catholic Bishops (2008) expressed concern with passing along the faith to the faithful in a doctrinally accurate way, while the Church documents and many educators place value on students creating meaning from the content of that doctrine, rather than responding to the content by rote. Educators have also been concerned with the intellectual freedom and autonomy of their students (Groome, 1980, 2011; Manning, 2012; McDonough, 2010a, 2010b, 2011; Ostasiewski, 2010; Rossiter, 1982).

A fourth challenge, possibly a tension, rests in the authority that the teaching Magisterium and the local bishops[2] hold over religious studies teachers (McDonough, 2010b, 2011; Ostasiewski, 2010; SCCE, 1988, USCCB, 2005). All teachers in Catholic high schools serve at the behest of the diocesan bishop. The bishop may determine that a religious studies teacher is not adequately representing the faith in his or her classroom teaching and practice, ultimately resulting in dismissal.

There is a lack of depth and breadth in the research on Catholic high school religious studies teachers and religious instruction in the United States. Specifically, the possible challenges or tensions found in teaching religious studies, and the ways that religious studies teachers work through them, are under-researched in the literature on Catholic education. Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993) began the contemporary conversation with their study on the changes that have been made in Catholic high school religious education since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. Other recent studies include those of Cook (2001), Cook and Engle (2006) and, Cook and Hudson (2006). These studies included research on recruitment, preparation, retention, and professionalization

[1] Hereafter referred to as the *Framework*

[2] For the purposes of this document, the term bishop includes archbishop and the term diocese includes archdiocese

of Catholic high school religion teachers. O'Donnell (2009) examined the influence religious instruction had on the spiritual development of adolescent girls. Manning (2012) studied how Catholic documents provide guidance for implementing the Bishops' curriculum *Framework* (USCCB, 2008). While these studies do not exhaust the research on Catholic religious studies teachers and religious instruction in the United States, there is a paucity of research on the actual experiences and perceptions of Catholic high school religious studies teachers and their practice in the classroom. Specifically, the Catholic educational community lacks data on how religious studies teachers address the challenges and tensions inherent in their roles as religion teachers.

While this study is limited in scope, it will provide a snapshot of how Catholic high school religious studies teachers perceive their roles and how they navigate the possible challenges or tensions experienced in their practice and in their classrooms. The data provided by semi-structured, open-ended interviews may reveal important insights that may help the Catholic educational community develop standards, resources, and support for those who enter into the profession of teaching religious studies.

Background and Need

The teaching Magisterium is the teaching authority of the Catholic Church, made up of the pope and bishops. The Magisterium has contended that parents are the primary educators of their children (SCCE, 1988; USCCB, 2005). Yet, the USCCB (2005, 2008) expressed concerns that parents may not have adequate knowledge of the faith to pass down to their children. In this context, Catholic high schools are seen as the primary place where students continue to learn and practice the faith they first learned from their parents (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Groome, 1980, 1988; USCCB, 2005, 2008).

Catholic high school students continue the faith development that was begun in the home and, often, in Catholic elementary schools. All students in Catholic high schools are required to take a minimum of six semesters of theology or religious studies classes in order to graduate. Some schools designate this discipline as theology while others designate it as religion or religious studies. Religion courses may include Hebrew and Christian scripture, Christian morality, Church history, sacraments, Christology, world religions, and social justice.

There is no nationwide written policy, issued by the Catholic Church in the United States, as to the qualifications of those who wish to teach religious studies in Catholic high schools. Only two states, Nebraska and Wisconsin, issue state credentials for the discipline of religious studies (Cook, 2001). As Catholic high schools move towards having all teachers credentialed in their subject matter, religious studies teachers are more and more expected to hold a Master's degree in theology or religious studies, since there is limited opportunity to obtain a credential. According to Cook's (2001) study, 41% of Catholic high school religion teachers had Master's or doctorate degrees in theology, religious studies or religious education (p. 545).

These degrees generally do not include courses in pedagogy. Cook (2001) stated that state certification was one way to ensure that teachers have had some training in pedagogical methods. His study showed that less than half of his sample of religion teachers held a state certification or credential in any subject. Cook inferred that religious studies teachers may not be as grounded and prepared in pedagogy as their colleagues in other disciplines. He pointed out that Nebraska and Wisconsin did offer state certification for religion teachers. In the absence of state certification, some

individual dioceses have created certification programs for religion teachers. Cook found that 64% of the teachers he studied held such certifications. In the cases where such certification programs do not exist, the diocese provides a list of qualifications for teachers of religious studies. For example, the Archdiocese of San Francisco (Archdiocese of San Francisco & American Federation of Teachers Local 2240, 2011) spelled out the expectations for qualified teachers of religion in their 2011 Collective Bargaining Agreement.

The USCCB (2008) has clearly delineated the doctrinal expectations and learning outcomes of Catholic high school religion classes in their *Framework*. The bishops' *Framework* does not provide data on how the courses in religious studies are currently being taught in Catholic high schools, nor does it suggest a pedagogical method. Both of these elements are beyond the scope of the *Framework*. Yet, the *Framework* provides the first official standards in the United States by which clearly teachers and administrators may evaluate the content of their curricula regarding doctrinal elements. Thus, at present, religious studies teachers are told what to teach, but not how.

Need for the Study

There is a recognized need by the Catholic educational community that, in order to develop the faith of Catholic students and to secure the future of the U.S. Catholic Church, Catholic high schools must be focused on transmitting knowledge of the faith and on faith development (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Groome, 1980, 1998; 2011; USCCB, 2008). This study will add to the under-researched area of teaching religious studies in U.S. Catholic high schools, the "what" and "how" of teachers' teaching practice, and the understanding they have of their roles in teaching religious studies. A

more thorough discussion of the philosophy of Catholic education and religious studies instruction, and the challenges and tensions that arise in teaching religious studies, will be presented in the Review of Literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the perceptions of Catholic high school religious studies teachers of their role as instructors of religious studies. The purpose was also to explore the perceptions and experiences of any challenges or tensions that each teacher encountered and navigated in his or her practice.

Conceptual Framework

The practice of teaching religious studies in Catholic high schools is impacted by a number of forces at play within contemporary religious education. The role of religious studies teachers in Catholic high schools is unique. The possible challenges and tensions they experience are different from challenges and tensions that are experienced by, for example, math or chemistry teachers. The sources of challenges and tensions that may be experienced by religious studies teachers include the individual identity and perceived role of the religious studies teacher (Donlevy, 2007; Rossiter, 1982; USCCB, 1972; SCCE, 1988), the Magisterium of the Catholic Church (SCCE, 1988, 1997; USCCB, 1972, 1978, 2005), the USCCB's *Framework* for religious instruction (USCCB, 2008), and the expectations of sound pedagogy (Cook, 2001; Cook & Hudson, 2006; Rossiter, 1982).

I employed Thomas Groome's (2011) philosophy of religious education as the conceptual framework for this study, a lens through which to examine religious studies teachers' experience of those challenges and tensions. For over three decades, Groome

developed an approach to Catholic religious education that he called "shared praxis," in his earlier work, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (1980). This philosophy evolved into "life to faith to life" in *Will There Be Faith?* (2011). His goal was to make explicit a philosophy of Catholic education. Building on the work and ideas of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Paolo Freire, Groome proposed that religious education, and, even, Catholic spirituality begins with one's life and life's experiences. Those experiences are reflected upon in light of scripture and Christian tradition. Such reflection then brings one back to life. In other words, the reflection is what allows scripture and tradition to affect one's life so that it becomes a life of lived faith.

Groome (2011) argued that the attitude of Catholic religious education should be that of attraction. He compared Catholic educators to Peter, James and John when Jesus calls them to follow him and become fishers of men [*sic*] (NRSV, Lk 5:1-11). He stated:

> Perhaps this is a helpful image for the work of Catholic educators. We are indeed to "catch" people, attracting and actively engaging them as agents of their own learning, so that they may become more fully alive for themselves and for the life of the world. (p. 238)

Groome (2011) proposed eight elements that make a Catholic school Catholic: 1) Catholic anthropology: made and growing in the Divine image, 2) a Catholic cosmology: a sacramental outlook on life in the world, 3) a Catholic sociology: made for each other, 4) a Catholic epistemology: a reasonable wisdom for life, 5) A Catholic historicity: the wisdom of the ages, 6) a Catholic politics: justice for all, 7) a Catholic spirituality: a God-shaped hollow in the human heart, and 8) a Catholic universality: people without borders. He believed that these elements should permeate the school, and, especially, religious studies classes.

While all of these elements informed my work, three of them were particularly

pertinent to the study. First, Catholic anthropology is an understanding that we are all created in God's image, which is "a permanent gift" (Groome, 2011, p. 240). This is recognition of the inner goodness of all human beings, with no one excluded. For the purposes of education, Groome noted:

> The conviction that we are made in God's image surely calls for holistic education that engages the whole person, head, heart, and hands. It should fully develop the capacities of learners' minds for reason, memory, and imagination; the capacities for their hearts for right and loving relationships; the capacities of their wills to know, choose, and live the best of values and life-giving virtues. . . . They should be empowered in their great human potential and be prepared to be makers of history toward God's reign. (p. 240)

The second element that provided a lens for this study is Catholic politics, by which Groome (2011) observed that all education is political, particularly Catholic education that is called to aim for the reign of God. A goal is to help students live lives of justice that contribute to the coming of that reign. Groome argued that:

> Graduates [of Catholic schools] should have a fire in the belly for justice at every level in church and in society. They ought to come out committed to oppose all sinful social structures and to help reform them or create new ones. In Catholic schools, justice and peace – the coming of God's reign – should be a standard guideline for what and how to teach across all subjects. Conversely, if graduates of Catholic schools emerge with social biases and prejudices, if they come out sexist, racist, elitist, ageist, homophobic, or biased in any other way, we have not given them a truly Catholic education. (p. 251)

The third is Groome's (2011) call for Catholic universality. To be Catholic is to include everybody. He discussed the destructive nature of close-mindedness and saw a Catholic approach to life to be one that creates communities, "care without borders" (p. 254):

> A truly Catholic education ought to nurture in people an inclusive and universal consciousness, enabling them to welcome in and reach out to all comers. It should encourage a deep respect and appreciation for – not just toleration of – every "other" . . . . An either-or stance is what most often leads to war and violence, injustice and oppression . . . . [I]f students come out of Catholic schools

> with attitudes that reflect sectarianism, parochialism, and closed-mindedness, we have not given them a Catholic education. (p. 255)

In his work on "life to faith to life," Groome (2011) promoted a deep understanding of scripture and Catholic tradition. Yet, scripture and tradition are not enough. As Groome explained about the Emmaus story (pp. 264-265, NRSV, Luke 24:13-35), the Catholic educator begins with the students' life experience, then moves to scripture and tradition, urges reflection on the two, and provides opportunities for students to integrate life experiences with scripture and tradition to achieve a lived faith, in which relationships and actions are informed by faith.

Groome addressed the realities that Catholic educators face in teaching students who are not Catholic. Catholic education provides opportunities for such students to learn about Christian tradition and spirituality in ways that may encourage them to think about their own traditions. Groome (2011) stated:

> [Catholic schools] can provide them [non-Catholic students] with a rich moral and spiritual formation, with a sense of meaning and purpose in life as well as with a good education that prepares them to live well and to be good citizens who contribute to the common good of society. (p. 236)

Finally, Groome made connections between his philosophy of religious education and pedagogical practice. He argued for a religious education that requires "intentionality, preparation, and some deep convictions on the part of the religious educator" (2011, p. 262). He described a key approach to pedagogy:

> So anyone aspiring to take this approach must commit to creating a community of conversation among participants; to actively engage them as agents of their own and one another's learning; to invite them to express and reflect critically on their lives in dialogue with each other; to lend them ready, persuasive, and meaningful (connecting with their lives) access to Christian Story and Vision; to encourage them to appropriate its teachings and spiritual wisdom as their own; and to invite them to make decisions for lived Christian faith. (p. 263)

Groome's philosophy and suggestions for a pedagogical approach was the lens the researcher used when considering the data and findings in this study.

Research Questions

In this study, the over-arching question is: How do religious studies teachers in U.S. Catholic high schools perceive their role in the Catholic high school? Secondarily, how is that role exemplified in the way religious studies teachers address perceived challenges or tensions in their praxis? The specific research questions that that I explored are:

1. How do U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers experience their role as instructors of religious studies?
2. What do U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers experience regarding the challenges or tensions that they might encounter in the teaching of religious studies?
3. How do U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers respond to and navigate these challenges or tensions in their practice in the classroom?
4. What pedagogical methods have U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers developed that help them to address the challenges or tensions?

Significance

This adds to the limited body of literature on Catholic high school religious studies teachers and religious studies instruction in the United States. It seeks to go beyond recent studies and discussions about religious studies teachers and instruction by adding data on the actual perceptions and experiences of religious studies teachers in the classroom. Thus, it makes a unique contribution to the on-going conversation within a

Church that is concerned with developing and nurturing the faith of young people in the school setting. The study adds to the minimal amount of literature on pedagogical methods used by religious studies teachers.

The study has significance in that it describes how religious studies teachers perceive and experience the possible challenges or tensions encountered in their profession. The data represents the point of view of practicing educators rather than the point of view of the philosophical and theoretical documents of the Catholic Church. It illuminates important insights for the U.S. Catholic bishops, and stakeholders in Catholic education, to consider as they continue to address the teaching of religion to adolescents. In addition, the study suggests areas for further research in Catholic religious studies education.

Definition of Terms

Apologetics: ". . . a theological science which has for its purpose the explanation and defense of the Christian religion."
(Catholic Encyclopedia, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/)

Bishop: ". . . the title of an ecclesiastical dignitary who possesses the fullness of the priesthood to rule a diocese as its chief pastor, in due submission to the primacy of the pope."
(Catholic Encyclopedia, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/)

Catechesis: ". . . the communication of religious knowledge; Church teachings in a question/answer format." (Rossiter, 1988, p. 266); "a dialogue of believers" (p. 268)

Diocese: ". . . the territory or churches subject to the jurisdiction of a bishop."
(Catholic Encyclopedia, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/)

Doctrine: "…the act of teaching or the knowledge imparted by teaching…" in reference to Roman Catholic Church teaching.
(Catholic Encyclopedia, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/)

Education in Faith: ". . . religious education aimed at handing on a particular religious faith tradition. Education in faith seeks to exercise and deepen the believing

activity of the individual and is directed towards better understanding of the faith tradition of a particular religion or church. Education in faith implies more than teaching or the giving of information." (Rossiter, 1982, p. 35)

Education in Religion: ". . . an approach to religious education where the justification, aims, rationale and practices for the activity come from the general educational process and not from the concerns of a community of faith. . . . Education in religion focuses on how the study of religion may contribute to the general education of pupils." (Rossiter, 1982, p. 35)

Faith Formation: "Passing on faith to the next generation…" (Lytch, 13) For the purposes of this study, formation implies a guidance in reflecting on faith and opportunities to apply faith to one's life, always remembering that faith formation in a lifelong process.

Laity: ". . . the people; the body of the faithful, outside of the ranks of the clergy." (Catholic Encyclopedia, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/)

Magisterium: ". . . the teaching authority of the Catholic Church, made up of Pope and Bishops; in matters of faith and morals, the Magisterium is infallible." (Ostasiewski, 2010, p. 83)

Second Vatican Council: The Council called by Pope John XXIII in 1962; the Council closed in 1965 under Pope John VI; the Council generated numerous documents and declarations with the purpose of opening the Church to the modern world. (Bokenkotter, 2005)

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: A national organization of Catholic Bishops established to address the concerns of the Catholic community in the United States and to provide guidance for the Catholic community.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Restatement of the Problem

Due to the lack of published research on religious studies teachers' perceptions of their role and of their experiences in the classroom, the Catholic educational community knows very little about how religion teachers navigate the challenges or tensions that are inherent in teaching religious studies in Catholic high schools. These challenges or tensions include, but are not limited to: 1) considering the purpose of religious studies education in Catholic high schools, 2) understanding the role of the religious studies teacher, 3) developing and maintaining professionalism as religious studies teachers, 4) meeting the needs of diverse student realities, 5) choosing content, pedagogy and methodology, and 6) being subject to the authority of the teaching Magisterium. The problem under study was: How do teachers navigate these challenges or tensions in their practice?

Overview

In this Review of Literature I explore the ongoing conversations that address the challenges and tensions experienced in teaching religious studies in Catholic high schools. I begin the review by examining the purpose of religious education and the role of the religious studies teacher. I then discuss issues of professional preparation and on-going expectations of religious studies teachers. The literature review continues by examining the realities of the religious diversity found in the students who take religious studies classes and the challenges experienced by religious studies teachers as they strive to meet the needs of all their students. The next section explores the challenges found in

the choices made as to the methodology to be used in the classroom. I conclude the Review of Literature with the challenges and tensions experienced by religion teachers as they fall under the authority of the teaching Magisterium of the Catholic Church.

Purpose of Catholic Religious Education

Catechesis v. Religious Education

For some time a conversation in Catholic education has focused on whether the purpose of religious studies classes in Catholic high schools is catechesis, the passing on of the faith to believers, or religious education, providing knowledge of the Catholic faith and inviting students to the faith. Two key sources of Church documents are the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (SCCE 1977, 1982, 1988, 1997) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB 1972, 1978, 2005, 2008). The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1988) noted that religious education differed from catechesis. Catechesis "presupposes that the hearer is receiving the Christian message as a salvific reality. Moreover, catechesis takes place within a community living out its faith at a level of space and time not available to a school: a whole lifetime" (¶ 68). The SCCE went on to say that the "aim of school is knowledge" (¶ 69), in that its purpose is to provide systematic knowledge of the Catholic faith. The SCCE acknowledged that some students are not engaged in overt faith development while others are ready to make a commitment to the faith. Religious education, as opposed to strict catechesis, addresses the needs of this diverse student body.

The question of "What is religious education in Catholic schools?" came under discussion after the Second Vatican Council and the publication of *To Teach as Jesus Did* (USCCB, 1972). The Bishops pointed out that an essential purpose of Catholic education

is to nurture faith development in young people and to connect the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church to the lived experience of the students.

At the same time, there was a felt need to differentiate between the catechesis found in parishes and the religious education found in Catholic schools (Rossiter, 1982). Borrowing from Marthaler (1978), Rossiter defined catechesis as the "systematic instruction and participation in experiences within a faith community directed towards formal initiation of adult believers" (p. 24). Prior to Vatican II, religion classes in Catholic schools were seen as the means for passing on the faith to Catholic youth. Once an understanding of the differentiation between catechetics and religious education began to develop, Rossiter stated that the USCCB (1978), in their National Catechetical Directory published as *Sharing the Light of Faith*, showed a preference for the purpose and methods of catechetics. Catechesis is assuming "A body of faith-oriented theory, concerned mainly with a voluntary faith-community context" (p. 25). Rossiter (1982) argued that viewing catechetics and religious education as synonymous was problematic for religious education in Catholic schools. He pointed out the limits to the religious education classroom that make using a catechetical approach inappropriate.

A key problem, in Rossiter's (1982) eyes, was that religious education is compulsory in Catholic schools. The teaching of catechetics is "applied uncritically to a compulsory classroom setting" (p. 25). The emphasis of classroom instruction might be better focused on teaching religious knowledge and content. In other words, Rossiter did not see the role of religious studies classes in schools to be that of evangelization of the faithful. Faith sharing cannot be made compulsory. The issue of whether religious studies classes in Catholic schools should take a catechetical approach or an academic

approach that addresses religious knowledge has caused confusion about the role of religion teachers.

Groome (1980, 2011) focused on the role of religious education as education that points to relationship with God, the transcendent. The focus of such education should be on empowering students in their quest for the transcendent. This empowerment points to the agency of the student. Groome promoted the importance of agency when he stated that students must not be manipulated or indoctrinated. Thus, the religious education in schools is not strictly catechetical. All education should have genuine emancipation as an end, including religious education. Groome stated that true religious education is an activity directed toward the future. The teacher does not see the final culmination of his or her students' religious education.

More recently, USCCB's (2008) *Framework* demonstrated that the bishops were concerned that Catholic students were not receiving adequate and accurate religious instruction in the home. The inference was that such instruction must, then, take place in the Catholic school. The *Framework* was a curriculum design focused on the catechetical approach. There was little attention given to, or space provided for, the non-Catholic student. Thus, the *Framework* posed catechesis as the purpose of the religion class.

In short, there is a tension between whether the purpose of religious education is to develop faith in the faithful or is to teach knowledge about the Catholic faith to Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Groome and Rossiter made the case that developing curriculum solely for Catholic children does not meet the needs of today's Catholic schools and their religiously diverse student bodies.

Role of the Religious Studies Teacher

The religious studies teacher is left with the challenge of choosing a place on a continuum between catechetical instruction and religious education. The Magisterium indicates that, while the Church expresses deep respect for the role of the teacher (USCCB, 1972), religious studies teachers are expected to teach doctrine and to prepare students to live in a way that constitutes Christian witness and that engages them in service to others. The SCCE (1988) also emphasized the witness to the faith that religious studies teachers bring to their students:

> The religion teacher is the key, the vital component, if the educational goals of the school are to be achieved. But the effectiveness of religious instruction is closely tied to the personal witness given by the teacher. . . . Teachers of religion, therefore, must be men and women endowed with many gifts, both natural and supernatural, who are also capable of giving witness to these gifts; they must have a thorough cultural, professional, and pedagogical training, and they must be capable of genuine dialogue. (¶ 96)

The question of the purpose of Catholic religious studies classes remains problematic for religious studies teachers, as demonstrated in Donlevy's (2007) study of Canadian Catholic religion teachers. Some teachers understood that the purpose was "to instill the Catholic faith in students; in other words, to evangelize Catholic youth into the faith" (p. 16). Others understood that the purpose was to "instill basic human values, the golden rule" (p. 16). Religious studies teachers experience this ambiguity of purpose and role.

The following section explores some of the inherent challenges and tensions experienced by teachers of religious studies in Catholic high schools given the, sometimes, competing demands of catechesis and religious education.

Challenges and Tensions to Be Navigated in the Teaching of Religious Studies

Professional Preparation and Development of Religious Studies Teachers

The preparation of the teacher is an important theme in the Church documents. The bishops (USCCB, 1972) recognized that the laity comprises a growing percentage of religious studies teachers in U.S. Catholic high schools and that lay teachers are not secondary in value to vowed religious teachers. "They [lay religious teachers] are full partners in the Catholic educational enterprise, and the dramatic increase of their numbers and influence in recent years is welcome and desirable in itself" (¶ 147).

The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1988) acknowledged the diversity of the students in Catholic schools, as well as the implications of student diversity for religious studies teachers in addressing student needs. The SCCE held up the expectation that religious studies teachers would be adequately prepared to teach in a systematic and rigorous way. The Congregation did not shy away from the natural skepticism of students and their need to ask questions. Given this inquisitiveness, the religious studies teacher must be well-grounded in doctrinal content in order to address students' questions. The SCCE commented on the need for the Church to assure the preparation of religious studies teachers in the face of such skepticism:

> In this area, especially, an unprepared teacher can do a great deal of harm. Everything possible must be done to ensure that Catholic schools have adequately trained religion teachers. . . We need to look to the future and promote the establishment of formation centers for these teachers; ecclesiastical universities and faculties should do what they can to develop appropriate programs so that the teachers of tomorrow will be able to carry out their task with the competence and efficacy that is expected of them. (¶ 97)

A challenge springs from the Church's requirement that teachers be well trained

while there remains a lack of specific guidelines and resources, from the Church itself, on pedagogical training, content knowledge, and vocational formation (Cook, 2001; Cook & Hudson, 2006). Lay religious studies teachers have not had the rigorous theological training of vowed religious men and women, whom they are replacing as teachers of religious studies in Catholic high schools.

In addition to theological training, the Congregation (SCCE, 1988) contended that teachers must be up to date on pedagogical methodology, making use of all the tools available to them. The USCCB's (2008) *Framework* outlined a clear guideline for content knowledge in religion classes. However, other than suggesting the apologetic approach to responding to students' questions, the *Framework* did not provide pedagogical guidance. The purpose of the document was content, not pedagogy.

One indicator of adequate teacher preparation is the credentialing process found in all states. State certification establishes that teacher candidates have had formal instruction and preparation in pedagogy in their fields of discipline (Cook, 2001). While the Church expects religious studies teachers to have similar training in content knowledge and pedagogy as teachers in other disciplines, only two states have certification programs for religion teachers, namely, Nebraska and Wisconsin (Cook, 2001). In all other states, Catholic religious studies teachers are certified by their dioceses, if such certification programs exist.

When considering the formal education of religious studies teachers, Cook (2001) found that 22% of the teachers in his survey had no previous Catholic schooling. Only 57.1% of the religious studies teachers had majors and minors in religious studies or theology, far less than the content background of teachers in secular disciplines. Less

than half of the teachers in the study had advanced degrees in religious studies or theology, yet those teachers who held advanced degrees contended that their teaching was positively impacted by that education.

Cook and Hudson (2006) were concerned with the development of special knowledge and skills, when considering the professional preparation of religious studies teachers:

> Regrettably, a list of special knowledge and skills that religion teachers should possess does not exist. . . . Catholic Church documents provide little guidance for identifying and/or fully describing a knowledge and skill set for religion teachers. (p. 411)

They also found that there were no clear performance standards or written code of ethics for teachers of religious studies.

In other words, the expectations of religious studies teachers, as expressed by the Magisterium, are great. Religious studies teachers are expected to be faithful witnesses to the faith. The Magisterium recognizes that religious studies teachers must teach to a highly diverse student population. The Magisterium is also aware that religious studies teachers are replacing vowed religious teachers, and is concerned that lay teachers be adequately prepared. At the same time, there is little concrete or formal support for religious studies teachers to gain the skills and credentials that they need.

Contextual Realities of Students

Another area of challenge or tension, experienced by religious studies teachers, is that of meeting the needs of Catholic students and meeting the needs of non-Catholic students. Since the publication of *Dignitatis Humanae* (Vatican II, 1965a , ¶ 2 & ¶ 9) and *Gravissium Educationis* (Vatican II, 1965b, ¶ 9), the Catholic Church has recognized that Catholic schools teach Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The acknowledgement of the

right to religious freedom and recognition that Catholic schools must meet the needs of all their students continued in the official documents of the following decades, (SCCE, 1977, 1982, 1988, 1997). A key element of this dilemma is exemplified in *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (SCCE, 1988):

> Not all students in Catholic schools are members of the Catholic Church; not all are Christians. There are, in fact, countries in which the vast majority of the students are not Catholics . . . . The religious freedom and the personal conscience of individual students and their families must be respected, and this freedom is explicitly recognized by the church. On the other hand, a Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a formation based on the values to be found in a Christian education; this is its right and its duty. To proclaim or to offer is not to impose, however; the latter suggests a moral violence which is strictly forbidden, both by the Gospel and by Church law. (¶ 6)

In the decades since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic educational community has recognized that religious studies classes were no longer made up solely of Catholic students, but included other Christians, students of other faiths, and students of no faith (Donlevy, 2007; Mulligan, 1999; Rossiter, 1982). The Magisterium was concerned with the response of teachers to this reality. The question of religious pluralism in Catholic high school students refers, once again, to the purpose of the Catholic school. Morris (1997) set up the dichotomy between the pluralistic model and the traditional model of the Catholic school.

> . . . some promoters of the pluralistic model assume that single faith schools are inappropriate for children living in a pluralistic society. Consequently, for both groups, Catholic faith and practices are presented as one of a number of possible alternative "life stances" which pupils are encourage to explore and, possibly, accept. . . [T]he confessional school . . . seeks a synthesis of faith and culture and looks to sustain and develop the faith community, together with the home, and the parish, to transmit a specific Catholic vision of life. (p. 379)

Given this diversity in the student body, Rossiter (1988) argued that to view the classroom as purely the means to transmit the faith to the faithful no longer reflected the

contextual realities of Catholic schools. He contended that what should be expected in religious studies classes was the "educational study of religion" (p. 30).

In addition to the faith element of religious studies classes, religious studies teachers face serious challenges in meeting the needs of their students who experience the world as a hostile place (SCCE, 1988):

> Many young people find themselves in a condition of radical instability. . . . [T]hey live in a one-dimensional universe in which the only criterion is practical utility and the only value is economic and technological progress. . . . [O]thers live in an environment devoid of truly human relationships; as a result, they suffer from loneliness and a lack of affection. This is a widespread phenomenon that seems to be independent of life-style; it is found in oppressive regimes, among the homeless, and in the cold and impersonal dwellings of the rich. (¶ 10)

The SCCE also acknowledged the influence of the norms of U.S. society on young people as they grapple with their faith, or lack of faith.

> Students will raise the standard objections [to Jesus' teachings of love]: violence in the world, racial hatred, daily crime, both young and old concerned only with themselves and what they can get for themselves. Teachers cannot avoid discussing these issues, but they should insist that the commandment of Christ is new and revolutionary, and that it stands in opposition to all that is evil and to every form of egoism. (¶ 86)

In summary, Church documents stated that teachers should teach to the whole child, encouraging the students to become fully whom they are destined to be. The centrality of this teaching is Jesus Christ. Teachers start with meeting the students where they are, in other words, recognizing the contextualization of the students. Thus, the realities of the students' lives must be taken into consideration when teaching religious education. In the context of a society that is so focused on individual needs and successes, teachers are to develop, in their students, what it means to be in community, through the lens of Christ. This includes developing mutual respect and seeking understanding of one another. Given a religiously diverse student body and a secular

society, religious studies teachers may experience challenges and tensions in how to teach to all students and how to make the Gospel message relevant in their lives.

Course Content, Pedagogy, and Methodology

Course Content

The bishops (USCCB, 1972) expected specific areas of content knowledge to be taught in religious studies classes, including the social nature of the human person, the dignity of the person, love for one another, responsibility to community, service to all, the ideas of justice and peace, and the core Catholic theological doctrines. In 2008, the bishops developed the *Framework* as a guide for educators and publishers in order to ensure that religious studies classes and textbooks accurately reflected the doctrines of the Catholic Church that should be included in high school curricula materials. Textbook publishers were called to revise their publications, to adhere to a set of guidelines, and to obtain approval of the USCCB Committee on Catholic Education prior to publication.

The bishops' *Framework* (2008) established a core sequence of curriculum in order to standardize the teaching of Catholic education throughout the United States. The curriculum consisted of six required religious studies courses and a selection of five elective courses, all of which are Christ-centered. It was suggested that the elective courses be reserved for junior and senior level students. The required course subjects included Christ as revealed in scripture, Christology, the Paschal Mystery, ecclesiology, sacraments, and morality. The elective courses included choice among courses in scripture, Church history, social justice, Christian vocations, and Church understandings of other faiths. The *Framework* included an outline of the specific Church teachings as they pertain to course content. In public school terms, these could be considered the

standards for Catholic education courses. Teachers must have extensive knowledge of these content areas. While the *Framework* was designed as a tool for textbook publishers, most recently some Catholic dioceses, such as Los Angeles, have adopted the outline of the *Framework* as their curriculum plan.

Pedagogy and Methodology

According to the SCCE (1988), methodology for teaching religion should include fidelity to the Gospel, rigor in the study, and diversity of teaching methods in order to address the needs of each student. Religious studies teachers must be prepared to take on the task of teaching religion. Manning (2012) argued that, while the Church documents do not provide a clear systematic pedagogy, they do provide specific guidelines for pedagogy and methodology.

One concern raised in the area of pedagogical method is the place of religion classes in the context of the other academic disciplines of the school. In other words, is a religious studies teacher expected to employ similar pedagogical methods or practice as teachers in other disciplines? Rossiter (1982) stated that, post-Vatican II, some teachers were beginning to treat the subject of religion in Catholic schools as if it were of similar status to that of other disciplinary subjects. These teachers were placing "an emphasis on content, study skills, written work, assignments and assessment . . ." (p. 30). Such teachers met with resistance from other religion teachers who perceived that religious studies should not be treated as an academic subject, and, thus, urged that there be no written work or assessments. The confusion for teachers lay in which paradigm to follow, the faith-sharing catechetical paradigm or the subject-oriented, religious education paradigm. Rossiter argued that the compulsory faith-sharing that was found in

the catechetical approach might violate the personal freedom of the student:

> . . . to presume at the start that a religion class ought to be able to share freely at this level fails to give proper respect to the pupils' personal freedom regarding faith. Such a presumption also fails to appreciate the natural range of variation in faith commitments in pupils who are not necessarily in the religion class by choice. (p. 34)

Rossiter (1988) was concerned that religious education had not yet found a clearly defined approach. He stated that:

> The most appropriate slant or context for classroom religious education is to base it within an intellectual study – one that does not suffer by comparison with cognitive challenges and study structures experienced by students in other subject areas .. . . [A]n open, critical, inquiring study of religion will do more to develop faith, attitudes, emotions, values, commitment, and aesthetic sensitivity than an approach that tries to deal with these personal areas more exclusively or explicitly. (pp. 268-269)

Rossiter concluded his thoughts on teaching religion by arguing that religion classes must share equity with the other subjects taught in the school. Therefore, religious studies classes need to include: systematic learning structures, sequenced progress, appropriate texts, homework, assessment and official accreditation (p. 276). An academic approach, which Rossiter called an *education* approach, would complement the catechesis that the students receive in their parishes and the faith-sharing they experience in school retreats and service projects.

A second concern is the role of the students in learning the academic and faith components of the religious studies class. Groome (1980) stated, "The Church is to exist for the sake of the kingdom and never for its own sake" (p. 50). It is the obligation of education and educators to assist students in developing an intellectual process for discerning the sake of the Kingdom. Catholic holistic education should develop the students' abilities to reason, to enter into loving relationships, and to choose the best

values and virtues that will contribute to their becoming fully human. Intellectual discernment, reasoning, and choosing are all dependent, to some degree, on critical thinking, and are all focused on the active participation of the students.

For Groome (2011), the students are subjects, not objects, and they are makers of history. He wrote forcefully about the necessity for student and teacher agency in *Will There Be Faith*:

> Given peoples' "inner vitality," they need to be active participants in the teaching/learning dynamic, agents of their own knowing and not just passive recipients. They should be empowered in their great human potential and be prepared to be makers of history toward God's reign. (p. 241)

Students have their own stories and their own realities. The work of the religious studies teacher is to provide opportunities for connecting those stories to the greater Christian story and to encourage their agency in bringing the present world closer to the reality that God intended, the Kingdom of God. The pedagogy should, then, be focused on building these relationships and connections. Groome urged that the pedagogical method be one of dialectical and dialogical sharing. When using the term critical reflection, Groome stated that it is a reflection that invites evaluation of the present, memory of the past, as it is reflected in the present, and imagination for the future. The dialogue that takes place in Christian religious education is aimed at nurturing such critical reflection. This includes the actions of listening and telling. Groome's dialogical approach to pedagogy is one of self-discovery:

> When dialogue involves authentic expressing/listening activity, then the consequences are both disclosure and discovery for the people involved. By listening to others disclose themselves to me, I can help them discover themselves. And in disclosing myself to others, I can discover myself. (p. 189)

The SCCE (1988) also emphasized the use of discussion and listening as pedagogical

methods. It encouraged the use of the discovery process of teaching and learning, as differentiated from a strict didactic process.

Groome (2011) then argued that Catholic education should "promote critical and creative thinking, an open pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, and help people to realize and embrace the responsibilities for their knowledge" (p. 246). Groome urged critical analysis as a goal of religious education:

> Our injustices are often hidden or made to seem legitimate, as if this is the way things should be. Catholic education must enable people to see what should be seen in society. And beyond seeing what should be seen, Catholic education is to empower people to redress situations of injustice and dispose them to work for change toward justice for all. . . . Conversely, if graduates of Catholic schools emerge with social biases and prejudices, if they come out sexist, racist, elitist, ageist, homophobic, or biased in any other way, we have not given them a truly Catholic education. (p. 251)

Thus, any pedagogical method used in the religious studies class should contribute to developing the students' abilities to engage in this critical analysis.

A third concern that follows from the question of the role and agency of the students is that of including critical inquiry and thinking in religious studies classes. McDonough (2010a) proposed that religious studies teachers have some latitude to include critical thinking as a pedagogical method when addressing non-infallible teachings. He posed this as the dilemma of the religious studies teacher: that they have the responsibility to cover the core curricular content of Catholic religious knowledge, "whether their students agree or not" (p. 290), and that they must use sound pedagogical methods:

> . . . in addition to this requirement for orthodoxy, the norms of good pedagogy dictate moving beyond rote memorization of content (i.e., doctrine, tradition, and Scripture) toward critical thinking (i.e., "thinking religiously" about authority, truth claims, moral dilemmas, exegesis, and many other things) as the context-specific brand of critical thinking in religion classes; such an approach to

> curriculum enables students to incorporate their intentions into the teaching-learning relationship by "thinking with the Church." (p. 290)

In "The Problem of Catholic School Teachers Deferring to the Home on Controversial Religious Issues," McDonough (2010a) stated that the religious studies classroom is precisely the place for controversial issues to be addressed. He argued that, by deferring controversial issues to the home, the school sidesteps its "responsibility to promote higher-order religious thinking" (p. 287). Like Groome (2011), McDonough (2010a) recognized that one purpose of education was to develop students towards becoming informed citizens:

> Even on certain controversial civil secular issues there is arguably an agreement that the role of the Catholic school is to foster the kind of intellectual breadth and depth necessary to the reasonable development of its students as moral political subjects who must make informed decisions as citizens, and is not to tell them specifically what to think. (p. 288)

This development of moral and political agency may be fostered in the religious studies class as religious studies teachers guide students by teaching for critical thinking. Students should be offered opportunities to do such things as "collecting information, assessing its validity as evidence, and developing their own opinions based on that work" (p. 288). McDonough stated that one goal is to teach students to think independently, not to teach them what to think.

McDonough (2010a) pointed out the benefits of religious studies classes in *not* being the final word on controversial issues. He stated that when teachers do not provide closed answers on controversial issues, students come to understand that there are "moral options outside the formal curriculum" (p. 299). To leave questions open to investigation and discussion, encouraging students to speak with their parents about concerns that arise, is consistent with the Church's position that parents are the primary educators of

their children, particularly in matters of faith. Leaving questions open also supports students' personal freedom and agency.

In her critique of the *Framework* (USCCB, 2008), Ostasiewski (2010) expressed concern with the apologetic approach to the challenge questions at the end of each chapter. The bishops focused their attention on preparing students to provide doctrinal responses to defend the faith rather than encouraging students to bring their own questions to the discussion. Ostasiewski pointed out that an apologetics approach does not reflect the developmental realities of teen-age students, nor does it foster the ability to engage in critical thinking.

> The "Challenges" section of the Framework stating the questions each student should be able to answer and the "correct" answer for each of the questions for each course harkens back to the Baltimore Catechetical method. The clear expression of this catechetical text is apologetic. (p. 69)

An aspect of sound pedagogy is active participation by the students. Ostasiewski found no reference to students' active participation in the course outlines of the *Framework*. "The Framework clearly lays out what students must study but does not encourage any creativity. The apologetic style which is to 'imbue' the Framework does not allow students creativity in either engaging the material or creating their own questions" (p. 84).

Another concern for Ostasiewski (2010) was that of religious freedom. If students are compelled to take religious studies courses, by the graduation requirements of Catholic schools, then the approach to teaching religious studies classes must take this into consideration. Freedom to choose one's religion is basic to Catholic teaching. As Groome (2011) stated, a religion not freely chosen does not produce a religion of authentic faith. Ostasiewski observed that the tone of the *Framework* and the scope and

sequence of the courses, both of which were strictly focused on Catholic students, was not invitational to non-Catholic Christians nor to students of other faiths or of no faith.

Authority of the Magisterium

Finally, religion teachers are faced with the ultimate authority of the teaching Magisterium, in the face of the contextual realities of their students and the paradigm of the times. The Magisterium is the key source for curriculum content and for the philosophical underpinnings of religious studies classes in Catholic schools. Groome (1980) discussed the relationship of the Magisterium to other sources for teaching and learning Christian religious education. There is: 1) the official teaching Magisterium of the Catholic Church, 2) scholars and theologians, and 3) the faith life of the people. He pointed out the symbiotic relationship among these sources:

> The faith life of the people must be informed by the reflection, research, and systematic investigation of the theological and biblical community. But the reflection of the scholars should be grounded in and arise from the lived faith of the Christian community. The Christian praxis of the people is informed by the consensus of belief and practice taught by the official magisterium. But the official magisterium must also listen to and be informed by the sense of the faithful. The official magisterium cannot claim to have a short cut to the truth; it must be informed by the research and scholarship of the theological community. But the theologians need the official magisterium to articulate a consensus position that is in keeping with what has come down from the apostles. Otherwise, theology is a maze of conflicting opinions and different schools of thought and by itself a confusing ground for decisions in faith. (p. 200)

Thus, a balance is necessary when teachers approach designing Catholic religious studies instruction.

McDonough (2011) proposed the need for teachers to address the questions that their students have and to foster their agency, as practitioners of faith and as learners, regarding issues that may seem to present an opposition to Church teaching.

To this end, any conceptualization of agency includes the abilities (a) to transcend

> uncritical responses to the Magisterium, whether in agreement or not, and (b) to be able to respond to the variety of intellectual positions in the church, including agreements and disagreements that may be critical or uncritical. (p. 277)

In his article on dissent (2010b), McDonough claimed that it is important to teach students that they may be faithful dissenters. That is, they may disagree with a stance or teaching of the Church while remaining true to the Catholic faith. McDonough claimed that dissent within the group, in this case, within the Catholic Church, is an option that allows the faithful to remain within the group. Moral education, whether it is about personal morality, professional ethics, or social justice, is a key aspect of religious education in Catholic high schools.

McDonough (2011) discussed how these disagreements spring from historical controversial issues, such as whether women should be ordained, whether priests should marry, and whether offenders who have committed murder should be executed. They are also generated by more current controversial issues, such as whether homosexual persons should be allowed to marry, how the Church addresses issues of medical science, and how the Church has dealt with sexual offenders within the Church. These questions cannot be satisfactorily addressed with students by a simple apologetic approach. McDonough pointed out that teaching about controversial issues and about Catholic dissent does not naturally lead to leaving the Church, but helps students to realize their own ecclesial agency. Without such knowledge, students may understand their choices to be either autonomous submission to Church hierarchy or rejection of the Church altogether. This dichotomy presents a dilemma for teachers of religious studies:

> . . . this situation in Catholic ecclesiology, therefore, leads to a disjunction in schools between (a) the best professional practices for teaching and learning, which on the one hand presents students with the impression that they might define their own ecclesial agency just as they do in secular civil society, and (b)

> official Church teaching, which on the other hand promotes a more restrictive conception of agency. (p. 275)

Ostasiewski (2010) revealed the fear felt by some religious studies teachers as they address the issues of submission, dissent, and questioning within their role as religious studies teachers. In the prologue to her doctoral dissertation, Ostasiewski, opened with concerns that religious studies teachers have about the risks of speaking out against the *Framework* (USCCB, 2008). "Those of us who teach Theology classes in Catholic schools are under ever increasing scrutiny by the hierarchy of the Church" (p. 1). For Ostasiewski, the *Framework* demonstrated the growing lack of trust between the hierarchical Church, in this case the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the teaching laity.

> We have all come to be very careful of word choice and find ways to stay consistent with written policy as we express the Church as we know her. Many of us, particularly female or homosexual, are finding that choosing "ecclesiastically politically correct" language is becoming tiresome, and is challenging to our integrity. Others fear being recorded in class, or being quoted out of context to extremely orthodox parents and reported to the superintendent's or bishop's office. Most of us fear losing our jobs. All of us struggle with our authenticity in the classroom. (p. 2)

Ostasiewski (2010) concluded her dissertation by pointing out the seeming contradiction revealed in the concerns that religion teachers have of their delivery of content in the classroom and the official teaching of the Church, as written in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Catholic Church, 2000):

> In accord with the knowledge, competence, and preeminence which they possess, [lay people] have the right and even at times a duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church, and they have a right to make their opinion known to the other Christian faithful, with due regard to the integrity of faith and morals and reverence toward their pastors, and with consideration for the common good and dignity of persons. (¶ 907)

She returned to the concerns Catholic religion teachers have about speaking out on the

Framework and argued that it is, in fact, the right and responsibility of Catholic educators to speak their truth about the *Framework*, based on the reasoned judgment upon which their truth lies.

Summary

Catholic high school religious studies teachers address numerous challenges and tensions as they make decisions about curriculum and pedagogy in their religious studies classes. First, the challenges and tensions start with the lack of clarity on the purpose of religion classes: catechesis, the communication of religious and Church teachings "aimed at handing on a particular religious faith tradition (Rossiter, 1982), or religious education, the study of Church teachings in a way that "may contribute to the general education of pupils" (Rossiter, 1982). Then, they are called to be professionals without an established structure for achieving and maintaining that professionalism, as compared to their colleagues in mainstream subjects, such as social studies and mathematics. They are asked to teach to students who are both Catholic and non-Catholic, both engaged with and alienated from religion. They have been given a set curriculum suggestion from the USCCB but little pedagogical guidance for teaching the curriculum. The implementation of the *Framework* (USCCB, 2008) is left to the bishop of the diocese. Religious studies teachers are expected to prepare their students to be active agents in their learning, yet they are given an apologetic approach in the *Framework*. While they are encouraged to help their students to think critically about society, at the same time, they are expected to unquestioningly accept magisterial teachings. If religious studies teachers should not be able to navigate these pressures satisfactorily, in the eyes of the hierarchy of the Church educational structure, they will no longer be employed or employable. The role of

religious studies teachers may be identified on a continuum ranging from the catechetical role to the role of religious instructor in an academic setting. This study explored teachers' perceptions of how they accomplish all of this in their religious studies classes.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the perceptions of Catholic high school religious studies teachers in their role as instructors of religious studies. The purpose was also to explore the perceptions and experiences of the challenges or tensions each teacher might encounter and navigate in their practice.

In this study, the over-arching question was: How do religious studies teachers in U.S. Catholic high schools perceive their role in the Catholic high school? Secondarily: How is that role exemplified in the way religious studies teachers address challenges or tensions in their praxis? The specific research questions were:

1. How do U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers experience their role as instructors of religious studies?
2. What do U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers experience regarding the challenges or tensions that might be encountered in the teaching of religious studies?
3. How do U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers respond to and navigate these challenges or tensions in their practice in the classroom?
4. What pedagogical methods have U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers developed that help them to address the challenges or tensions?

Research Design

I employed a semi-structured interview model (Seidman, 2006) to identify and describe the perceptions and experiences of Catholic high school religious studies

teachers. This study included four participants currently teaching religious studies in Catholic high schools at the time of the study. The data was gathered from two semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with each participant. The participants provided artifacts which were used to understand each one's teaching milieu.

Population and Sampling

The sampling frame for the interviews consisted of religious studies teachers currently teaching in West Coast Catholic high schools. The schools were either diocesan high schools or Catholic religious order high schools.

I used purposeful sampling to select four participants for the study. In order to achieve some diversity, I considered: 1) the type of school: diocesan or religious order, 2) the gender make-up of the school: single-sex or co-ed, and 3) the location of the school: the West Coast of the United States. In addition, I employed convenience sampling in that it had to be possible for me and the participants to meet for the two interviews.

To identify potential participants, I asked for suggestions from colleagues and considered religious studies teachers I had met in graduate classes, educational conferences, and local professional development activities. I called or emailed the suggested teachers to screen for appropriate criteria and to discuss their interest in the study (Appendix A). For the purposes of this study, the criteria for inclusion were that the teacher was teaching religious studies at the time of the study, that the teacher was teaching in a Catholic high school on the West Coast, that the teacher was accessible for the two interviews, and that the teacher was willing to engage in the study. I then selected four potential participants, based on the diversity of school demographics that

they would bring to the study. I invited them to participate in the study, and, upon their acceptance, called them to establish a date and time for the first interview and to gather basic demographic information (Appendix B). I followed up this call with an email confirming the interview appointment (Appendix C). This email included an attachment of the Informed Consent Form, which was signed at the first interview (Appendix D). I photocopied the signed consent form and provided each participant with this copy, either by mailing it or giving it to them at the second interview. This study received an exemption from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) (Appendix E).

Interviews

I conducted two 60-90 minute interviews with each participant. The first interview addressed the first two research questions. The second interview, which took place eight to twelve weeks after the first, addressed the third and fourth research questions. The initial prompts and follow-up questions are listed below, as well as in Appendix F. Not all follow-up prompts could be anticipated. I remained flexible and followed each conversation where it led, while keeping it focused on the topic at hand.

The first research question was: How do U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers experience their role as instructors of religious studies? The first interview prompt reflected this research question: "How do you understand your role as a religious studies teacher in a Catholic high school?" Sub-questions included:

- What is your experience of your role as a religious studies teacher?
- What additional roles do your see yourself having? Please describe them.
- You're not a math teacher or an English teacher. How do you see your role as

different from those teachers?

Addressing the second research question, What do U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers experience regarding the challenges or tensions that might be encountered in teaching religious studies?, participants were asked to describe some of the influences, challenges, or tensions that affected them and how they taught religious studies. Follow-up probes depended on how teachers responded to the prompt.

- Teachers in mainstream disciplines must adhere to state standards, or feel a pressure to teach to standardized tests. Please tell me about any similar influences that may affect your teaching.
- What other forces or expectations do you feel influence your teaching? Please describe them.
- Who are the people who influence your practice as a religious studies teacher? Please describe how they influence you.
- Catholic high schools include diverse student bodies. What challenges, if any, does this diversity pose to your teaching of religious studies?
- Please describe any other challenges or tensions you experience, in as much detail as you feel comfortable.
- How serious do you perceive these challenges or tensions to be? Please explain.

The second interview took place approximately eight to twelve weeks after the first interview and addressed the third and fourth research questions. I sent each participant a transcript of the first interview prior to this meeting. The email included a list of the possible challenges that I had identified from each participant's first interview

that might lead to further discussion in the second interview. At the second interview, I brought a copy of the transcript of the first interview, for our reference. I also brought a print copy of the challenges I had identified in the first interview.

The second interview began with me asking for any clarifications that the participant wished to make. Then I checked for understanding of statements that the participant had made in the first interview but that were unclear to me. In some cases I asked for more detail or elaboration on something that was said in the first interview.

I proceeded with prompts based on the third and fourth research questions. The third research question was: How do U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers respond to and navigate these challenges or tensions in their practice in the classroom? The next prompt addressed this research question: "In the first interview, you mentioned some challenges or tensions [at this point I identified some of the specific challenges brought up in the first interview]. How do you navigate these challenges or tensions?" Follow-up questions were more specific, based on the responses in the first interview.

- What methods have you developed to deal with any particular challenges or tensions?
- In what ways, if any, have you adjusted your curriculum as a result of these challenges or tensions?
- In what circumstances have you not felt the need to adjust your curriculum?

The fourth research question specifically addressed the teacher's pedagogy: What pedagogical methods have U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers developed that help them to address the challenges or tensions? The interview prompt began: "How has your teaching practice changed or developed to address any of the challenges

or tensions you have discussed? Follow-up probes to this prompt were more specific, based on the responses in the first interview and the previous probes.

- What pedagogical methods, or teaching activities, have you used to help navigate these challenges or tensions? In other words, how are you dealing with these challenges or tensions through your teaching?
- In what ways does this challenge or tension affect your perception of your role as a teacher of religious education?

Within three to five weeks after the second interview, I sent a transcript of the second interview to each of the participants. I asked that they review the transcript and inform me, by email of phone, of any corrections they felt should be made. When the study was completed, I sent a thank-you note to each participant. (Appendix G).

Data Collection

Once the four participants were selected, I contacted each one by telephone or email and discussed possible dates and times for the first interview. I gathered basic demographic information (Appendix B). I then sent an email to each participant, confirming the date and time for the initial interview (Appendix C) and including an attachment with the Informed Consent Form (Appendix D).

I conducted the first 90-minute interview with each participant. Each interview took place at a mutually agreed upon location. In order to protect each of the participant's identities, we did not meet at their schools. At the beginning of each first interview, I reviewed the Informed Consent Form with the participant and collected the signed copy. Shortly thereafter I mailed each participant a copy of the signed Informed Consent Form. Each participant provided me with a personal pseudonym and a

pseudonym for his or her school. These pseudonyms were used to refer to him or her and the school in the written findings. I collected the teaching artifacts from each participant at the beginning of the first interview (Appendix H). These artifacts included a course syllabus, a list of texts used in the course, and documents for three key assignments used in the course. These artifacts were used solely to gain an understanding of the courses each teacher taught and the approach they used to assessments. No deep analysis was made of the artifacts. I asked each participant to provide me with his or her teacher website address, if he or she wished to make it available. In most cases this website was password protected and not fully available to me. The first interview provided data that addressed the first two research questions (Appendix F).

Within approximately four weeks after the initial interview, I prepared a written transcription and provided each participant with a copy via email. I then contacted the participants, either by phone or email, to arrange for a date and time for the second interview to take place. Each participant reviewed the transcription for accuracy and clarification and sent any corrections to me via email or discussed them with my in a phone call. I also provided, for each participant, a list of themes about role and challenges that I had identified from the first interview. As the participants had not mentioned tensions in the first interview, the list focused on the challenges that had surfaced. This list became a starting place for exploring the second interview questions. Each list was unique and was drawn from each person's responses to the first interview questions and conversation.

The second interview began with the participant discussing any observations or changes that might clarify or correct the transcription. I then focused on the third and

fourth research questions (Appendix F), making reference to some of the themes and challenges that had arisen from the first interview.

In the first round of interviews, I had prepared the transcriptions myself. This was an unwieldy and time-consuming process. In order to transcribe the second interviews more quickly, I chose to use an online transcription service. Upon concluding the second interview, I electronically sent the second interview recordings to a transcription service to be transcribed. The transcriptions were then provided to each participant via email with a request that the participants review them for accuracy and clarification. The participants and I found that there were corrections to be made in the vocabulary that was particular to religious studies. As one example, the transcription said "electrical dance" when the correct quotation was "liturgical dance." The participants communicated clarifications or corrections to me by a telephone call or email. At the conclusion of the study, I sent each participant a thank-you note (Appendix G).

Data Analysis

I saved a copy of each transcript in computer text and audio files, stored in a cloud-based storage system. I used printed working copies to code, categorize, and analyze the data. These copies were stored in a locked cabinet in my home. Prior to beginning the data analysis, I reviewed the narratives of the participants, as well as their artifacts, and created a brief profile of each one. This served to contextualize the participants, their experiences, and their ideas.

Each of the participant's two transcriptions was identified by the pseudonym that he or she selected earlier. I began the process of data analysis of the first interviews immediately after all four participants had concluded the first interview and had reviewed

their transcripts. In the preliminary coding scheme, I identified themes that emerged, particularly patterns of beliefs about role and patterns of challenges or tensions. I made note of these themes in the margins of the transcripts. I assigned each participant a highlighter color and proceeded to highlight each margin note theme for each participant. I then cut up the transcripts, placing like themes from each participant with the other participants. This allowed me to see themes common to all or some of the participants. I paper clipped collections of transcript quotations together by theme. The color-coding of the margin note allowed me to easily identify the participant. This preliminary analysis provided me with areas to follow up on in the second interviews.

I began the coding of the second interviews once all four had been completed, transcribed, and reviewed. I re-read the transcripts of each of the first and second interviews. The themes and challenges that emerged from the second interviews reflected the themes of the first interviews. I followed a similar process in coding as I had used with the first interviews. I used the same colored highlighter, as in the first round of coding, for each participant, and made margin notes, relating the transcript sections to themes from the first interviews. Again, I cut the transcriptions into sections. Each section was identified by theme or sub-theme and by participant. This process allowed for common themes and challenges to emerge from the interviews. While there were numerous themes and challenges held in common, the second interview transcripts revealed the unique ways in which each teacher addressed and navigated the challenges that they experienced in teaching religious studies. For this reason, I reported the findings from the first interviews looking at all four participants together, but I reported the findings from the second interviews by looking at each individual participant. This

analysis of the participants' perceptions and practices led me to my findings and conclusions.

Trustworthiness, Strength and Transferability of Knowledge

The language that qualitative researchers have used for assuring that findings in their studies represent the responses of the participants included the ideas of trustworthiness, strength, and transferability of knowledge (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008). When comparing these ideas to those of quantitative studies, trustworthiness is related to reliability, strength to validity, and transferability of knowledge to generalization. Kvale and Brinkmann argued that the overall issues of validity and reliability may be gathered collectively under the concept of craftsmanship of the research design, as well as the craftsmanship of the interviewer.

A consideration in trustworthiness is freedom from bias and prejudice. To address this concern, prior to engaging in the interviews, I reflected and journaled on the same interview questions to which the participants were asked to respond. This process surfaced my own assumptions, biases, and presuppositions, with the purpose to bracket them and prevent them, as much as possible, from interfering with the interviews themselves and with the interpretation of the data gathered from the interviews. One example of one such assumption was that I had assumed that the participants would find the bishop's *Framework* (USCCB, 2008) to be a serious tension or challenge. This did not prove to be the case. Another example is that I entered the study assuming I would find that the teachers did have experiences of tensions in their practice. This was not revealed in the data. To the greatest extent possible, I let go of these assumptions while conducting the interviews.

A second consideration in trustworthiness is that of inter-subjective knowledge, that is, consistency between belief and knowledge. To address this concern, I engaged the participants with clarifying and follow-up questions so that the parties could, together, come to an understanding of the meaning of their responses to the interview questions. I asked follow-up and clarifying questions that did not inject my own meaning, but simply asked for elaboration. Examples of such questions were: When you described your first experience with . . . , what did you mean by . . .? You mentioned . . . Would you please describe . . . a bit more? What did it feel like when . . . ? Such questions asked for more details. This inter-subjective knowledge was also evident from the participants' responses to and clarification of the transcripts of the interviews.

A third consideration in trustworthiness is what Kvale and Brinkman (2008) referred to as *allowing the object to object*. The object, the phenomenon, may not present itself in a way that the researcher expects. This means that I had to be attentive to any frustrations that I experienced when the data revealed from the participants' narratives of experience and understanding did not match my own pre-conceived notions of the phenomenon under study.

Strength is related to the concepts of the truth, correctness, justifiability, and the convincing nature of both the interpretations of the data and of the craftsmanship of the study as a whole. Kvale and Brinkman (2008) suggested that one way to arrive at strength is by "continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings" (p. 247). The strength of a study may be determined by the "examining sources of invalidity" (p. 247). In other words, the researcher becomes his or her own critic. The strength of the study is also revealed by the extent to which it leads to effective actions.

The study is not simply conducted for the sake of intellectual curiosity, but exhibits strength if the result is thoughtful and ethical action. In the case of this study, such action might include shifts in the participants' practices, shifts in my own practice, and shifts in the way the Catholic educational community thinks about the perceived role and praxis of religious studies teachers. Thus, future application to research and practice will become an indicator of the strength of the study.

Finally, the study is validated by the transferability of the knowledge it generates. Two forms of generalization are applicable to this study. The first is naturalistic generalization (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008), which is the product of experience, leading to expectations and predictions. A second form is analytical generalization, which "involves reasoned judgment about the extent to which the findings of one study can be used as a guide to what might occur in another situation" (p. 263). The transferability of the knowledge generated by the study is based on the logic and evidence used to make the argument for such transferability. Kvale and Brinkmann reiterated that the trustworthiness, strength, and transferability of knowledge in a particular study rest on the rich descriptions captured in the interview process. These matters are discussed in the recommendations for further research.

Position of the Researcher

I am currently a religious studies teacher at a diocesan Catholic high school. I have been teaching in Catholic high schools for 14 years. I hold a Master of Arts degree in Theology from the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. I have presented papers at regional meetings of the American Academy of Religion (WECSOR) and have conducted workshop presentations at the annual meeting of the National Catholic

Educational Association (NCEA) and the Annual Conference of the Foundation for Critical Thinking.

Most recently, I have been involved in learning and implementing the use of technology in my religious studies classes. I have served on the Technology Committee of my school for three years and have been involved in a learning community of teachers in which the focus has been on embedding technology into the curricula.

I received extensive training in interviewing from the California Appellate Project (CAP). CAP is a state-funded research and support center, under the California Supreme Court, for those attorneys who will be filing state and federal appeals for prisoners sentenced to death in the state of California.

Limitations

One limitation to the study was the small number of participants. The study, therefore, strove to reveal depth of the participants' perceptions rather than to generalize the findings. The focus was on providing rich, descriptive data.

A second limitation was the concern that a participant's responses may not be authentic. I would never be able to guarantee that the personae the participants put forth in the interviews were their authentic selves. Markham and Baym (2009) also addressed the issue of truth-telling. Referring to Plummer's (2001) work on life narratives, Markham and Baym (2009) stated that all biographical narrative is truthful, although perhaps not factually accurate. When people tell the stories of their experiences, they "inevitably forget, select, exaggerate, become confused, and sometimes lie" (p. 47).

A third limitation was that of researcher bias. As a religious studies teacher in a U.S. Catholic high school, I was living the very experience that I was researching.

Therefore, I took great care not ask leading questions or to impose my own perceptions upon the participants. In some cases, the participants asked me questions about what I thought or about my own practice. I did my best to deflect those discussions to a future date, once the study was completed. In one way, my position as a religious studies teacher served as an entry point to ease into the interview conversations, in that there may be trust among peers. It was also possible that participants were hesitant to speak freely to me, as a fellow teacher of religious studies.

Ethical Concerns

A Catholic high school religious studies teacher serves at the will of the bishop of the diocese in which the high school is located. Religious studies teachers have the difficult task of teaching the objective elements of the subject of Catholic faith and religion. At the same time, given that one requirement for religion teachers is that they are practicing Catholics, they are teaching what they believe in and live out in their own lives. Religious studies teachers must represent the Church and Catholic doctrine accurately. Yet, many also wrestle with the teachings of the Church and their faith (McDonough, 2010b) or with their professional agency and autonomy (Ostasiewski, 2010). The Church has the power to remove a teacher if the principal, president, superintendent, and/or bishop do not approve of how the teacher represents the Church or the faith. Religious studies teachers serve with the approval of the bishop and are not solely responsible to the school's principal and president.

Because of this, it was important to maintain the confidentiality of the teachers participating in this study, and the schools they represented, to prevent a situation in which their responses might put them at some professional risk. The participants needed

to feel free to describe all of their experiences and feelings without concerns for judgment, recrimination, or retaliation by their employers. The focus of the study was on the participants' perceptions of their role and their experiences of any challenges and tensions they encountered in teaching religious studies. The focus was not on any particular school or official office of the Church. The interviews were conducted in person and the identity of the participants was protected to the greatest extent possible.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

This study explored the experiences and the perceptions of Catholic high school religious studies teachers related to the challenges or tensions found in teaching religion, as well as how these teachers have navigated those challenges or tensions in their practice. The study investigated these experiences, perceptions, and practices by exploring the following research questions:

1. How do U.S. Catholic high school religion studies teachers experience their role as instructors of religious studies?
2. What do U.S. Catholic high school religion teachers experience regarding the challenges or tensions that might be encountered in teaching religious studies?
3. How do U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers respond to and navigate these challenges or tensions in their practice in the classroom?
4. What pedagogical methods have U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers developed that help them to address the challenges or tensions?

In this chapter I will report the findings on each research question as revealed by the participants. The first interview covered the first two interview questions: the perception of role and the identification of challenges or tensions. The demographic information was also gathered during the first interview.

The second interview addressed the third and fourth research questions. The participants were given a list of the challenges and tensions that emerged from the first interviews. These challenges and tensions were discussed, as well as other challenges or

tensions that came to mind after the first interview. There were many commonalities found in the responses to the challenges but none of the participants discussed any of these challenges as being a tension. While there was a similarity in the participants' perceptions of what the challenges were, the emphasis that they placed on specific challenges varied widely. The discussion of how participants responded to the challenges and how they adapted their curriculum and pedagogy to these challenges was personal and unique. For this reason, the second interview is reported by individual participant, with the challenges they discussed, rather than by challenges, with what the participants said about each one. Occasionally an idea about a participant's perception of their role came up in the second interview.

Overview of Participants and Their Schools

Participants were identified with their pseudonyms: Anne, Francis, Sarah, and Juliana. When reference is made to their schools, the schools will also be referred to by their pseudonyms: St. Irenaeus, St. Mary's, Blessed Trinity, and St. Catherine's. Three of the participants were women and one was a man. All of the participants were laypeople. One of the participants was beginning a term as chairperson of the religious studies department of her high school. Another had served as department chairperson in the past.

Two of the participants had Master's degrees in the subject area of theology or religious studies. One of these two was a doctoral candidate at the time of the study. One had a Doctorate in education, as well as a Master's degree in the subject area of theology. One had a Bachelor's degree in another subject area but extensive experience in religious education.

Each of the participants taught religious education in a Catholic high school on the West Coast. Three of the schools were religious order schools. One was a diocesan school. One school was single-sex. Two of the schools were classified as urban and two as suburban. Two had populations of working class families, one had a mixture of working class and mid- to upper middle class families, and one was predominately made up of affluent families. Three of the schools reflected a wide variety of ethnic and religious diversity.

First Research Question

First Research Question: How do U.S. Catholic high school religion teachers experience their role as instructors of religion?

The participants in this study had similar perceptions of their role as religious studies teachers. They perceived their role to be multi-faceted and important to the future lives of their students. Their perceptions included:

- The role of being church for their students
- The role of inviting students into the Church
- The role of ministering to and forming their students
- The role of teaching religious studies content and academic skills

Each of these roles will be discussed in the following pages.

Being Church

The participants understood themselves to be representing, even being, the Church for their students. They hoped that, when their students experienced them as educators, that the students would see their teachers as Church, expanding beyond the institutional understanding of Church.

Anne perceived this role of being Church as reflecting one of Avery Dulles' (1991) models of Church, Church as Herald. It was important that she walk the talk. She worked to make sure that her students came to know that the Church was more than an institution. She explained:

> It's more like Church as herald. I've been told for years you are a walking billboard for your school because you've got that uniform on or that shirt. [We're] a walking billboard for [our] faith. And from all that, it's like now God has put me in a position where, okay, you've got to walk the walk. This is what I've prepared you for and this is where I need you… I think we have a greater responsibility. (First Interview)

Anne hoped that her students would see her, in part, as the face of the Church. She wanted them to "see I am also the Church, for all my faults and failings, I am the Church. I am the Church and the institutional Church is just one part of that" (First Interview).

Juliana phrased this as "being an authentic witness" to the values and practices of the Church. Students look to religious studies teachers as examples of Church.

> I certainly see one of my roles as being as authentic a witness to faith as I can be. When the students are leading prayer, it's clear that I am praying as well. And when we have reconciliation for students during Lent, if a student asks, "Do you go to reconciliation?" I can say, "Yes, I do, not here, but I do." "Do you go to church?" "Yes, I do." (First Interview)

Francis stated that he wished to "[model] what we believe and teach" (First Interview). For Francis, this was particularly important. Francis worked closely with his diocese and was frequently seen in public, in a formal capacity representing the Church. His students associated him with the Church hierarchy because of these public appearances. He provided an example:

> A few years ago, when the whole sex abuse scandal was breaking, I was actually invited on [a local news program]. What I said was that for many of the kids I was the face of the Church, that I represented the institutional Church. So the anger, the questions, the frustrations that they had were being directed at the Church, but channeled through me… I would like to always portray myself as a

> Christian, as a teacher, to portray my faith in the Church as something that they can relate to, or relate with. Not this thing in Rome. Something that is very close and real. So I think I'm very much aware of that and I think that's part of what I like to do, and, as a teacher, to make sure that that's always in the forefront of my mind. (First Interview)

Sarah referred to the higher moral authority that others, especially students, assign to religion teachers. "I would hope that any educator has the same sort of moral authority when kids are doing stuff, but I think sometimes that the students are like, 'Oh, busted by the religious studies teacher'" (First Interview). This perceived higher moral authority was accompanied by perceived higher religious and spiritual standards. "Nobody's telling me, 'You're the religious studies teacher, you've got to do better.' But I feel like that is an important thing" (First Interview). Religion teachers are expected to be practicing Catholics. "We are held to a different standard, in some ways. Like to get hired in my department, you have to be a Catholic. That's not a pre-requisite in any other department" (First Interview). Sarah noticed that while other departments have openly gay teachers, she doubted if the school would ever hire an openly gay religious studies teacher.

The participants all perceived that part of their role was to represent the Church to their students. They hoped that their presence and interaction with the students would demonstrate the human element of the Church, which many students just understand as a hierarchical institution. They also felt a responsibility to represent the Church as authentically as they were able.

Inviting Students Into Church

The participants expressed that they had a responsibility to be invitational in their approach to religious education. In other words, their role was to invite their students

into the possibilities that Church, Christianity, and spirituality might offer. They did not perceive their role as that of converting their students of other religions, or of no religion, to Catholicism.

In discussing her role as a religious studies teacher, Sarah reflected this idea of invitation: "[M]y goal as a teacher of religious studies is to open their minds and hearts to the possibility that the divine exists. That there is room in their lives for a connection between some sort of spirit or God in their everyday life" (First Interview). Anne concurred, "I tell them at the beginning of the year, 'I would love for every time you walk in this door [that] it would be a rejuvenation, a mini retreat'" (First Interview).

The invitational role was manifested in the attitude found in each individual religious studies teacher. When reflecting on the role as invitational rather than one of conversion, Juliana brought up the idea of metanoia:

> I definitely don't see the role that way [as conversion]. At all. I definitely wouldn't see myself as a midwife to conversion, as you said, if conversion is bringing students into the Church. If conversion is defined more broadly as the turning, the metanoia… I do hope that students turn in a variety of ways. Turn even to embrace the possibility of faith… the turning to recognize the needs of the world, the needs of other people. (First Interview)

Anne, in particular, noted the downside if religious education teachers failed to fulfill their invitational role. Anne observed that the role of the religion teacher carries a responsibility with risk. In other words, to turn a student away from Church, or God, or spirituality, would do, in Anne's mind, great harm. She related it to the Hippocratic Oath. She shared the story of a colleague who reflected on his high school history class. He remembered the facts from the class, but came out of it hating history well into his adult life:

Brother Daniel said he took a class. It was a history class. He was in high school.

> And he learned so much history and he talked about the way that history was taught. He says, "I know a lot about history. But the one thing I got out of that class is how much I hated history. And to this day I hate history because of that class." That always stuck with me because I thought I want to be academically rigorous, but, at the same time, there's a fine line between academic rigor and academic ruthlessness. I would much rather err on the side of caution. Because if the only thing that these Catholic, or, especially non-Catholic, kids get out of a religion class is that my religion teacher was compassionate and that's what they remember for the rest of their lives, I think we're way ahead of the game… And not that I want kids to come out hating history or math or religion or reading or English. But if they come out hating religion, specifically the Catholic religion, that's never going to be healed… So maybe there's a higher risk of failure, or a higher risk of damage when there's failure. If the skin doctor fails, that's one thing. But if the heart doctor fails… It's hard because I don't want to say that we're more important than anybody else. When I walk in the classroom I feel that responsibility. (First Interview)

The participants did not perceive their role to be one of converting non-Catholic students, bringing them into the fold. Instead, they experienced their role as invitational. They expressed their own love of faith by wanting to help their students to grow into their own faith, whether that was Catholicism or some other religion and to become open-minded about the possibilities of faith, spirituality, and religion. An important element of facilitating this growth was to model what it is to be a faithful Catholic.

Ministering and Forming

Another point of agreement about role was that the participants experienced their work as that of formation. They recognized that they would not see the results of their teaching and formation, but they had confidence in the process. In one way, this differentiates them from teachers of other disciplines. Religion teachers guide the growth of the spirit, regardless of the students' religious beliefs.

Francis shared his ideas on education as ministry. He began by saying that "Religious studies is both academic but also transformative" (First Interview). The role of the religious educator is to comprehend a bigger picture than the high school

experience and to help prepare students for their future in spiritual terms. He explained:

> You know, not to belittle the subject matter, but what we do and what we teach and how we want to encourage students to look at things… that's [an] important part of religious studies… Those are things that will hopefully have fruit somewhere else beyond us. I think, in that sense, the ministry of education is important because we're hopefully planting and tending things that will grow somewhere else that we'll never see. And that something else is Christian life that is beyond our control. [T]here's not always success in the classroom, but their religious education, formation, hopefully continues, not necessarily formally, but with life issues; that for every life event there are questions that are raised that, hopefully, we've already touched on in the classroom. (First Interview)

Sarah built on this sentiment by stating, "… [I] hope that they end up walking out of the class thinking about what they [carry] in their lives later. And maybe at some point recognizing, 'Oh wait, I do believe in God'" (First Interview). She pushed students to become aware of where they were in their belief, and then to consider future possibilities.

> I think that my role as a religious studies teacher is to make the students aware and then one step beyond that, to help the students give serious thought to the idea that religion and the faith journey, wherever that is for you, actually is vital and relevant in the world today. (First Interview)

She encouraged her students to reflect on their learning in a personal way: "So this is what the Church says. And your job, as students, is to make an informed decision in your heart and in your conscience about what you think, about what you feel" (First Interview). Sarah also touched on the need to balance the role of educator with the role of formation. There are times when the academic plan is sacrificed for the possibility of formation. She observed:

> [I]nstead of covering such a deep breadth of information, that we go into a lot more detail on things to try to get at the point… to make the connection to what is this saying in life today? What does that mean in life today? Instead of memorizing every parable and miracle that Jesus performed or told or whatever, we do fewer of them, make sure we understand the story, the symbols, the images, and then spend some time figuring out, well, what sense does this make in the world today? (First Interview)

The participants experienced this role in formation as encouraging students in their spiritual growth. In other words, they perceived their role as helping the students to feel comfortable in their current location in spiritual development. Anne responded to her students' frustrations and concerns with, "'You're right where you're supposed to be. Keep questioning. Just don't give up.' They go, 'I'm not sure I believe in God.' 'Excellent. Good for you. Keep searching. That's exactly where you're supposed to be'" (First Interview). She concluded with, "My job is to teach kids to be the best everything they can be" (First Interview). Juliana concurred in this aspect of the role:

> … accompanying students on whatever path they're on, and with a class of 25 they're on 25 different paths. But giving them the richness of this tradition, of this Catholic tradition… I would say fostering spiritual growth in my students. And what that is depends so much on the student. I think helping them to see God active in the world, active in their own lives. (First Interview).

The participants understood formation to be a lifelong process, a process that they were able to participate in for the four years of their students' lives at school. They viewed their role as modeling the values that faith supports, such as empathy and compassion and creating an open door to faith.

Teaching Religious Studies Content and Academic Skills

The participants conveyed a deep interest and respect for the subject of religious studies. Thus, they recognized an important aspect of their role being the transference of that content information. While the participants were vocal about their role as assisting in the formation of their students, they were equally vocal in their responsibility for teaching the content of their subject. Juliana perceived her role, in this area, as "developing, what I would call, religious literacy in my students" (First Interview). For her, religious literacy meant the ability to be conversant and literate in the content areas.

> So for scripture, for example, I want them to develop certain skills from basic skills, like here's a book, chapter and verse. How do you find it? If you have never looked at the Book of Job, how do you find it? How do you find the chapter and verse? That's at the simpler, more basic end, to being able, by the end of the year, to write a mini exegesis paper, incorporating socio-historical methods and literary methods and ideological methods and really being able to do that with a text that I didn't teach them or that they didn't discuss in class. On their own. (First Interview)

Juliana pointed out that while the department had high academic standards, she felt that they had more freedom than other academic departments. There was no state testing for religious studies courses, no state outcomes. This freedom allowed for more academic depth. She stated:

> I think religious studies teachers perhaps have a little more freedom, in that we make sure they [students] know what they need to go to the next level, but there isn't the pressure of an AP text, or there isn't the pressure of those state standards and those kind of things that other departments seem to be pressured by. (First Interview)

In reflecting on their role as religious studies educators, all of the participants alluded, albeit briefly, to the role of preparing their students with the skills needed for college work. They focused on academic skills in depth when asked about challenges in the classroom, covered later in this chapter. These skills included making meaning from reading, writing clearly, thinking critically, and analyzing, among others. Francis spoke to this in some depth:

> Am I doing enough? Am I equipping students enough? Will they be okay after graduation? Because I'm hoping that it won't end after high school, but that this continues… I see myself as, first of all, an educator, who engages students in learning information, processing, and analyzing. I see my role as to present information, engage students, and reflection [and] analysis of that information, and then, hopefully, to make connection in their lives and what they do and why it's meaningful… I do want to instill in students an opportunity, the skills to analyze, to reflect, to focus on different aspects of things… I want them to challenge. I want them to question. I want them to push back. And those are the successful classes, because it gets me going, too. It gets my mind going. (First Interview)

All of the participants understood their role as that of authentic teacher of content and academic skills. They had a desire to prepare their students as well as possible for college or work. Anne and Sarah did not speak to this directly when discussing perceptions of their role as religion teachers, but it became evident that they did perceive their role as one of teaching content and skills when they responded to the second research question, discussed in the following section.

Second Research Question

Second Research Question: What do U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers experience regarding the challenges or tensions that might be encountered in the teaching of religious studies?

As a group, these teachers did not so much experience tensions as they experienced challenges. For the purposes of this analysis, the term challenge is used to refer to "a test of one's abilities or resources in a demanding but stimulating undertaking" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2014). Many of the challenges were common to all four participants (Table 1). In addition to their discussion about these challenges in response to the second research question, the participants went into more detail in response to the third and fourth research questions.

For the purposes of this analysis, the term tension is used to refer to a strained state or condition resulting from forces acting in opposition to each other (Oxford Dictionary, 2014). The tensions will be discussed at the end of this section. One area that could have provided tension was regarding the Bishops' *Framework* (USCCB, 2008). This will be discussed at more length in the following pages. Teachers perceived this as a challenge rather than a tension since not one of the four participants worked in a

diocese that was mandating strict adherence to the *Framework*. The few other tensions that arose from the interviews included conflict with an administrator and perceptions about the religious studies department made by faculty members in other departments.

Table 1

Challenges Experienced by Participants in Their Role as Religious Studies Educators

Francis	**Anne**	**Sarah**	**Juliana**
Representing Church	Representing Church	Representing Church	Representing Church
Religious Diversity	Religious Diversity	Religious Diversity	Religious Diversity
Contextual Location of Students	Contextual Location of Students	Contextual Location of Students	Contextual Location of Students
Diversity of Developmental Stages	Diversity of Developmental Stages	Diversity of Developmental Stages	Diversity of Developmental Stages
Relevance	Relevance	Relevance	Relevance
Curriculum Design and Bishop's *Framework*	Curriculum Design and Bishop's *Framework*	Curriculum Design and Bishop's *Framework*	Curriculum Design and Bishop's *Framework*
Academic Rigor and Authentic Assessments	Academic Rigor and Authentic Assessments	Academic Rigor and Authentic Assessments	Academic Rigor and Authentic Assessments
Breadth v. Depth	Breadth v. Depth	Breadth v. Depth	_____
Collaboration	Collaboration	_____	Collaboration
Technology	Technology	_____	_____
_____	Classroom Environment	_____	_____
_____	Orthodoxy and Church Teachings	Orthodoxy and Church Teachings	_____
_____	_____	Faith Formation	Faith Formation
_____	_____	_____	Feminist Approach to Christianity

This table demonstrates the challenges discussed by the participants in response to the second, third, and fourth research questions.

Challenge: Representing the Church

In the discussion of the role, the participants commented on how they perceived themselves as representing Church. When we began discussing challenges, this came up again.

Sarah was concerned when students asked her about her opinion on issues involving Church teaching, stating: "It's a hard thing, because there are times that I do give my opinion on things. When do you do that and not?" (First Interview). She went on to talk about the tough issues for her students and the line she walks between her opinion and Church teaching:

> It's a slippery slope and that's a tough one, knowing when to answer and when not to answer. There are times when I know it's a particularly difficult situation. If they're asking me about the role of women in the Church or ordination of women or teachings on homosexuality or artificial means of birth control. We have a number of openly gay faculty and staff members. The whole thing is interesting because of what the diocese might say or do. It draws extra attention to the teaching we do or how we do it, if it draws further scrutiny [from the diocese] and things like that. (First Interview)

Francis also addressed this concern. He focused on the perceptions that students had of God and the Church magisterium and the confusion that they felt between the walk and the talk. He described one situation:

> There's a student who had a death in the family. He was angry and said, "Why would your God do this?" Which is a perfectly normal human response, crying out to God. I didn't give him an answer because how can you? But just the notion that "my God is doing *this"* [participant emphasis]. And for some reason I represent God.
>
> Or when the student asks me "Oh, how can you work with a bishop who hates gays?" I'm trying to work with them. Everything is much bigger that what it seems. So trying to find and see different nuances and see that we're more than just individual sets of actions and beliefs and ideas. We're more than that. I spend time on that. Each of us has a part of us that we're not all that proud of, a part of our history. A part of what we've done, what we've said. But that's not who we are. We're more than that. (First Interview)

He noted that the religious studies teacher is caught between the Church and his or her students in a way that teachers in other departments are not. When religious studies educators are teaching, they teach the Church, and to their students they represent the Church, personally. Francis stated:

> I am the Church for them, which I don't think is fair for me or for them. I carry this big burden of representing something more than who I am. So that's a challenge in terms of interaction. I don't want to put anyone off to the Church. But I also want to be able to help someone else understand where the Church is coming from.
>
> I don't think other people in the Church authority or hierarchy have an appreciation for that. So, here's a teacher in the middle, kind of mediating with the student to the Church and the Church to the student. And either on the opposite sides have no appreciation for the other. I feel kind of like, I mean this sounds a little conceited, but how the prophets might have been in terms of representing God to the people and the people to God. (First Interview)

While Francis perceived this as a challenge, he also began using the language of tension.

> I don't see a lot of support or appreciation or recognition from the Church in that aspect. I guess the official Church doesn't know that the teacher that teaches religious studies in the classroom is that for the students. There are a lot of Church documents that say, this is what our religious education and educator should be and do. I don't know if there's enough recognition of what we are doing and striving to do.
>
> I guess there's just an assumption by the Church, Church leaders or whatever, that it's getting done somewhere, somehow, but that the important role of the religious educator, the teacher as the go-between between the two, I don't think that's looked at or focused on, or even acknowledged. I mean, we're told to do these things, to teach as Jesus did, the documents, and all that. We're doing that. But I don't think there's an appreciation for what that really is like, to be working with young people. The Church is very adult. Our scriptures are adult. Our liturgies are adult. Everything is adult focus. (First Interview)

All of the participants experienced the challenge of being Church for their students. They not only represented themselves and their school, but also the larger concept of the Catholic Church. Anne and Juliana mentioned this in response to the first

research question and again in response to the third and fourth research questions.

Challenge: Religious Diversity Among the Students in the Classroom

All four of the participants disclosed that the religious diversity among students found in any given classroom was particularly challenging. The classes included practicing Catholics, non-practicing, and, even, un-churched Catholics, Protestants, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, agnostics, and professed atheists. The ratios in the schools differed somewhat, but this diversity was common to all four schools. Differences could be ascribed to such factors as the neighborhoods from which the schools drew their student body to the economic status of the students' families. It was common among all four participants to have experienced cynicism about religion from some students.

One precursor to being able to address this challenge well was the teachers' attitudes about interfaith dialogue. They found this dialogue to be rich and to benefit all of the students, including the Catholic students. Francis spoke about this diversity in his World Religions class:

> We just finished up Islam, and I have two students who are Muslim. And one student, during Christmas break, went to Iraq on a pilgrimage with his family. To be able to bring that in, I think, was great. They were able to share their faith. And I think, for any student, Catholic, non-Catholic, Muslim, to be able to share their faith and something that they believe in is great for students to see, even if they don't believe in it but they know that for other kids, it's important to them. And for Christian students, Catholic students, to be able to share that, too. To be able to share their experience I think is important, because that, again, connects religion to life and allows people to see that this is something that is important in people's lives.
>
> This school has a large Latino population. And I've found that, for Latinos, and for Filipinos too, there's more comfort with faith. They can talk about it more. I don't know if it's because they've learned it or that it's just a part of the culture. Definitely with Guadalupe and pieties, religious pieties, rosaries, scapulars, stations of the cross, those kinds of things. That part of the population has had that experience and we are able to tap into that. That's why I like being in a diverse school, not just racially but experiences with religious [diversity], because

> you can draw on those. (First Interview)

Francis also noticed that the cynicism that he had experienced in earlier times and at other schools had diminished.

> The last couple of years of teaching, I've found that [cynicism] less and less…. I don't know if there's a shifting in terms of our culture and they think that it's an okay thing to have and no big deal. Or maybe it's because the students I work with now, with the Latinos and even the African American students who come from a background where faith is important and it's emphasized at home. [They are] definitely less antagonistic. I haven't even heard a student say "I'm an atheist" in awhile. For instance, they're agnostic, they're not sure. But in the past I used to have kids who [would say] "I'm an atheist. I don't believe in anything." (First Interview)

Francis attributed this more open acceptance of faith to the presence of the two priests at the school and to the faculty members' participation in retreats and school liturgies. "If there's someone that the students respect and connect to, and that's part of their life, then it becomes less of an issue" (First Interview).

Sarah described many of the students at Blessed Trinity as Catholics on paper. In other words, the family belongs to a parish but may not be practicing or living the traditions of faith. More than half of the students were Catholic, with somewhat active families. "But I think, even within that half they're probably only half of those kids that actually buy into what's going on" (First Interview). Sarah found it interesting how students self-identify:

> At the beginning of each of my classes, we go around the room and I ask them if they've been raised in any particular faith tradition and what that was like and how and if they practice now and how they define themselves now. And many, many, many, students identified themselves as spiritual but not religious. Or, I don't know, maybe there's God, maybe there's a higher power. (First Interview)

With that said, Sarah noticed "the students that define themselves as agnostic offering prayer intentions" during class prayer (First Interview).

Anne experienced similar diversity: "My Baptist kids, my Jewish kids, I've had occasionally Islamic kids. I mean the majority of my atheist or agnostic kids all come from one of the local Catholic schools. They're searching" (First Interview). She found that the un-churched students were the most challenging. By un-churched she meant "raised with nothing whatsoever" (First Interview). She worked to show them that, while they may not believe in God, they did believe in something. She used this as an entry point to think about religion.

Juliana also found diversity in her students:

> We have everything. We have a student who prays the Rosary every night with her family, and a student who professes atheism. We have a student who is Jain, and I had to look that up. I have no desire for her to become Catholic, but for her to just grow and develop and be the best Jain she can be. (First Interview)

She experienced this diversity to be challenging in a positive and rejuvenating way.

> It's certainly a challenge, but really a wonderful challenge, to teach in a very diverse classroom. I don't know where it would be if we were mostly Catholic. I mean, that would be a very different experience. It's a challenge with just trying to figure out even where they're coming from.
>
> Again, the Jain student I mentioned made a comment in the scripture class. I don't remember why this came up, but something about people who were homeless. She was kind of implying it's kind of their fault for being homeless. And other students challenged her right away, in a very respectful way. She was coming out of believing in reincarnation. You know, and that it was like their former life that led them there. When students were challenging her, they were challenging her more from somebody who doesn't believe in reincarnation. They were challenging her with addiction and economic problems and those kinds of things.
>
> But it was a totally different worldview. Or, a student who's Jewish who asked, "What happened? How did Jesus die the second time?" And I said, "What?" I didn't understand. And she said, "Well, he rose from the dead." And I said, "Oh, he didn't die. We celebrate Jesus' ascension into heaven 40 days after Easter." And she said, "Oh, like Elijah." And I said, "Yes, exactly. Just like Elijah, just without the fiery chariot." I love the challenge of trying to negotiate this material with these students who are in very different places. (First Interview)

Given the perception of their role as inviting students into Church and ministering and forming, it was clear that the participants welcomed the religious diversity in their classrooms. At the same time, they acknowledged that it was challenging to teach to this diversity but challenging in a positive way.

Challenge: The Diversity of Contextual Background of the Students

The contextual background refers to all of the background that the students are bringing into the classroom, including their prior knowledge, their language proficiency, their experiences, their family situations, their ages and their grade levels. All of the participants experienced this as a challenge. In the language of the educational community, this was about meeting students where they are.

Francis emphasized the importance of knowing the students in order to reach them in the classroom:

> Knowing who my students are and understanding where they come from is always a challenge…. If I don't understand them, where they're coming from, then the material that I'm working with will either go through or over their heads or drop to the ground like it doesn't matter. So, the challenge of always knowing and connecting with students is important.
>
> The students bring their lives into the classroom. So, being aware of that and being respectful. There are times when there's something going on at the school, like going on to state championships. I know the students are focused on that. Or, if there's a death in the school community or a family member. They bring that all in. (First Interview)

Anne spoke of economic diversity. She was particularly sensitive to economic inequality, both at the school and in the students' home lives, as well as the problems that come with that in neighborhoods. St. Irenaeus was a suburban school and the students represent a broad spectrum of economic stability.

> I try to be really careful when we're talking about the poor. It hasn't happened to me, but when one of my colleagues was going to prepare the kids to go over to

> [an inner city area of poverty] and was harking about certain neighborhoods, one guy goes, "I live there. That's my home." He wasn't offended. But he just wanted people to know that there's nothing wrong with that place. "You just have to know that there's certain places you don't go."
>
> I'd be getting dressed in the morning and I'd hear about a drive-by and it would be beyond my radar. And now, chances are if it hasn't been any of our students, it's usually somebody that somebody knows. And that's the thing that's sad. That shooting at the Kairos University was the aunt of one of the kids in my class. Left behind three little girls and a husband. The kid was just sobbing. It's like, they all know somebody. So that, in itself, is a challenge. (First Interview)

Anne observed that the dress code of the school was one way to diminish the appearance of economic difference. In her school, all of the outerwear, such as jackets and sweatshirts, are required to have the school logo. It can be a team jacket, but it has to have the school's identity. She stated, "I love it because it helps level the playing field a little bit. And if somebody says they don't have the money for it, we've got the Angel Fund" (First Interview). In this way, there is less conflict or judgment made about the amount of money one can spend on clothing. Anne admitted that the students who have money dislike the policy.

Sarah mentioned the diversities that were not easily identified by physical appearance. She referred to this as the hidden diversities. These were the diversities that were not so visible, as a disability or a specific ethnicity might be. She referred to diversities of religion and faith journey and home life:

> "Divorces and single parent and multi-generational and there's a lot of families that have, like, 'Oh yeah, my brother's autistic.' 'My sister has this health challenge.' 'My father was in the hospital.' It's not constantly on your radar to teach to those diversities"
>
> You can look and say, okay it's all a bunch of rich, white, sort of quasi-liberal, socially liberal, maybe economically conservative [families]. So I need to make sure that I don't play to that crowd and disenfranchise another part of the crowd. The diversity that's in these classrooms is not one that you *see* [participant emphasis]. (First Interview).

Sarah described a particular incident in a class when she gave an assignment on nativity stories:

> At one point I taught a freshmen class and they had this assignment at the beginning of the year where they're supposed to interview their parents on what it was like when they were born. And I amended the assignment and I said, "It's for your parents or guardians about when you were born or adopted. What was going on in their life? What was going on when your parents found out that they were pregnant with you? Or, when they decided to adopt?" I had a parent come to me and thank me profusely. It was the first time, the kid's a freshman in ninth grade, it was the first time that an assignment like that had been written specifically where her son felt like he didn't have to make the changes because he was adopted. (First Interview)

She referred to another hidden diversity, the child with two moms or two dads:

> I have a student that says my mom this or my mom that, and I come to find out, oh, two moms. So we figure out how to [talk about it]. "So when you say, 'My mom,' do you use that interchangeably for both of your mothers? Or do you call one momma this or momma that?" We have the whole conversation so I know when he says "my mom" whether he means Kara or Susan, or whatever it is. So it's just sort of those kinds of things. That's my challenge with the lack of diversity, to find the hidden diversities. (First Interview)

Another area of diversity in student background was the assumptions students and parents made about education. In Sarah's school, Blessed Trinity, it was taken for granted that students would go on to university. In the other three schools, that may not have been the norm. Some of these students might be the first generation in their family who would go on to post-secondary education.

In Anne's school, St. Irenaeus, she experienced different attitudes based on how students and families perceived their privilege. She explained:

> We serve a wide population. We've got a lot of inner city kids. Even though they might live in an impoverished area, they still know somebody, an aunt or somebody, who got out [of poverty] through education. A lot of them have parents or aunts or uncles who have done that. They're real supportive. (First Interview)

But Anne experienced other attitudes about education from families who may take educational opportunity as something they were entitled to, not necessarily something to be grateful for.

> Our teachers would call it a sense of entitlement for certain kids. It's almost like once they're accepted into the school, acceptance automatically translates into going through the motions and getting a diploma for some people. You know, once you got in the door it was like for some kids they think, "I don't necessarily have to work that much." Whether it's that their father donates a lot, or whatever. (First Interview)

Juliana addressed this challenge of diversity in the contextual background of her students when she responded to the third and fourth research questions. All of the participants experienced the challenge of contextual background or location of the students. They recognized that what the students bring into the classroom affects their learning, so it was vital to come to know the students as well as they were able.

Challenge: The Diversity of Developmental Stages and Abilities

There are cognitive and social developmental differences that greatly affected how one taught in the classroom. Freshmen learners had different cognitive and skills abilities than seniors. Students with experience in church or faith had different background knowledge and skills abilities than those who did not have church or faith experiences. Juliana noticed:

> I haven't taught freshmen now for five years. With freshmen, some of them are coming in taking the shrink wrap off the Bible, or don't know what a [religious] sister is. Like trying to teach our foundress and her charism, and realizing I have to back way up. Way, way, way, way up. They don't have any context for what it is to be a sister even. (First Interview)

Francis added similar observations:

> My freshmen are very different from my senior class. Everything from the things freshmen are worried about or that affect freshmen are very different from seniors. When a freshman class starts, they seem to be around my desk, asking

> me for things. "What was our homework?" "Where am I supposed to put my name?" "Were we supposed to write in pen?'" All these questions. Whereas my seniors, they could care less if I was there. And so knowing the difference between that helps me understand how to present material. And how to tailor material to the students. So I guess that's a developmental thing. (First Interview)

All of the participants described the adjustments they had to make between teaching freshmen students and upper classmen. This came out in their responses to the third and fourth research questions. While the participants did not bring up challenges of different cognitive abilities among their students, as will be discussed in the later section, all of the participants attempted to provide assessments that allowed for diversity in learning styles.

Challenge: Academic Rigor and Authentic Assessment

The first element in this challenge had to do with students and parents taking the subject matter seriously. Not all of the participants had experience with this attitude on the part of their students. In many cases, the courses had been approved by the University of California and California State University systems, which gave them more gravitas. Juliana commented, "The courses I teach count for UC electives. So that helps. I don't know what it would be like without that. If they would think it was sort or not important. But I'm grateful I don't have that struggle" (First Interview). The second element had to do with the perceptions by others in the school of the religious studies department as an academic department.

All of the participants approached their classes with academic rigor, although they recognized the fine balance, as Anne described, between "academic rigor and academic ruthlessness" (First Interview). The participants did experience their perceptions of the rigor to be expected in the classes to be somewhat different from the perceptions of their

students. Sarah told the story of one student in particular, a story that many religion teachers have experienced:

> I had an interesting conversation with a student last semester. "Yeah, I don't understand why I have a B. It's religion. Why do I have a B?" And I was like, "Well, when you turned in your project three days late, with no excuse, no reason, no anything. What kind of effort? If you graded the effort you put in, did you put in an A's worth of effort?" "No." "Then why would you think that you have an A if you didn't put in, what you would even consider, effort?" "Well, it's religion." That's part of the reason we talk about being a religious studies department, because there's at times at the school, with the pressure, with the tuitions that are paid, and the belief that every student should get into Ivy Leagues or the Ivy League of the West, the religious studies classes don't count. (First Interview)

Sarah felt that the religious studies department had worked hard at "defining itself as an academic department" (First Interview). Members of her department worked at differentiating themselves from prior perceptions of religion departments and classes. She explained:

> Not just a religion class where, if you write down, "I love Jesus" and, we go hug trees and make paper dolls for good…. I think that some people feel like there shouldn't be homework in religion. Students end up being very surprised when perhaps their worst grade is in religion. "How can my worst grade be in religion?" (First Interview)

Francis made similar observations. It was important to him that the religious studies department be perceived as an academic department.

> I'm still trying to make sure that religious studies is seen as a credible academic department. I also hope that other faculty members see that as an extension of what we do, not just fluff. That religious studies is both academic but also transformative.
>
> The term religious studies emphasizes an academic rigor that we've been wanting to emphasize, that we have been emphasizing the last couple of years. The emphasis on learning and being able to use the skills they've [students] been developing in other classes. The expectation is that they'll still learn and do writing and researching and oral skills. That's part of the religious studies department. (First Interview)

Juliana added, “Our religious studies courses are contributing to their college readiness” (First Interview).

The participants were also conscious of the specific work that students were preparing. The teachers wanted students to learn both content and academic skills. Because of their belief in the department as an academic one, the challenge was to make assessments that would be as rigorous as other departments’ assessments without losing the moments of formation. Juliana spoke to the issue of content knowledge.

> I want them to be conversant and literate in content knowledge. So knowing who King David is, and knowing the patriarchs’ and matriarchs’ family tree. And knowing when Jesus talks about, “I’m the bread of life and your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness,” that they know, “Oh, yeah. That’s the Exodus story, that’s Moses, That’s manna and quail.” Why is it important for them to know that? One of the best questions I’ve ever been asked in a job interview was, for my first religious studies teaching job, “What do you think is the purpose of teaching the Hebrew Scriptures to Christian students?” And I thought that was a great question. Biblical literacy is cultural literacy. The Bible is part of our culture. You can’t read Shakespeare without knowing the Bible because he knew it so well. (First Interview)

The seriousness with which the participants regarded their subject matter and teaching was reflected in their comments about curriculum and assessment. Francis brought up the difficulties encountered in assigning grades:

> The assessments that we do to really assess what we’re doing are very hard to grade and number mark. I think that’s an ongoing challenge in religious studies. You don’t want to give them all A’s. But you want everyone to succeed. That’s a structural thing in education that we’ve got to do. I’d much rather read an essay, because then they can really think about things. Or have them present something or do something, rather than check off A, B, C. That is definitely much easier to grade and get back and turn in and show up on the report card. But I don’t know if that’s a really authentic assessment for what we’re trying to do. (First Interview)

Anne looked at assessment in terms of the curriculum mapping her department has been doing.

> We've got really good continuity with our classes and the people who teach, you know, when they switch and teach other classes. We've got all the classes mapped out and all the resources available for them, so it's not like, "Here, you're on your own," when you haven't taught that particular class before. When we were doing curriculum mapping we would use, instead of industry standards, we would use our ESLRs, or student learning graduation outcomes and we would apply those to our curriculum. (First Interview)

In addition to being classes addressing faith formation, all of the participants also demonstrated a deep desire that their classes be academic in nature, providing the academic skills their students would need in the future.

Challenge: Making The Courses Relevant For Today's Students

The participants all expressed concerns about making their courses and the subject matter relevant to their students. Without relevance, they would lose their students to boredom or cynicism. Students often perceived the textbooks to be, in their words, biased.

Sarah discussed this aspect at length. The students in her school were more affluent than students at the other three schools, and they may have had less support for religious learning at home. She stated:

> I think the biggest tension or challenge would be relevancy. In terms of having so many students that don't necessarily feel that faith is important in their lives or that the things we teach in the department can have any bearing. (First Interview).

Anne also found the students to be disconnected from Church:

> I think especially in high school, because "It's all about me." It's all about, "How does it affect me?" Whether you're a Catholic or not, they always think of the Church as being really far away in Rome, and maybe feel this, not a disconnect, but not a really strong connection because it's so far away. (First Interview)

Sarah noticed that part of the disconnect was related to the bias that her students perceived in the content:

> Especially in the time and parts of class where we talk about dogma and doctrine

> within the Catholic Church. The students say, "This textbook is propaganda." They're honest with me. They're very open about their feelings. "You're making us read the propaganda tonight." And I'm like, "Yes, Yes, I am. Read it. You're being such a freshman." But I also admit it, as opposed to being like, "No, this book isn't biased." "You're at a Catholic school. This is a religious studies class." I have to acknowledge when we're reading the Whitehead's book, *The Wisdom of the Body*, when they say, "This just doesn't have any relevance to me." I'll say, "Okay, There are some things from this book you need to know. Let's get through these kind of quickly and let's move on and look at it in a way that makes sense to you." But sort of acknowledging those kinds of things.
>
> I try to use current events and real life. That's one of the things we do a lot of. We try to use pop culture and movies to address Christian Scriptures when we talk about all stories are true and some actually happened. You know, the idea of religious truth. (First Interview)

Francis and Juliana discussed the challenge of relevance in response to the third and fourth research questions. This challenge was the one that seemed the most important to the participants. They repeatedly mentioned how the courses needed to be relevant for their students. The idea of relevance opened the discussion of the Bishops' *Framework* (USCCB, 2008).

Challenge: Using the Bishops' Framework in the Classroom

All of the participants discussed the Bishops' *Framework* (USCCB, 2008). However, because the *Framework* had not been mandated in any of their dioceses, they experienced the *Framework* more as a challenge than a tension. They did, however, express that their responses would be different if they were ordered to follow the scope and sequence of the *Framework*. They used it more as a guideline and the departments made sure that the elements of the *Framework* were covered in their course curricula.

Anne made an effort to try to understand the Bishops' point of view, their starting place when designing the *Framework*. She then commented on the final tone of the *Framework*:

> I think what the Bishops are trying to do, they're trying to make up for a couple of generations of where God was hearts and flowers and we didn't have teachers that knew what they were doing. And they grew up and didn't know how to raise their kids. They certainly didn't get it at home. Now they're [the Bishops] putting in the schools what should have been done [in the home].
>
> That lovely opening [in the *Framework*]. That beautiful opening, that was what I expected. This is what we want. This is what we're moving to. We respect you all and we expect you to do a great job. In no way do we want to tell you exactly how to implement it. Go with God. And then, in the next 25 pages, they actually show you exactly what they said they weren't going to do.
>
> How do you teach that? I understand that's not the Church's concern, but how do you teach that curriculum? You know having background for that versus having a kid come in who's non-Catholic, never had anything. It's almost like you need to create two tracks. And then, what does that say? I'd want the track where I could spend a little time contemplating where I am and who I am.
>
> I don't feel any particular pressure. Everybody's concerned about it. We have a guy who does our online stuff. It's his job this year to scrutinize that where we are and where we need to be. I would hope somebody doesn't come in and say, "You have to teach these classes in this order." We might have to prove that we're covering all that stuff, which is what we need to do. But we're at a place where we're not having the Bishops' curriculum forced down our throat. (First Interview)

Francis also addressed the process of creating the *Framework*. He was concerned with how it was developed and written. He observed:

> From what I've seen and read and understand, the *Framework* wasn't developed by teachers. And maybe if it was, it would serve better, it would be better received. It would be more effective, more authentic, rather than here's something that came from the Bishops. Obviously they're teachers, but they don't teach adolescents. Maybe that's a good example of this sense of being caught in the middle between the two.
>
> We've adopted the text [St. Mary's Press] and have been adapting the *Framework* and the curriculum that way. So we're not following the *Framework*, we're using the textbooks but building from there. Maybe the *Framework* as a framework should be just a framework. Let's build around it. But it doesn't seem like that from the Bishops. It's like, "Here it is." (First Interview)

Sarah discussed how her school is responding to the *Framework*:

> We're reorganizing and revamping some things to make sure we give greater

> focus and attention to some things that, rightfully, were brought up. We do need to do stronger work with the sacraments. But a whole semester that's sacraments would be long. I just think it would be narrow. Then the goal for us is how we make those relevant for our population, where half the kids are Catholic but half the kids are not.
>
> If the *Framework* were different, it would be kind of neat to have standards in theology, religion, and religious studies. (First Interview)

Sarah went on to voice several concerns about the *Framework*. A key concern was the absence of a World Religions class. She explained:

> There's no place for a world religions course in this global, interconnected society we live in. I think that it's actually a moral imperative. That as a faithful Catholic who is striving for ecumenism and peace and justice in the world, that at least we understand, even on the surface, like we can articulate some of the major teachings of other world religions and how those are practices. So we can engage in a conversation.
>
> Even from the point of view of someone who's, "Catholic is right and everybody else is wrong," we should at least learn what the wrong is. If my whole goal were that I want to convert everybody to Catholicism, then I need to learn about their religion and what they believe so that I can lead them. So, looking at the *Framework* and seeing that that [course] doesn't exist in the *Framework*…. When I say narrow, when I think that it's a challenge, I think it would be detrimental to this idea of relevancy. We live in this very global, very, very connected society and our students are growing up faster that I was every asked to grow up. They are asked to process things. They are asked to evaluate things. So I feel like helping, not just teaching them everything the Catholic Church teaches about everything, but how to make themselves mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, is super important.
>
> I feel it's [the *Framework*] very, very narrow in its mind and focus and it's very restrictive. I think it will be dismissed by the students. They're like, "Oh, great. This is Jesus, Semester Six." (First Interview)

Sarah summed up to what the others had alluded. Perhaps this is putting voice to the possibility of tension as tension that is not yet, because the *Framework* has not been mandated. She stated:

> In the challenge for relevancy and autonomy, if we were to adhere to the Bishops' *Framework*, it would exacerbate those two things, perhaps beyond redemption. If we had to follow those eight semesters the way it's outlined, the way it's said, I

> think the courses would still be there and the kids would still take them, because they have to. But I think they would cease to be relevant and life-giving classes.
>
> I don't want to water down Catholicism at all. And I know that we're a Catholic school. I recognize all of that. And I want the students to be aware of what the Catholic Church teaches about things. But, our call as Catholics is to open up the kids' hearts and minds to greater conversion. So, it seems like a pretty narrowly focused eight semesters. (First Interview)

Because the Bishops' *Framework* was not mandated in her diocese, Juliana did not see the *Framework* as even a challenge, although she did mention it briefly in response to the third and fourth research questions. All of the participants reflected a wait and see attitude. Some of them discussed this in more detail in the next section.

Third and Fourth Research Questions

Third Research Question: How do U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers respond to and navigate these challenges and tensions in their practice in the classroom?
Fourth Research Question: What pedagogical methods have U.S. Catholic high school religion teachers developed that helped them to address the challenges and tensions?

The second interview with each participant focused on the third and fourth research questions. Because the matter of pedagogy was handled in a unique way by each teacher, these findings will be reported by participant rather than by challenge. In addition, when addressing the third and fourth research questions, the participants did not clearly differentiate between the concept of "responding to and navigating" and the concept of "pedagogical methods." The two elements blended together. For that reason, these findings are stated as the participants responded to the questions, without attempting to make such differentiations.

The participants' discussion of their curriculum and pedagogy clearly related to the challenges and tensions that they had mentioned in the first interviews. In addition,

the participants blended the challenges together. They are reported reflecting the connections that were inferred or stated explicitly by the participants.

Third and Fourth Research Questions: Francis

The Challenges of Contextual Location of the Students and Relevance

Francis began the second interview by mentioning his desire to engage his students and to meet their learning needs. Making connections to the challenge of the context of the students, he stated:

> I try to pay attention to the different learning styles of my students in terms of presenting material and in terms of activities. . . [T]hat's number one, the first way to make it connect with students. The other is trying to always be aware of anything that I say or cover or that we do. To always keep it, not really fresh, but kind of alive and engaging for students in a way that, again, makes those connections. "What does this have to do with me [the student]? Why does this matter?" (Second Interview)

Early on in his career, Francis had followed the textbooks explicitly. As he grew more proficient at teaching and more aware of the learning diversities of his students, he adjusted how he approached this type of prepared content, that is, textbooks and teacher manuals. He observed:

> [W]hen I first started out teaching, I followed the teacher's manual very closely. I used the quizzes and texts and all the things that were in there almost, pardon the pun, religiously. The more I worked with the students, or worked with the information, I was able to pick and choose between, oh, yeah, that works, or that doesn't work or that fits the students I have, or no, that doesn't. That includes choosing what kinds of films to show. (Second Interview)

When discussing films and music, Francis made connections between the challenge of the contextual location of the students and the need to make the classes relevant to their life experience. He noted the need to make careful choices:

> I used to teach a ritual class . . . and I have to really be more attentive in terms of what movies I choose . . . in terms of what they [the students] see on the screen. Are they characters that look and sound like, or come from, the same experiences

> in terms of culture? (Second Interview)

Francis described the types of decisions he would make in order to tailor films to a particular class:

> There was one time that I had more young women in the class. I think I only had four boys in the class of 24 and so choosing movies that would speak more to the young women in the class. And there was one time I had more boys in the class. So sometimes I tended to drop some of the movies that I used with the girls. That kind of thing affects the choices I make.
>
> When we used *Soul Food* for African American students it made sense and they could relate to that. Last year when I was teaching a lifestyles course, I chose to use *The Fighter*, which is a boxing movie, because I had more boys in my class and they could relate to the main character and his relationship to his brother and to his sisters and to his parents and to his significant other. So I think the boys were able to access that. (Second Interview)

He admitted that he was not always up to date on the music that his students were listening to, which made it hard to incorporate relevant music into the classroom. He solved this problem by having the students suggest music choices:

> [I]n terms of music, there are a lot of times that, the longer I teach, the further removed I am from the students' musical repertoire. So, I've been using students to come up with their own and [asked them] to explain [their choices] and then use that information for next years' courses so that they [the students] would at least have some similar kind of musical repertoire. (Second Interview)

Francis, then, provided an example of an activity he used in class, making connections between music and the course content:

> When I did a class on the life and times of Jesus, one of the assignments that we did was to use one of the. . . Gospel characters and use a song that they [the students] know or have, to kind of speak for the person, speak for the character in terms of their relationship with Jesus, be it questioning, be it acceptance, be it whatever. A student would choose a musical piece and say, "This is why this character in the Gospel would use this music in terms of describing their relationship with Jesus." Then they have to interpret the song, too, and connect it to why they chose that song for that person [the character]. So, again, kind of having them think about what is in the song that they would understand as the person's relationship with Jesus. This [activity] first came out when I was showing Jesus Christ, Super Star, and the "I don't know how to love him" song.

> It worked when I first used it, but then further on, kids didn't know the play. They didn't know the movie. They didn't know the musical style or the genre. So, I began using their own [music]. And what happens is that I end up having a collection of music that is relevant to you people and also relevant to scripture. They used to do CDs. Last year they did a playlist and they posted it online. (Second Interview)

The Challenge of Relevance and Timeliness in Terms of Technology

Francis had adapted the method of delivering the curriculum to meet the current needs of students to become familiar with and to use computer technology in the classroom. He put the major class projects on his website. He also created a homework page and weekly reminders on the website. Not only did Francis have his own faculty web page, but his students were regularly asked to convey their learning via computer technology, as well.

In the freshman class, in the unit on the school's founder, Francis included a Fakebook page assignment. Fakebook is a pseudo Facebook type program. He described the project:

> As a review for all of the information about the founder, they were to create a Fakebook page that includes information about the person, some things that they [the founder] would have done, some friends that he would've had, based on the movies, based on the lectures, based on the lessons we've been doing, based on the readings. Then, part of it is just to have them create things on their own. They did enjoy it, but what I'm finding is that even this, creating a Fakebook page, is old now. (Second Interview)

Francis did not discuss this challenge specifically in the first interview. Yet, as he talked about his curriculum and how he responds to the challenge of teaching religious studies to teenagers, he articulated how useful computer technology is, in reaching the students where they are, but also how important it is to keep up on the latest in technology programs and educational uses. He observed that Facebook is now passé.

He described ways that he used technology in the class. "I provide [an online]

template for students and then they fill in stuff for basic review. They can download it and then they create it or revise it. This is review at the end of the unit" (Second Interview). He included test essays online along with the rubric for grading the tests. For his senior class, Francis had the students create a digital portfolio. When asked about his technological skills, he was modest, "I've been doing that [the digital portfolios] for about five years. I don't really call myself that [a techy guy]" (Second Interview).

The Challenge of Breadth and Depth

Francis acknowledged that in several courses there was a conflict between covering the breadth of the content and investigating particular aspects of the course content in depth. He addressed this problem in his World Religions class by jigsawing the content. Jigsawing is a teaching technique of dividing students into groups and having each group go into depth on one aspect of the content being studied, and then share their findings with the another group made up of members who explored the other topics. Francis described the way he addressed the breadth and depth problem in his World Religions class:

> One of the tensions was with depth and breadth. When I was doing a world religions class, there was just no possible way to [cover everything], all the Asian religions with all the other world religions in one semester. So, one of the units I had was for students to choose one of the other Asian world religions. We covered Hinduism. We covered Buddhism. But then they could choose between Jainism, Sikhism, Confucianism, Shinto, and their group could choose and present that material to the class. I allowed them to choose a topic and religion and they could go into depth on that one religion. Then they presented it to the class….
>
> The instructions were to create a one-class lesson about this religion and that it had to be engaging, had to use visuals, and it had to have an activity for the class. They worked in groups of no more than four. They had about two weeks to do it. They could do movie clips, music clips, an activity. Some of them created a skit. Some created a worksheet that kids could [fill out]. Others did PowerPoints and some brought in food.

> One young woman who was Sikh lead a group of four and she did a really good job of going into depth. Even from her sharing her experiences as a Sikh young woman, it gave the students depth in a particular religion. In having to teach it to other students, I think they got a lot out of it. And the rest of the class got at least some information about that particular religion. (Second Interview)

He stated that he did such activities two or three times a semester, "allowing the students to really take a topic and go with it, either by themselves or with a group" (Second Interview). Another depth activity involved the freshman religion students:

> My freshmen, this past January. . . we were celebrating the feast of the founder of the school. So we would be learning about him and then they [students] were to create a homily and basically imagine themselves getting in front of the school and preaching and sharing why the founder was so influential to them. This is the point where we're talking about the founding charism of the school. So they were able to go with and really get the experience of writing down a reflection, but also delivering it. I gave the option for students who wanted to, realizing that some kids are better in public doing that kind of stuff than others are. But they all had to write them [the homilies] down so they at least had the written part. Students got more into the life of the founder beyond just what we did, to have to find experiences from his own life experiences and his own teachings and writings. It was a little bit more simplistic for the freshmen, but I think they did a really good job with it. (Second Interview)

The Challenge of Academic Rigor and Assessments

Francis referred to the perception of the Religious Studies Department as an academic department in tension with an expectation for affective spiritual growth. In his experience at a prior school, teachers in other academic departments had been influenced by religious studies teachers who had focused only on the affective and experiential aspects of faith development. Francis noted:

> When I first started teaching, I worked with a woman who was teaching in the department and I think she was definitely more on the affective side. That really shaped people's perceptions of the Religious Studies Department, not just of her, but the whole department. She had a big sand box built outside and people would be playing in it, which I'm sure was connected somehow [to religious studies] but the perceptions were there, you know. That's my own experience as a new teacher. (Second Interview)

He went on to explain how his own teaching experience had grown as a result of that first encounter with affective teaching:

> I think I've been more attentive to that. I had just finished my Master's program so I was definitely more on the academic rigor side. Being a lot more aware of that [tension between affective and academic] and trying to be both, in an appropriate way, I think is a big part of how I like to structure the course. Admittedly, I tend to focus a lot more on the academic rigor part. And I could do a lot more of the affective formation part. But I think my work in retreats kind of helps balance that out for me. That's how I've been coping with that tension. (Second Interview)

He then commented on the administration's expectations regarding academic rigor:

> [There is the] expectation of it being a serious academic department. I think I mentioned earlier that there has been a growing, changing, perception among the faculty and I think it's been kind of spearheaded by the administration, which has been great. (Second Interview)

This support from the administration also called a halt to counselors using religion classes as time to pull students out of class with a frequency not experienced in other departments. He stated:

> Religious studies is no longer seen as a dumping ground for things, so I think that's good in terms of respecting the integrity of our religious studies department. That's been very clear in terms of the counselors. The counselors can't just have stuff to do with the religious studies department. (Second Interview).

When asked about how the students respond to the academic expectations in religious studies classes, Francis observed:

> I know there are students who, and I don't know if this is a good thing or a bad thing, there are students who have gotten in trouble because they skipped all their classes to finish a religious studies project. You know, they'll end up skipping class and be in the library just because they need to finish something. That's good, I guess. In the past I think it would have been, "Okay, whatever. This is just religion."
>
> And also, having students know, seniors, but I think freshmen also, but definitely seniors. . . it's more pronounced in terms of, they understood the expectations of writing, thinking, and communicating in a religious studies class. So it's not just, "Oh, this is what I think," or "This is what I feel," but also why. So I think that

> has been showing up a lot more. It's been awhile since I haven't seen that kind of an expectation. (Second Interview)

Francis commented on how academic rigor has become an expectation in his classes:

> In the past, it was "How can I get a bad grade on this? This is what I feel. This is what I think." "Well, yeah, that's great, but you didn't show it. You didn't support it. You didn't make a coherent argument for it." Whereas now, yes, of course grammar counts. I know the last two years with the freshmen that has been drilled in. I think the Religious Studies Department, working with the English Department, even with the Computer Science Department on similar projects, has helped student see, "Oh, yeah, this is part of all that." I think the cross curricular stuff has helped a lot, too, because what they're writing in English is emphasized, but also expected in religion. In religious studies, what we do there [in class] they'll talk about in history or in English, and they'll see those connections there. (Second Interview)

In the first interview, Francis mentioned his desire that the students question and push back on the content of the course. In the second interview, he elaborated on this idea and provided an example of a lesson in which he felt he accomplished this goal. The research project focused on Ninian Smart's seven elements to a religion (Smart, 1968). These included the narrative dimension, the ritual dimension, and the social dimension, among others. Francis described one student's project:

> So, this student focused on the ethical and legal dimension of Christianity. He focused on the Ten Commandments . . . . So pushing back in terms of questioning, I want them to be able to question, to think. [O]ne of the things that he did [in his presentation], he talked about the legalistic view of religion that some people have and he used the Ten Commandments as showing us, you know. . . every one of his lines was that people throw the Ten Commandments around, as either judgment or as punishment or as in your face, you've done something wrong.
>
> [His] take was Catholics believe that God is showing us how to live and how we are meant to live. The way to live is by having a loving relationship with God and with each other. So kind of taking the legalistic, the ethical dimension of Christianity and taking it more in terms of not seeing it just as laws to live by; it's a guide to relationships. So that was what he focused on in terms of what he learned by looking at the Ten Commandments. I guess some people can see it [the Commandments] as the laws. What do you do with the laws? He was able to see it beyond a set of laws but a way to live.

> I asked him, "What did you think of, before you chose this topic? What did you know about, think about, the Ten Commandments?" And then we talked about what he learned and this notion of it is more than just things to do. It's how you live. I think that was an example of, he was able to question and challenge a preconception of a previous understanding and develop it into something more. I think the students hearing that from him encourages them to think about it too. (Second Interview)

Francis shared some of the ways he assessed student work. For example, in the presentation on The Ten Commandments, mentioned above, he stated, "I let them go through it [the presentation] first and then I have questions" (Second Interview). He had students who were watching and listening to the presentation write three questions to ask at the end. He discussed one technique that he uses to assess participation:

> I would physically put a sticky note on everyone's desk and then I would collect them. I tell my students that everyone is required to participate but that participation doesn't necessarily mean talking, because not everyone participates in that way. "So, if you can show me that you're participating by focusing and understanding and at least wrestling with the question or the problem, that's all you need to do because that's participation. If you don't have anything on yours, but I know you've been talking and asking questions, that's great, because that's how you participated." (Second Interview)

Francis explained that he was exploring a program called iBrainstorm which allows the students to create sticky notes on their iPads. They point the iPad at Francis' technology device and it picks up all the sticky notes, so that they can have synchronous sharing of questions and ideas during or shortly after a presentation. He also mentioned the digital portfolios that he assigned to students. The portfolios were created on Google Docs as a presentation. He described the expectations:

> I either give them a naming protocol or I have them share it with me as an editor or owner. Marilyn [pseudonym] created a website. Google sites has a bunch of tutorial videos they can watch and do themselves. . . . So, for her portfolio, they're supposed to have one main concept that stood out for them in that religion. Then similar, but not exactly the same is what everyone should know. So I asked them, "What do you think others, your peers, should know about this religion? Then

> explain it." She puts in a video. She cited her sources. And then they were supposed to include art and video. They're supposed to include an annotated bibliography for each religion. And I every year, one or two students would email me back saying, "Remember that annotated bibliography that you made us do, and you harped on us making us do these things? We're doing them in college all the time." (Second Interview)

The Challenge of Collaboration

Similar to comments made by other participants, Francis found collaboration among colleagues to be refreshing and essential to the development of curriculum and to his own development as a teacher. Informal, casual conversations were leaven for the practice of teaching. He noted one example of such a conversation:

> [J]ust this past semester, in religious studies, in the freshman class, we were talking about Abraham and moving into the Promised Land and what that's all about. At lunch, some faculty members were talking about what the freshmen were doing in terms of coming up with arguments both for and against the Israelis and Palestinians. Talking about some of the biblical foundations that people on both sides tried to link to. So the History Department, or Social Studies Department, began incorporating that into some of the debates that they were having, in terms of what do people, what were some of the non-stated beginnings of this [Israeli-Palestinian conflict] in terms of ancient times. So that kind of made sense, but that was accidental because we were just talking about it and then students who were talking about it with their teachers. So it wasn't intended, but that's what it became. It would have been nicer if it were planned. (Second Interview)

Third and Fourth Research Questions: Anne

The Challenge of Orthodoxy and Relevance

In the first interview, Anne expressed some concern about her preparation to teach religious studies at the high school level. She stated that she was cognizant of not having a degree in theology and, while this was not a tension, it was something she was aware of whenever she prepared her lessons: "I want to really make sure that what I'm teaching is correct, you know" (Second Interview). Anne shared a little about how she prepared herself for particular lessons and classes:

> First of all, I study the material. . . . I feel like I have a couple of gaps here and there, so I study the material. I use the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as a reference. In all fairness, it's a little dry reading sometimes and it's a little difficult to un-package for kids, so I use the *Complete Idiot's Guide to the Catholic Catechism*. It's got the Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur [indicating that nothing contradicts Church teaching]. The language is much more for the common person and it's definitely geared toward Catholics, which is nice. It gives a lot of little tidbits of information that aren't in the *Catechism* but make learning fun.
>
> It's nice to explain things in a language that kids can understand. . . . I seek the advice of my colleagues for clarification just to say, "This is what I'm teaching. I know it's right, but is there another facet of it that I could add on? Is there someone's research that I could stand on?"
>
> That's basically what I do and, again, not being afraid to say, "What a great question. I don't know. Let's look it up." I have my go-to Catholic websites. Some of the Catholic websites are a little vocabulary heavy in ways that just . . . you just have to sift through all this stuff and just give me the answer, you know. I try to be really careful with the kids to make sure that it's a legitimate site and not just somebody's blog that is their opinion. (Second Interview)

In addition to her concerns about teaching orthodox material in language that her students could understand, Anne was concerned with making her classes relevant to her diverse group of students, while holding onto the teachings of the Church. She felt particularly challenged in the Christian Sexuality class:

> Another thing I do a lot of is, what I call, search-to-discover. I'll provide different websites so some will be hardcore Catholic sites and some will be more geared for converts because they're a little bit easier to understand.
>
> With my Christian Sexuality class I use two sites: kidshealth.org and American Pregnancies Association, because they're non-religious. I want kids, not that I don't believe in the Church's opinion, but I want them to see it's not only the Church who promotes safety. Maybe it's a cop out. It's kind of a backdoor way, but at the end of the class, I want them to see maybe the Church's position isn't the most popular, but in some respects it's the smartest. It's fiscally responsible.
>
> So I'll try to bring in non-religious sites and . . . I'll just give a list of them. Or I'll start with one site and just let them go wherever they want to be, wherever their interest takes them. Then I always provide a discussion board. I like transparency. They can't just write something very quickly on a piece of paper and put it on the bottom [of the pile] if it's low quality. They're going to put it on

> the discussion board. All of their classmates are going to see it. (Second Interview)

The Challenge of Church Teaching, Faith Formation, and Relevance

Similar to other participants, Anne sometimes found it challenging to make the Church's teaching relevant, or even comprehensible, to her students. This was particularly true in the Christian Sexuality class. Anne used movies and music to help the students make connections. She described one experience in the sexuality class. The lesson was on dating and courtship:

> You go through certain eras where males were considered, you know, that sex was an animal instinct and they were totally and completely unable to control themselves. So, it was totally up to the woman. The kids unearth some really interesting stuff. They're on a website, a bunch of them.
>
> I showed them the clip from *Four Weddings and a Funeral* where . . . she's sitting in a coffee shop with the guy she's not going to marry. He's just helped her pick her dress and they're talking about the way you're being monogamized after your marriage. . . . She goes through this whole litany of the men she slept with and she's describing . . . and I remember sitting there watching this scene just laughing hysterically.
>
> But then I saw it. It's amazing [when] you see a movie after you teach something. After you're teaching a class, that a movie's kind of about that class. All of a sudden that movie takes on a whole new, different significance.

The Challenge of Technology and Relevance

Anne's use of the discussion board in the Christian Sexuality class led to her thoughts on technology in the classroom and digital citizenship. She stated, "I do a lot of discussion work. . . ." (Second Interview). Not only could the students in a particular period see each other's work, they could see the work of other sections taking the same course. Anne pointed out:

> I also think that helps promote positive digital literacy. It's not private. Not only can they see it, their parents can see it, any administrator, anyone who has guest access [to the school's classroom management system] can see it. I want them to

> understand, "What you write on there is visible for everybody." So that's part of the relevancy.
>
> Even if you're talking about faith. . . your opinion, it's going to be out there for everybody to see if you post it online. I mean, it's not the World Wide Web. . . but I want them to understand it's not just between them and me. They need to understand that it's public. I think the internet also helps them practice that digital transparency in their actions as well. So just any way to connect the sacred to the secular. . . the fact that we are a billboard for our faith in the cyber world and in the real world.

Anne conveyed her conviction that the use of technology is part of what makes the course, or a lesson, relevant to her students. The use of the internet took the students outside of the boundaries of the textbook. Using the context of a lesson on religious orders, she explained:

> Having technology, especially one-to-one [each student has a laptop or a tablet that they bring to class] is, you know, double-edged. It has a lot of positives and a lot of negatives. But I think the positives far outweigh the negatives, especially for us to be able to see that Catholicism, or any faith tradition, exists beyond the textbook. . . . To see what connection is. To be able to just go online.
>
> I've got a website, it's kind of a portal to almost every religious order on the planet. So for them to literally see this list that goes on and on and on and on, that's pretty impressive for a lot of kids. A lot of [the religious order] sites have videos. "Go look and see what do they stand for? What are the commonalities between every one of them. . . . ." Catholic kids know that already, but they don't, in our day and age, see a lot of religious orders all the time. Just to see that connection to the greater community I think is a really big deal. [There was a lot of] interest in our students, depending on which class I was teaching, in the election of the pope. They could get those answers immediately. (Second Interview)

The Challenge of Academic Rigor, Breadth v. Depth, and Assessments

In the first interview, Anne mentioned concern that academic rigor not become academic ruthlessness. She described her Dead Ancestor Project, which was a research project that she would use as a reference point throughout the semester:

> They have to tell us a story about a dead ancestor of their own, of their family. "They [the subjects] have to be dead and you can't have ever met them. Go find,

> call a grandparent. Do whatever [you have to do]." I heard amazing stories. People who lived on the same street as Martin Luther King. A woman who was an anchoress in an abbey. They have to comment on the accuracy. It's like, well, here's a book about her. Somebody who was a chief engineer that laid out the City of Portland and there's a type of engineering. I've learned stories about horse thieves and illegal immigration. Just incredibly rich stories.
>
> Then throughout the rest of the semester, they start doing reports on St. Augustine, Hildegard of Bingen. Just things like that. I just call them another dead ancestor story, so it's like, "They're your ancestor. You've got to get up and tell us the story, make it real, like everybody else." (Second Interview)

Anne was making the transition from the students' dead ancestors to the Church's dead ancestors. She felt this was particularly helpful for students who had not been raised with a faith tradition. She explained:

> If you're not a person of faith at all, and you haven't been raised in a faith tradition, you might have a tough time thinking that way. But we're a Christian, for the most part, we're a Christian country . . . . So, you inherit that history. Nobody seems to balk about it. They get a choice of who they want. If they don't like who's on my list, pick somebody else.
>
> The nice thing is they get into the story. They get into not just the facts about them. They get into the stories, like make it real to us. I think it's been a little more positive. Another thing is, "What's the legacy that they left the world?" I tell them, "Nobody's going to be talking about me 500 years from now. Nobody's going to be talking about me 50 years after I die. Some of these people are at most 2000 years old. They're in our books. Why? What can we take from that?"
>
> The individual piece that they have to give in just about everything I do is, "What impressed you about that person? What are you going to remember about that person beyond the facts on the page?"
>
> Then, if I have time, I'll [have them] go on a discussion board and put in their saint. "Just give me the basic stuff. Just give me, 'Remember, this was the one about… .' Refresh our memory and then say what was the legacy? What will you take [away]?" And then everybody will have to read everybody else's and then comment, depending on how much time I have or if I wanted to give it as points. "Find somebody else that your saint has something in common with and then write about it." So, they're showing that connection . . . . They get to read what everybody else did, the ones [students] that care. And all the information's in one place when they study for the final. (Second Interview)

Anne found this exercise particularly helpful as they moved through the semester. She explained, "When I start to lose them all semester long, I harken back, "Remember that ancestor?" (Second Interview). The inspiration for the project came from a religious sister she met at the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) conference a few years before. "She was talking about the saints and how we don't teach kids enough about saints. I thought, 'I don't have time to do that.' Then I thought, 'The whole stupid class is about saints. Let's be a little more intentional about it'" (Second Interview).

Anne shared an experience she had when using a publisher's textbook and publisher-generated tests. She struggled with helping her students learn for the tests. She observed, "The questions in the test don't line up well with the work in the textbook at all" (Second Interview). The students did not do well on the tests. Anne explained that the next time she taught the class she restructured the notes to align more closely with the test, then whited out key words and had the students fill in the worksheets. However, this method led to less knowledge retention over the semester. She concluded:

> I'll be honest. It was less painful. The kids did really well on the test because it was just almost word for word what they studied. I don't think they learned it. And I'm [later in the class] making references to things we just did a few months ago and some of it's not even ringing a bell.
>
> "Do you remember this at all?" "Do you remember the name?" I mean it's like St. Augustine, City of God, confession, sin, grace. All that. I just think they didn't have enough interaction with the information. I think I made it too simple. It saved a lot of time and so it worked for them. The other way, we spent so much time getting into the text, looking at it, trying to explain. They're struggling to find it [the term] and then I would go over it and it saved a lot more time.
>
> That's why I'm really not as stressed at the end of the semester because I have this little extra bit of breathing room. But it was at the expense of them not knowing. So the final is going to be a little tough for them because they just don't remember it. I'm going to find a happy medium for that. (Second Interview)

She did not seem discouraged and commented that she would go back and do something

else. Anne stated several times that if a learning activity worked, she kept it and if something was not working for her students she would adapt it or change it all together. Occasionally these changes were made mid-stream, when she realized that a planned lesson was not being effective at all. She spoke about borrowing lessons from other teachers:

> I took a thing that a guy who taught the class next to me did. His lessons are great. There are actually people, you walk in and watch it [their lesson] and they do it brilliantly. You take their lesson and you try it and it fails miserably. I cannot do, cannot think the way he does. I just can't do it, so I try to take the essence of what he does and find another way to do it.
>
> When I get something that works, like yes, finally. And then, you know, it's like it'll work in period one and [not] in period two. (Second Interview)

Anne went on to discuss particular skills she taught and expected from her students when doing presentations. "Every time they do a presentation I grade on respect for the subject matter (Second Interview)." She went on to explain what she meant by respect for the subject matter:

> They can't be cracking jokes . . . especially when they're acting things out. They have a tendency to get a little bit . . . they play for the joke. So people will remember and they'll say, "What's wrong with that?" I said, "Because people are going to remember they liked your presentation, but they're not going to remember anything about it. They're not going to remember any of the content."
>
> Other things would be [when] they're doing a presentation about a Church teaching that they don't agree with. "I don't have a problem with you not agreeing with it, but you darn well better be respectful about that."
>
> We're having kids like, "Let's have a debate on abortion." It's like, "No. That's not going to happen." So, they're pretty clear about, by the time we do something, they're pretty clear about what that [respect for the subject matter] means on the rubric.
>
> It's usually content, delivery, whether they read [from the screen or notes]. Twenty percent is whether they read it right off [the screen]. I have kids who turn around and read to the screen. I don't require my students to do presentations from the front of the room. (Second Interview)

The Challenge of Classroom Environment and Contextual Location of the Students

Anne was the only participant who explicitly spoke about how she created a classroom environment that was responsive to the contextual location of the students. She started by having them get to know each other. She described the first day:

> The very first day, I don't need to talk to them for 40 minutes. I have them pair up and they have to . . . your basic introducing people, but then I give them the twist. They have to introduce them to us in formal language, like, "Ladies and gentlemen, it is my privilege to introduce to you our new classmate, Mr. both names." And then they have to tell us . . . I do have a cheat sheet they can use that I put up, but they have to say that. They have to get up in front. Everybody gets up in front of everybody, but they're not talking about themselves. It's a little bit easy and it's interesting. The ones that are like the class clown, when they're up there and somebody's talking about them, they look so uncomfortable. I mean, that's not my goal to make people look uncomfortable, but it gives me a lot of insight into the kids. Some of them get a little more in-depth than others. I do that in all my classes because, number one, I try to get to know them a little bit. So, I try to get them up right from the very beginning.

In addition to the first day's activities, she described how she guided the students in creating a class covenant that they would adhere to throughout the school year. She observed:

> One thing that I have done on and off throughout my career, but especially after [my Master's and doctoral work] is creating the class community, talking over, listening to them. Now I have it ritualized with assignments that I have them do. It gets printed and it's on the wall, which is not something I've ever done but I do that in high school for every single class. We have a class covenant that they [the students] come up with so, at the beginning, I'm modeling any ideas they come up with.
>
> "Why don't we have Taco Tuesday?" That's not going to happen, but you listen to it, you take it. I learn a lot about them, what their needs are. I learned about how serious they're going to take the class. They share a lot of information about teachers that, I shouldn't say teachers, but techniques that teachers do that they don't like. So, I go out of my way to make sure that, even if I don't think that's that big of a deal, I make sure that I don't do [those things].
>
> It's [the covenant] posted on the wall and I think even from the very beginning I can tie that into respect and dignity. "Over and over again, you're going to hear that. How do we do this? What do we do for somebody who's holding the class

> back? Do we make them stand in the corner? How does that display dignity and respect?" (Second Interview)

She described her process in detail and explained how this helped with student buy-in into the class. Anne started with a discussion board exercise. She posed the question, "What does the perfect class look like? What are those kinds of things?" (Second Interview). She went into more detail:

> I put posters [around the room], expectations "Of Adults," "Of Myself," "Of My Classmates," "Strategies and Consequences." They go around in groups with the [group] color and they write what they want and present those [ideas] to the class. Then I put those away.

She followed up by grouping the students again and had them refine the ideas on the posters.

> On another day I'll create Google Docs. . . . "Your group has strategies and consequences. You're now quality control. If you think something is stupid, don't put it there [in the Google Doc]. If you think there's something missing, go ahead [and add it]." As they're typing it up, everybody sees it. So, when they present it we decide, "Okay, is everybody willing to adhere to this?" Then, eventually, I just put it on a poster. But Google Docs is great because I don't have to type it up. . . . If it's on legal [sized paper], I can get it all to fit. I just bullet point. (Second Interview)

However, Anne goes on to add, "Let's not be under the misconception that this is in any way a democracy. But I'm willing to listen and I'm willing to consider" (Second Interview).

After some experience with the class covenant activity, Anne added another strategy to it. She used questioning as a way to get to know her students better. She wanted to know what was important to them. This was an exercise in getting her students to describe their own familiar world in new ways, thus aiding her in knowing them better. In this case, the topic was their favorite year in school. She developed the activity from work in her graduate studies. Anne explained:

> I was in somebody's class, maybe it was a spirituality poetry class. It was like, ask your students, "What does this concept look like? What does it feel like? What does it taste like?" I thought this was the stupidest thing on the Planet. They [the students] would laugh me out of the room. (Second Interview)

But she decided to try it in her own classes:

> I'm just going to try this one day. I'm going to keep a straight face and I'm going to ask. I don't remember what it was, but after I asked the question, it was dead silent. They were thinking so hard that they came up with the most wonderful things. I thought, "Aren't I the idiot?" So now I would say, "Think back to your most favorite year in school. What was the most . . . what was so great about it? Was it the teacher? Was it with your best friends? Was it your mom taught at the school? Whatever. Just think back to what was the most special thing about it."
>
> Then I say, "In a perfect world, what does the most perfect class look like? What does it sound like? If somebody walked in the door, what would they see?" That's kind of how I started the discussion. (Second Interview)

Anne found that this strategy worked well to create a safe environment for engaging the students in faith sharing later on in the semester. She hoped that the efforts she put into the first few days of class, building trust, would link to the Catholicity of the class and the school. She stated:

> It's the whole hidden curriculum . . . . It is a religious school. And it is Catholicism. I'd want them to make that link between Catholicism, the Catholic school, this classroom. If it's an atmosphere, for the most part, of dignity and respect, I think we've at least done something right. . . . As I come back to the class covenants, I can start using intentional language, like community of disciples, especially if I'm teaching Catholic Experience. That's what Christianity was all about. (Second Interview)

Third and Fourth Research Questions: Sarah

The Challenge of Curriculum Design and the Bishops' Framework

Sarah began the second interview by discussing the Bishops' *Framework* (USCCB, 2008) as it related to the department's curriculum development and design. She had been to a conference of other Catholic educators and discovered that several dioceses require a standardized test of the freshmen students at the end of their freshman

year. The test required students to answer questions that were "in compliance with the *Framework*" (Second Interview). She spoke about how colleagues in other schools have navigated around the *Framework*:

> What most of the other educators have said is what they are doing is figuring out how to fit the *Framework* within their established curriculum. I think that's kind of universal. I haven't run into anybody that's like, "Yes, we're using these eight textbooks in this order, this exact way." I haven't met anybody that's doing that but it varied from diocese to diocese about how strict the compliance is. (Second Interview)

She went on to discuss how they were addressing the *Framework* in her department:

> Currently we do not have a standardized test that these students have to take. . . . We're working on filling out a document that addresses where [in] each of our courses we teach the points of the *Framework*. So, I feel like that might be sort of a win-win situation. If we're addressing those issues and we're able to do that in a way that the kids get or understand and we continue to use our methodologies and pedagogy and all of that, and bringing [in] other topics that we also find to be helpful, useful, and relevant within our theology or these classes, I think that's the way. That seems to be the trend. . . so it isn't as concerning as it was, I feel, because in my mind I can envision how that compromise can work for us, for my school, and for many schools.

However, Sarah did voice concern at the possibility of the diocese mandating strict compliance with the scope and sequence of the Bishops' *Framework*:

> If the bishops, or our particular bishop, decide to change things, then that's a whole different kettle of fish. But as it stands with what it sounds like will be the practice within this diocese, I think we can get behind that, make sure we cover what we're supposed to cover within the *Framework* and also continue to teach other things. So, I'm good with that. . . .
>
> The two dioceses that I am aware of and talk to the teachers that have this test, it's like 50 multiple choice questions or something. . . sort of what you hear about happening in many public schools as Star testing. . . . [Y]ou teach to the test so you make sure that the kids know that stuff and can take that test and then you do what you want to do.
>
> I'm going to wait until that comes down the pipe to figure out how to do that or, because my hope with the office of education for the diocese and everything else, it seems to be a good working relationship. . . . It seems like the current way that the schools and the diocese are moving forward with being upfront about where

> they meet the curricula or the *Framework* within their curriculum seems to be making everybody happy. So, I'm just going to, we're going to keep our fingers crossed for that because that would be a tension to figure out how to teach to a test or have a standardized test. . . . (Second Interview)

At Sarah's school, Blessed Trinity, there were six semesters of required religious studies courses and then the seniors could choose from a variety of elective courses. Sarah wondered about how the electives would fit into the *Framework*:

> We have a relationships class that, as I was rescanning the *Framework*, I think could fit easily into one of these Life in Christ offerings. Challenge of Peace, we have a course in peace. We have a course in gender and religion. We have a course in sacred art and themes of art. So, we have a bunch of different ones and we have to look at, this is one of the things we'll be doing over the next year or so, is looking at how everything fits in with. . . because the *Framework* has electives.
>
> I think part of the question we have to ask as we're moving forward with this is, "Do we, where is the, in the *Framework* what do we, what's elective in the *Framework*? Does that make sense?" Because if they're offering electives, not every student will take all of those. I have no idea how to answer that question. (Second Interview)

The Challenge of Contextual Location of Students and Relevance

Like Anne, Sarah taught a religious studies class in relationships and encountered similar challenges with teaching the Church's perspective and having the course remain relevant to the students. At the same time, she felt an obligation to open her students' minds to the values that the Church was teaching. She was concerned with the world these young people would have to navigate in and how Church teachings could help them in their journey. She began:

> I taught this relationships class this semester and it was very, very interesting for me to have some very candid conversations with the students about their beliefs about sex and intimacy and marriage and what's appropriate, what's expected in all of that. So, this idea of relevancy. . . I felt kind of by the end of the semester, as I was teaching them, we need to meet them where they are and have conversations with them. But I'm a Catholic educator and I need to, I feel a sense of, I guess, moral obligation . . . to at least engage them in a conversation about

> what the Church teaches and that, perhaps, there is something more to sexual intercourse than a physiological, biological feel-good event, which is how a lot of them feel.
>
> And in having the conversations, "Wow, that's very interesting. That's not the way I think about it." Then, on the other hand, I'm somebody who needs to stand up and tell them they're wrong. I mean, in some ways I would never say that in that way to them. But my thinking is, "You're so young. You're pretty secularly raised. You watch TV. You listen to a lot of music. All these kinds of things are bombarding you with all these messages." (Second Interview)

She engaged her classes in discussions about the sacrament of marriage and its place in contemporary society:

> In a hyper-sexualized world and society, I think that there's actually something to being the voice that says, "At least think about this stuff." For example, almost everybody in the class figures that they're going to live with somebody before they get married, but they all want to get married. . . . And part of the conversation is to engage them in a conversation about, "Well, if you think that all stuff is fine before you get married, why would you even bother to get married? What's the benefit?"
>
> There's something special about marriage. . . and try to have them look at and understand that, well, "I do think marriage is special so it should be something different." And why is that special? And maybe living with somebody beforehand isn't necessary. They all think test driving the relationship, living together. . . "Well, then, why would you get married? What makes marriage special?" So, it's been this really interesting process because I've never taught the class before. To realize that there's a lot of room to have conversations about the sacramental nature of marriage and relationship and intimacy and all of that. (Second Interview)

The Challenges of Faith Formation and Contextual Location of the Students

As mentioned by the other participants, a key challenge for Sarah was her role in the faith formation of students who come from widely diverse religious backgrounds. An aspect of this diversity was the secular background of many of the students and their identity as being spiritual but not religious. She explained:

> I believe that a lot of our students are . . . Catholic. Not many of them really like to admit it. Some students are a variety of religions but they don't like to admit that. They are more interested in the spiritual than the religious and I'm kind of

> feeling compelled, especially with the older kids, to call them on that and be like, "I'm pretty sure you believe in God. I've seen you pray and listened to you talk. I'm not saying you have to prescribe to a particular set of dogmatic beliefs." It's just an interesting thing. I think that the students are, not all of the students but many of them, are resistant to identifying themselves as religious in nature because – I don't know why. . . .
>
> [They're] happy to say they're spiritual, not so happy to say they're religious. They don't like the fact that they come back from retreat and they're wearing crosses around for months. Well, it was really interesting. This kid wasn't in my class, but . . . we were on a retreat and a student was like, "Yeah, I try to be a good kid. I've been Catholic my whole life, but I don't have any use for God anymore. Bad things have happened and I'm done with God."
>
> A priest came to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation and there were too many kids and we didn't have enough time . . . . The priest was coming back that night for mass and he was like, "Anybody who hasn't received the sacrament, if you'd like to, the priest can come back early for mass." This kid, he wanted the priest to come back early and spent half an hour with him and, then, applied to be a [retreat] leader.

Sarah found the juxtaposition between this student's dismissal of God and his later seeking God to be interesting and demonstrative of the crooked path students take in their faith formation. She concluded:

> So, as he was saying, "I don't believe in God, he's seeking out counsel and from a priest, going back to his roots. So there's this interesting kind of thing like they say one thing but sometimes their actions show something else.

This memory brought Sarah back to reflecting on the relationships class and how it related to their faith formation.

> And that's kind of in this relationships class when they talk. They talk a pretty good game about being casual with their behaviors and their intimacy, like their sexual behaviors. They talk a good game about it. But I see enough kids upset by having hooked up with somebody who now wasn't talking to them. So, I don't know.
>
> They probably all want to, when they get married, probably want to get married in a church with some pastor or priest or somebody officiating a wedding . . . . I had a student do a presentation on cohabitation and talked about how cohabitation is a stepping-stone to marriage. But some people, if you reject the institution of marriage, then these are folks that are never going to get married and they're

> living together in this committed relationship. And the students think it's odd that people would reject the institution of marriage.

The Challenges of Church Teachings and Relevance

The discussion about the relationships class led Sarah to reflect again on her role as a religious studies teacher. In the first interview, she had mentioned that part of her role was to "be one of the grownups" (First Interview). In the second interview she wondered, "As I was thinking through this, I think there's lots of times we teach what the Church says with a wink" (Second Interview). She addressed this issue with a tone of seriousness:

> I'm still processing all of this idea that I think I need to do better. For me, personally, there are times that, when we talk about certain teachings of the Church, that I disagree with, I put it out there and the kids sort of eviscerate it and I'm like, "Well, that was certainly very interesting."
>
> Knowing full well that they're going to do that, I'm starting to believe that it's actually important, even if I disagree, to try to explain the thinking and the philosophy behind it even. And to say that, I've always said that you can disagree with certain things that a group – you can be a member of a group and disagree with parts of it. Like there are a lot of people living in the United States that don't agree with half of what the U.S. government does. A lot of people say that they're Republicans that might not agree with every plank of the Republican platform or whatever it is. So, I can say that I am a Catholic and a believer and I disagree with these things. But I have to understand where they're [the Church teachings] coming from.
>
> So, it's the idea of empathy I'm starting to play with a lot this year. Not play with, but to just really think about. And I think part of doing that as a teacher, for me, it'll be important because if I teach too many things with a dismissive wink and . . . when I try to say something that I actually believe or I feel needs the weight, they're [the students] ready to dismiss it already. It's a big challenge. (Second Interview)

Sarah explored from where she thought the "teaching with a wink" attitude came. She speculated on the teachers in Catholic schools in liberal urban settings. "I would guess that a lot of the religious studies teachers [in these settings] would define

themselves as liberal Catholics as opposed to conservative Catholics" (Second Interview). She wondered if this was part of the reason the bishops' *Framework* had been developed.

Sarah provided an example of how she revised a lesson to be more attentive to Church teaching. She chose a new textbook for her Catholic Social Ethics class, to be introduced in the following school year. She tested it with some of her current students and felt that it was accessible and interesting to them. She stated, "It tries to meet them where they are. It talks about the history behind things and then it gets into the theology of things. So, it was interesting. I'm looking forward to try to find a better way to use it" (Second Interview). She went on to explain how she planned to restructure the class:

> I'm thinking of how I may structure the whole class a little differently. This class has been fantastic but I want to do a better job next year. I think there might have been a little bit too much on the psychology sociology, which I think is important. But we have a psychology class at the school. So, I can probably touch on that more briefly and then I think spending more time with the implications of things.
>
> We used Erikson's eight stages and trust versus mistrust and intimacy versus isolation. I would still probably use that but I might do that in a day, as opposed to just really spending so much time in it. Use that very abbreviated version of it so they kind of understand it but really talk about, "What is this idea of trust versus mistrust that happens when you're young?" Maybe even trying to draw that back to faith and maybe doing some more focus on. . . like using Fowler's faith development. So, if we have a belief in God and bad things have happened to us. . . the same way you think about a baby who doesn't know where its food is coming from because the caregivers aren't taking care of them, that's when the mistrust comes in. That first stage. So, how does that happen in our faith life? Like we think we're good, holy. We've been praying a lot. Well, bad stuff still happens and so, are we developing this? So, I think drawing some connections there might be an interesting thing to do towards the beginning of the year. (Second Interview)

She went on to observe that it would be easy to teach some of the classes she taught without bringing faith or God into the class. This ease could be a slippery slope. She explained:

> In some ways you can teach relationships and you can teach personal ethics or morality without ever once bringing God into it . . . . In some ways it's easy, it's really easy to teach that without bringing faith or God or whatever into it. So I have to think about it more. I have to be more conscious about it and think that it's integrated at every point during the class and that the faith pieces are there. So for the relationships class, I'm going to make sure that I use the idea of Fowler's faith development. And I think with every topic we talk [about], I'll probably try to have them look at themselves, and we'll do some temperament stuff, you know, God, self, others. Like continue to bring God into the conversation as often as possible. (Second Interview)

Connecting to the importance of bringing God into each religious studies course, Sarah recognized that what might seem obvious to her, or any teacher of religious studies, was not necessarily obvious to her students. She needed to make the connections to God and faith explicit for her students. This led her to become more reflective about her pedagogy. In reference to her ethics class, she observed:

> I had them get the Bible out to read the Good Samaritan because we were talking about compassion and empathy and all this stuff. They're like, "I thought we finally finished with the Bible." And I'm like, "That's an awful thing to say in a religious studies class, my friend." Part of me, there's a part that dismissed it and I'm like, I've been discussing God the whole time, but I'm also like, oh maybe I'm the only one that's making the connections to God and theology, which seems obvious to me, but maybe I'm not actually saying it as much as I should.
>
> So teaching the personal ethics based on sort of virtue ethics and walking through justice and compassion and wise judgment and wholeness, which are all so tied up in Catholic virtues. That kind of stuff. And that's the whole *Framework*. Maybe I forget to remind them that this is the reason that we're actually taking this class and studying things, not just because we are good people. (Second Interview)

Sarah found this explicit teaching in the ethics class more challenging than in the scripture class. She explained how she created an academic assignment that also included elements of faith and interpretation of faith.

> I've got this parable project. They're assigned a parable and they work in a group. So, the first thing they do is the scholarly research using biblical commentary into an exegesis of a parable. Then, their job is to take the lesson of the parable, not the plot, the teaching, and write their own story that teaches the same lesson.

> I tell them the idea is not . . . . "You can look at the grading rubric. For the story, you can't take the Good Samaritan and your original story is, 'Steve was walking down the road and got mugged and the mayor walked by and didn't stop.' Like that's just updating the story. I want you to take the message of the story." So I really try to challenge them to think about how the lessons of the parable can be seen in a story today. (Second Interview)

When asked about what she did if they got the lesson wrong, Sarah stated, "I work with them as they're doing the exegesis. They do this in class" (Second Interview)

The Challenge of Academic Rigor, Breadth v. Depth, and Assessments

Sarah explained that none of the religious studies classes have sit-down final exams. Students did not have a final during finals week. Instead, they had a three-week project at the end of the semester coupled with an oral assessment. She described one such project:

> I give them a pericope [short passage from scripture], something from the New Testament. They have to do the exegesis of Jesus and they actually have to write an application piece for today on how they have seen the idea of this in their life today. They have to do a creative project about it, not just a diorama of Jesus walking on water, but something to illustrate, some kind of medium to illustrate them [the pericopes] which is hilarious.
>
> I had a kid that did the story of Nicodemus. So, for her creative piece [she] videotaped, she choreographed the dance and videotaped it, but at night, where she was moving from a spotlight. So, she was moving in and out of the darkness the way Nicodemus at night moving to the light. They have to explain how it applies. So, these particular moves that she did at these times. It is pretty awesome when they do it. The ones that are really good are fantastic.
>
> The story where Jesus is saying, it's not what you eat and so on. I can't remember which one of the passages, but it's basically about you can look all good but you could have a problem. It's the insides that are important. So, I have these kids who would oftentimes make cookies. [The cookies] look really, really pretty, and [the students] give them to the class. And they make ones that look kind of crummy but taste really good. The other ones have Tabasco and salt and stuff. That's how they would teach us that . . . it's not about the outside . . . . So it's very fun to have them do these creative projects where they look at those kinds of ideas and teachings. (Second Interview)

Sarah reported that they worked on this project all semester. It is their alternative to an exam. She required that they use academic sources in their preparation. She mentioned making a variety of biblical commentaries available to the students:

> It's really the NIV commentary [that] often helps them. That's a good one. We have a bunch of commentaries. Our librarians are constantly stocking up. And I tell them they have to use books. I give them the books to use. I don't want them looking at the [internet]. (Second Interview)

When asked about the time it took to prepare the students for such assessments, she replied:

> That's a tension, but that's not one that upsets me at all. I'm happy to give all the class time in the world to the idea of synthesis in that way, in analysis in that way. And they read the passage, then they do have to apply, they do exegesis and they have to say what it teaches about. What was he [Jesus] trying to teach about the kingdom of God, because we spent a lot of time on Christian scriptures. We spent a lot of time on the kingdom of God. And then, will they see it in their own life? Then this creative piece.
>
> I think that what I really feel like is [that it] is a legitimate assessment of the semester's work. They have to be able to articulate to the teacher about the kingdom of God. They have to be able to understand the context, because we do some stuff with history and context at the beginning of the semester and how it applies. They have to be able to do scholarly research and analysis, which we've done once before in class. And then they have to see where they see it in the world today and apply it in a different medium . . . . And it does take some time for them to do it. It does take time. (Second Interview)

Sarah went on to explain her ideas about rote learning in comparison with deep learning that results from analysis and synthesis, while acknowledging when she tests for memorization:

> [M]y belief is that [depth] is a lot more valuable and important than being able to memorize the Pauline epistles. There's a part of me that [thinks] that they do have to memorize and learn things. I do give tests where they're, one of my big things on a lot of my tests is they have to list the types of miracles and say what's generally being taught and the nature of the miracle. So these are objective questions. The Jewish style of teaching, the Greek methods, and why did he [Jesus] use parables and things like that.

> But then the rest of the test, there's a lot of writing on my tests. So, what's the importance of the parable? What role did it play in Jesus' public ministry? Pick two of the teachings and how they illustrated his vision of the reign of God. So, it's about applying what we read to the reign of God. They're given a miracle and a parable. They open the Bible. They've seen it before, so they have to read it. Then they'll have to tell me what's being symbolized, what's being taught . . . . I don't expect them to memorize all the parables or the characters in the parables because I feel like they can look that thing up if they ever want to know that. But I want them to be able to break it open. (Second Interview)

Sarah also discussed how she addresses homework and in-class review of the homework:

> The homework is usually reading something. It's reading so when we come into class, I might have a PowerPoint over what they have read the night before and we can go through it. There's very little [of when] I stand and lecture and they sit and take notes. There's not a ton of that. For the parables and miracles, in this class, "All right, get out your Bibles. Let's read this. All right, who are the characters? Let's analyze this. Let's go through this." And we put it all together and then I give them one to try for homework. (Second Interview)

She shared her expectations for when she assigned reading. She expected the students to take notes and would ask them "two questions over the reading. You know, I call that a homework assessment, whether or not they do their homework" (Second Interview). She explained that if the reading was in a textbook, she might have the students answer the review question at the end of the section. In her mind this was a "traditional textbook kind of method" (Second Interview).

Sarah became animated when she talked about her hopes for assessing classroom discussion and for discussion as a method of teaching. "One of my dreams for the future is finding a better way to assess their classroom discussion" (Second Interview). She described how she currently used discussion with her students:

> [There's] a ton of discussion and all I really want them to do, like I would rather not have them take notes over the readings or do anything. I would rather have them read it and come with three really good questions about what they read and just go from there, assuming everybody has read it, and moving through it. They're not quite there yet. I mean, there are some kids that read for the sake of really wanting to learn, but most of the kids, if they know that they're not being

> assessed, they may not give it their best attention.
>
> I'll do it [discussion] all sorts of different ways. I have them get in a group, "Come up with the three best things that you read last night. What's going on?" Or, "Answer these questions." Or, "I had you analyze this miracle last night with the passage. Turn to the person next to you to compare what you got to see where it is." That kind of thing. (Second Interview)

She, then, went on to describe what she hoped to do with discussion:

> I would love to be able to say . . . "You know what, I'm not actually going to grade your discussion, but I fully expect that you do the reading and you actively participate. If you don't, then you're going to get, there's a consequence for not participating. But you don't actually get rewarded for participating because I assume everybody's going to participate." I'd love to not have to grade any discussion because everybody was so in it. (Second Interview)

Sarah observed that when she actually graded discussions, she couldn't be a part of the discussion because she was too busy keeping track of who spoke and how valuable the comments were. While she appreciated that it was good to be an observer, she also felt that something was lost when she was engaged in assessing the participation in the discussion. She explained:

> You still need an adult in there unpacking things. I still need to be in the discussion. If they all sit around and like, "Oh, this miracle's just plain stupid." How do I jump in? So, I'm torn between wanting to guide the discussion because I'm hearing what they'd have to say, but I've, especially with the younger kids, I feel like they're not quite there yet . . . . They can do that for a very small or limited [amount of time]. "What do you think this means?" They can do that for ten minutes and then I actually need to tell them what it means or pick up on the points. So, I think that's a tension that I have because I don't like lecturing. I do try to let them have that discussion or conversation, but it's still in tension, still forming. (Second Interview)

She described a time when she actually did interrupt a student when he clearly strayed from Church teaching:

> . . . [A] student in Personal Ethics was making a presentation about same sex marriage and he was talking about the Catholic Church's stance. He happened to have an image in this slide show of homosexuals are possessed by demons. It was somebody with a sign. I was like . . . "Okay, I'm just going to have to interrupt

> you because the Catholic Church does not believe that homosexuals are possessed by demons." [The student said], "I know. It's the only one I could find that was a religious-y kind of an image." I'm like, "Okay, but I would like everybody in the class to know this [that this was not Church teaching]." So there are times where I sometimes jump right into [the conversation]. (Second Interview)

Third and Fourth Research Questions: Juliana

In the second interview, Juliana focused most of the discussion on how her lessons reflect her desire for the students to achieve content literacy. She went into depth on two of her lessons, for which she had provided artifacts. She also discussed the challenge of teaching a feminist perspective of Catholicism and Christianity.

Juliana began by saying that she did not really experience tensions, per se, in her work. She referred to a lack of anxiety or needing to "tiptoe around" (Second Interview). Juliana did touch on the issue of the Bishops' *Framework*, but did not see this as a tension or challenge in that it had not yet been strictly implemented in her diocese. She stated:

> That [tension] would be purely theoretical because it [the *Framework*] hasn't been implemented at our school. So, if that were to happen, there would be tensions. . . but I would only be speculating about what those might be. . . . [E]ven though the present bishop certainly is conservative, I mean, nobody's going to be appointed a bishop these days that's not conservative, but he's known as being *very* conservative [participant emphasis], but has not expressed any interest in education or in schools or getting into all that. And he didn't implement it in his prior territory . . . so I guess I don't want to get sort of worked up or worried about something like that. I have enough to deal with. If it were to be implemented, presumably there'd be time to figure it out at that point. . . . I'm sure there would be new tensions and things to navigate if that were to happen. But it can just be speculation at this point. (Second Interview)

The Challenge of the Administration

When asked about tension as pressure or outside expectations, while Francis mentioned that administrative challenges had been present in prior years of his career, Juliana was the only participant to mention a challenge, or tension, with the

administration at the time of this study. Unlike the three other schools, St. Catherine's offers only six semesters of religious studies courses. In over 10 years at St. Catherine's, Juliana had pushed for adding another two semesters. She found her principal to be a block to this change in the Religious Studies curriculum. She explained:

> In contrast between what's said [by the principal] and "Yes, of course you're important" and "Yes, you're very valuable" and blah, blah, blah, but at the same time why have we been trying for almost two decades to get even a seventh semester of religious studies, let alone the eight semesters that most schools have at this point, and that we're supposed to have if you look at the WASC accreditation instrument. (Second Interview)

Juliana described having reached a point where she had decided that adding the two semesters would not be achieved with her current administration.

> At this point, after investing so much energy . . . now I'm just waiting until retirement, not my retirement, their [the principal's] retirement . . . . I'm assuming in five years or less that will happen. (Second Interview)

Her way of addressing this challenge was to wait it out.

The Challenge of Collaboration

The Religious Studies Department at St. Catherine's was quite small, with only three faculty members. Juliana did not specifically mention collaboration within the department as a challenge. However, she did see collaboration with campus ministry as less than ideal. In addition to teaching, Juliana also worked in campus ministry. The challenge came with the new campus minister who had recently been hired. She explained:

> She just finished her first year . . . . I think there isn't [the] sort of alignment there was before, with the campus minister being on the same page. We have kind of a shared mission and we live it out in these different ways. I think part of it is that she is new to high school, new to campus ministry. She's older obviously. She's middle-aged, so she's not like right out of college, right out of a Master's program, has never taught. But, anyway, I just think there's that alignment we used to have with her predecessor who did teach for many years and . . . we were

> on the same page more about the two departments.
>
> She started an M.Div. [Master's in Divinity] but did not finish . . . . [She] lacks the background in some – the academic background that would help campus ministry programs to really complement religious programs. (Second Interview)

Juliana reflected on how this collaboration had worked well in years past. Campus ministry had coordinated with the freshman religious studies classes to prepare a year-end liturgy. This was a send-off for the freshmen, an acknowledgement that they had completed the first year and were truly part of the St. Catherine's community. The campus ministry staff would teach liturgy for two days in the freshman classes and help them prepare for the liturgy. The third session would be the actual liturgy. Juliana did not feel that this close collaboration would take place in the near run. She observed, "She [the campus minister] doesn't have the background to teach those classes, to go in and talk about what's liturgy and what's Eucharist. So, that was much harder this year to do that" (Second Interview). Juliana did not discuss how she might address this challenge in the future.

As stated before, Juliana noted that her department was very small, with only three teachers. Juliana was the senior teacher, with 13 years at the school. The other religious studies teachers were new, one who was just hired and one who had been at St. Catherine's for two years. In response to this challenge, Juliana took the department to a nearby retreat center to work on collaboration in refining the curriculum.

The Challenge of Personal Opinion

In a department meeting to collaborate on the curriculum, one of the teachers asked how much of one's personal opinion should come out in the classroom or what to do when students ask for a teacher's opinion. The teacher who brought up this question,

who was no longer at the school, did not agree that a teacher should not share her or his opinion with the students. Juliana described the conversation:

> [The teacher] said, "They will figure out what you think. If you don't tell them, they will figure it out. You will give subtle cues so it's better to just tell them. It's better to just be honest and tell them." I really don't agree with that, and again, it's fine. As a department I don't think that you'll really have to come to a stance on that . . . . And this person and I wouldn't have come to an agreement.
>
> I think with college students it would be different. They're 18. There isn't the same sort of liability there or the same impressionability there. You could just be freer. But I think with high school there's responsibility to just have that boundary be a little clearer. (Second Interview)

While Juliana did not perceive this as a tension or challenge personally, she did discuss how she dealt with it in the classroom. She remembered a question shortly after California's Proposition 8 passed:

> It was probably the first time . . . someone asking "What do you think?" and I just said, "I'd rather not say, but what I do think is that this is inexorable, like we're moving toward recognizing same sex marriage [legally], so whenever we think about it on a legal level, that's the level we're moving towards."
>
> I think that's the only time I've been asked that directly. I've never been asked what I think about abortion, never been asked what I think about birth control, about any of those other – even though I teach ethics. Again, it's so rare, but I generally don't say, but I will offer some information or some observation, like whatever we think if we're for gay marriage or we're against it, or we're not sure, whatever, it seems that legally this is the direction that we're moving in. (Second Interview)

She went on to explain how she handled such questions:

> I can't remember what the issue was, but somebody asked me what I thought and I put it back to them . . . and somebody asked, sort of pushing, that "Why don't you tell us." [Juliana responded,] "This is not about what I think, this is about my helping you to think through what you think and for your view to be solid and grounded and not something based in ignorance or something based in misinformation or just sort of a casual opinion that you can ask anybody in the food court in the mall, as opposed to something that's really, really thought through and researched and whatnot." Then I said, "If I taught English, I wouldn't tell you what I think the poem means, I would help you to figure out what you think it all means. Or if I taught social studies, I wouldn't tell you who I

> voted for. I would help you think about who would you vote for if you could vote, and make sure you register." (Second Interview)

Juliana was concerned with the impressionable stage of the students. She pointed out that if she shared her opinions, "Either they will be inclined to rebel against whatever [I said] or consciously or unconsciously led along to agree with what I said . . . . It seems irresponsible." (Second Interview). This conversation segued into the next challenge, that of Juliana's feminist perspective.

The Challenge of the Feminist Perspective in a Catholic School

Juliana's school was the single-sex school included in the study. The students were all girls. Juliana felt that it was important to provide the students with strong female role models and to help them develop agency, not just in the complex world they would soon be facing, but also in the Church. She adapted a definition of feminism from Sandra Schneiders (1986), describing it as "the belief in woman's full equality and personhood and acting to bring that about" (Second Interview).

Juliana shared some of her experiences with teaching through the feminist lens. While discussing the challenge of personal opinion, Juliana mentioned that one student claimed that she had told them that she voted for Nancy Pelosi, to bolster her argument that her teacher actually did share her opinions with the students. Juliana responded that she could not have voted for Pelosi since she did not live in Pelosi's district. Juliana did tie this into how she exposed the students to female role models:

> I pointed out how historic it was when she [Pelosi] became Speaker of the House, the first woman, and the first Italian American Speaker of the House. We're a very feminist school. We would point out any kind of first woman doing anything. That was my pointing out this historic moment for the girls. (Second Interview)

She went on to consider what it would be like at another school. She wondered:

> I said at some point I wonder if I could ever be at another school. I probably would experience more tensions, perhaps, at a coed school or a boys' school, in terms of our feminist, the feminist outlook of the school and my own feminism. (Second Interview)

She described a memorial service for one of the teachers that the students prepared as an illustration of the agency that students assumed both at St. Catherine's and afterwards:

> [This teacher] had been teaching at St. Catherine's maybe eight years and this was the middle of May, so a lot of young alumni came. It wasn't a mass because his widow was just sort of uncertain about whether she wanted a full mass. But she wanted something sort of semi-Catholic, sort of like a liturgy. The students did everything.
>
> They spoke. They did the readings. They did the environment. They sang. They did liturgical dance. They did everything, because that's what we're about, empowering them. So it's all these young alumni. [They] said "Oh, my gosh, this is so great to be here." "I miss this." "I haven't found this anywhere since being in college." Some of them [were] just out of college.
>
> We're giving them this wonderful feminist, woman-centered . . . experience of Church and that is undoubtedly so different from what they're going to find when they go out and try to find a parish, or even when they get involved in college campus ministry. (Second Interview)

Juliana explained that the experience of the girls at St. Catherine's was not a common experience of students in Catholic high schools. She remembered back to the comments made by a student who came to St. Catherine's without previous Catholic school experience. Juliana described the student's observations:

> She said something like, I can't remember the context, but something about the Catholic Church is so about empowering women and so about focus on women. And I thought, "Oh God, you poor . . . ." That's what she thinks because her only experience of the Church has been at our school. I don't feel I need to burst her bubble yet because she'll probably go to a public university and never go to a Catholic church again. But anyway, it is sort of a little feminist bubble that I'm so glad we're able to nurture. And, again, it's what makes me wonder if I could ever go to another school. (Second Interview)

She was aware that the broader world, to be encountered by her students, was not going to be as open-minded and welcoming of this woman-centered experience and thought. She explained and described an interaction with another alumnus:

> Whatever the students encounter when they leave us doesn't make me question what we're doing. It doesn't make me want to say better for them than for us, but it does make me, I guess, I hope, they're able to take what they've learned . . . .
>
> We had a student who just graduated who was one of our . . . very involved in campus ministry, and one of our lay presiders. We have student presiders that read the Liturgy of the Word. And she's going to a Catholic college. "Oh, I already contacted campus ministry and I'm going to be a lector . . . ." And I said, "Oh, great. Make sure at some point to say you've been a lay presider and if that's not something that they have there, try to start that." And it's on her to educate them about, yes, women can do this. Yes, it doesn't have to be a priest if it's not Eucharist. [I'm] just hoping they can take that and bring it to college campus ministry or parishes or whatever. But I can't control that. (Second Interview)

The Challenge of Academic Rigor and Assessments

Juliana continued to demonstrate the feminist environment of the school as she discussed the need for academic rigor and teaching critical thinking skills, such as close reading.[3] She referred to one of the artifacts she brought to the interview. The lesson was based on Sandra Schneiders'(1986) book *Women and the Word*. She divided the book into three sections and gave the students discussion questions. Sometimes she would give the students the questions and have them work in small groups. At other times she would do this as a carousel activity with groups moving to each question, written on a piece of large paper, and adding their thoughts and questions. This activity tied in closely with the idea of academic rigor. Juliana explained:

> I was looking at the book closely and sort of fostering those close reading skills. I think I talked about that in the prior interview, that one of my roles I see as, it's

[3] Close reading refers to a careful and purposeful reading of a text, focused on what the author had to say, the author's purpose, the structure, and the meaning of the words. (Dr. Douglas Fisher)

> supporting to overall education of the students in terms of their reading skills.
>
> So discussion of the incarnation. Why did God become incarnate? In other words, if God saved us by becoming human, not by becoming male, why did God become Jesus rather than Jesusa? But so often they don't read carefully . . . . She [Schneiders] goes through all . . . these things that have been proposed. So, like back in the Middle Ages, people said, various Church fathers said, "It's because God chose the superior form of humanity to be incarnated in." Or, "God himself is male. God himself is male so, therefore, God became male." She prints all these inaccurate ideas and rebukes them and when [the students] don't read carefully . . . .
>
> [I] try to help them cultivate that close reading. . . . I feel like that's a skill that's declining. But anyway, so asking them, putting forth one of her [Schneiders'] views. The second question. She talks about relationship to Jesus, that God is not male or female but Jesus obviously was male. And in prayer and spirituality men are going to relate differently to another man, Jesus, than a woman would relate to Jesus. There's the same kind of differences in that relationship as there would be between two women who are friends and a woman and a man who are friends. So, helping them understand the theories . . .
>
> The author says that Jesus was a feminist, that's anachronistic, but if he was here today, that's what we would call him. So for them [the students] to see what her view is and why she says that [rather than] to say what do you think about that . . . trying to get them to develop their reading skills, thinking skills . . . (Second Interview)

Juliana used Schneiders' book to get her students to think about God from a completely different paradigm, pointing out to them that their understanding of God as having a particular gender was a social construct. She was stretching her students' thinking. She was getting them to examine their assumptions. She pointed out how strange it sounded when the students encountered Schneiders' gender shift, which Juliana did through what she called a thought experiment:

> It's a passage about . . . when people pray at church or they pray to God, the mother, who is acknowledged as queen of the universe and who embraces us with her motherly love. And all the leaders of prayer are women, which we are told more directly reflects God's feminine and nurturing qualities. And prayers are addressed to "My sisters and womankind." It's sort of a little thought experiment. "I'm not suggesting this, but what would it have been like if you had grown up in a church like this? Or what would it have been like for your little brother if he

> grew up in a church like this?" Just to sort of get them to look at things that we might take for granted. (Second Interview)

She observed that this reading challenged the students' background, regarding what they had been taught about Jesus:

> I think to some extent it does. . . . . Maybe not so much Jesus but God, because, again, we talk about how Schneiders lays out . . . she distinguishes between sex and gender. Sex is the male gene. Gender is a social construct. So we kind of go through that, and then the issues for women, to sort of grapple with. Not the sex of God because God has no sex or body, but the gender of God. Like how do we experience God in our prayer? I think it does stretch them. (Second Interview)

Juliana described another assignment in the scripture class that was based on the students choosing their own medium of assessment. Juliana had been working from the concepts of *Understanding by Design* (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), although she noted that she was the only one in the department approaching the curriculum in this way.

The students were offered three choices: an exegesis paper, four lessons of which one 10-minute section would be taught to the class, or a video. By presenting these choices, which reflected different academic strengths, Juliana demonstrated a respect for the diversity of learning styles in her class. The topic was Deuteronomic history. Juliana believed that any one of these assessments would provide her students with deeper learning than the standard read the textbook, answer the questions for review, and take the test. She explained:

> These are things that I hope in a year they might still remember. They're not going to still remember what was the name of Ruth's first husband, but they will remember how the book of Ruth presents this view of God. Anyway, the big, big things. So there's options which I think, at least my understanding from curriculum and critical thinking, is giving students the opportunity to decide how they'll be assessed so they can [use] their strengths. (Second Interview)

She shared comments from the students about the assignment and assessment:

> There's sometimes a student or two who's like, "Oh, I wish we had a test. It's so

> much easier." The vast majority have said, "It's so much more fun. Like I remember stuff more." I had a student write on a course evaluation, "I know I did so well on this because I remembered all those stories because I had acted them out on this video." She remembered them because she was immersed in however long it took to make the video. (Second Interview)

Juliana also described a technique she used that was similar to annotations. She introduced this in the first few days of class, using the syllabus. She called it muddy and clear.

> So, what I started doing was, instead of reading through it [the syllabus], I had them with a partner and I just did something called muddy and clear. "Sit with a partner and go through this and just mark a couple of things that are clear. Like, yes, I understand your late work policy. I get it." And a couple of things that are muddy." (Second Interview)

She mentioned that the juniors were using college level reading and found it difficult to go back to high school textbooks.

In summary, the participants shared the many ways they responded to the challenges that they encountered. They demonstrated a respect for the individual context of their students and created assignments that reflected that respect. Another aspect of respect was their welcoming of and interested attitude towards their students of faith backgrounds other than Catholicism, as well as towards their students who professed no faith background. The participants showed a concern for accurately portraying the Church's teachings but not in a dogmatic way. They welcomed students' questions.

Summary of Findings

The four participants provided a rich and complex view of what it is to be a teacher of religious studies. While they varied in their responses, there was commonality in many of the topics they discussed. The participants were clear about their roles as religious studies educators. Those roles reflected the complex world in which they lived

and in which they taught.

The first and key finding was that the participants revealed a poignant understanding of themselves as representing the Catholic Church. They discussed the importance of representing the Church's teachings in an accurate and respectful way. At the same time, they worked at making those teachings interesting and visible to their students. They wanted their students to experience more of the Church than just the official Magisterium and hierarchy. The participants identified themselves as Church, too, and wanted their students to gain a broader understanding of who and what was Church. They acknowledged that, as religious studies educators, they were standing in for the Church and represented the Church. Everything they did to prepare curriculum and everything they did in the classroom reflected this role.

A corollary aspect of this first finding is that others perceived the religious studies teachers as representing Church as well. This was revealed in the teachers' discussions of interactions with students, parents, teachers in other departments, administrators, alumni, and the teaching Magisterium of the Church. Students wanted to know what their teachers personally thought about Church teachings. Students and parents alike expected to find consistency between teachers' behavior and Christian principles such as acceptance, love, forgiveness, and mercy.

A second finding was that the participants did not seem to experience tensions in this role. The only language of tension that came up was in Juliana's discussion of wanting to add two more semesters of theology to the school's curriculum, and meeting resistance from the principal. All other discussions focused on the challenges of developing curriculum and of meeting the needs of Church and students in their daily

praxis.

The participants did not find the bishops' *Framework* to be a tension because it had not been formally implemented in their dioceses. As Juliana put it, it was not worth spending much energy on unless, or until, the *Framework* was implemented. They seemed confident that, should the need arise, they would be able to work with the *Framework* by continuing to supplement it with material and projects that would be more relevant to their students. Along with colleagues in their departments, they had spent time reviewing their courses and curricula in light of the *Framework*. They stated that they believed the courses they taught included the requirements of the *Framework* and could be justified should their respective bishops question them. However, the participants all indicated that, should the *Framework* be mandated in their dioceses, implementation would be problematic. The participants found the apologetic style of the *Framework* and the repetition of the Christocentric curriculum to be challenging to teaching their diverse students with diverse needs.

They were concerned about what would happen to the current courses that were not covered by the *Framework*, such as the relationships and world religions courses. These were courses that the teachers felt were important to their students. Challenges that they encountered in this area were the Church teachings on sexual behavior and gay marriage, particularly in the courses on Christian Relationships and Christian Sexuality. It was important to not only convey the Church's teachings on these topics, but also to help their students understand why the Church took particular stances.

A third finding was that the participants encountered similar challenges in their practice. They found it challenging to address the needs of Catholic and non-Catholic

students alike. As representatives of the Church, the teachers indicated a need to demonstrate respect for students of other faiths. Reflecting Groome's discussion of Catholic anthropology and Catholic universality, the participants understood their role as one of inviting Catholics and non-Catholics to learn more about the Catholic Church and to experience their own faith at a deeper level. Many of the participants also worked in campus ministry. They approached their work not only from an academic perspective, but also from an affective, spiritual perspective. They offered students opportunities to express and practice the faith of their understanding through liturgies, prayer, and retreats.

The participants acknowledged the challenge presented by accompanying their students on their faith journeys. The teachers recognized that they would probably not see the fruits of this work, although occasionally students returned to the schools and shared stories that revealed the continuation of their faith journeys. In part, this willingness to accept the unknowing of the future of their students was a demonstration of the teachers' own faith.

The participants spoke eloquently about the diversities they encountered in their classrooms and they demonstrated a great respect for that diversity. This diversity represented another challenge. They noted diversity among their students in religious backgrounds, economic status, ethnic identities, learning styles, and developmental stages, both in cognitive abilities and in faith formation. The participants emphasized a need to know and understand where their students were coming from and recognized how these social locations affected their presence in the classroom. The teachers identified that they valued the characteristics of respect, empathy, and compassion in their teaching.

The participants revealed a deep respect for the academic endeavor of teaching. While not all of their students were destined for college, the teachers worked to prepare the students for the skills needed in college, as well as in the world of work in the 21st century. They held their students to high standards, guiding them in analysis, synthesis, and creativity.

The participants were animated when it came to discussing how they responded to their roles and to the challenges they encountered in their pedagogy. They were enthusiastic and spoke at length about the particular lessons or units that they had used as examples and had supported by artifacts. They described lessons that reflected academic rigor, diverse learning styles, and student choice, all qualities that the participants valued. The participants did not teach from one textbook but used a variety of sources and materials to engage their students in learning. Another way of engaging the students was to opt for depth in a topic rather than breadth. They made frequent use of small groups and jigsaw or carousel exercises that developed deep knowledge in particular subjects that were then shared with the entire class.

A key consideration of these participants was how to make their courses and the Church relevant to the students. They felt that it was mandatory to connect to the world in which their students lived. That world was highly sexualized and focused on materialism and social media. The curricula and lessons had to be able to hold students' attention and had to relate to their world. The teachers spoke of how they used technology in the classroom, such as online discussion boards, website and video creation, and web searches.

Three challenges were mentioned by only one participant each. Anne focused on

creating a safe and respectful environment in the classroom. Juliana discussed the feminist culture of her school and how that intersected with teaching religious studies. Juliana also shared the challenges she encountered with her administration regarding the number of semesters of religious studies that the school offered. Francis made the observation that he did not think that the bishops truly understood all of the challenges that high school educators in religious studies face every day, especially the religious diversity of the students. The other participants mentioned this challenge tangentially, but Francis made it explicit.

The three key findings in this study, 1) that the teachers and other stakeholders perceived their role as being and representing Church for their students, 2) that they perceived challenges rather than tensions in living out this role, and 3) that the challenges they experienced were similar, reveal the complexity involved in teaching religious studies in Catholic high schools. Given the contextual location of the students, the participants perceived their role to be that of learned guide, rather than as catechist. They provided rich descriptions of their experiences. They revealed a deep love and respect for their students and for the Church.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the perceptions of a small group of Catholic high school religious studies teachers in their role as instructors of religious studies. In addition, this study explored their experiences and their perceptions of any challenges or tensions they found in teaching religious studies, as well as how they navigated those challenges or tensions, particularly in their practice.

I used purposeful and convenience sampling to select a group of four participants. The geographic area represented by the participants was limited to the western states. The criteria for selection were that the participants must be teaching high school religious studies classes at the time of the study; that they represented a variety of school types, such as diocesan, religious order, single sex, and co-ed; and that they be available for the two interviews. Each participant was interviewed twice.

The preeminent finding of the study was that the teachers perceived their role as representing Church. Aspects of this role included being Church for their students and inviting their students into the Church or into an understanding of the Church. Other stakeholders also perceived these religious studies teachers to be representing Church and the Christian principles found within the Church. In addition, the findings revealed that the participants experienced challenges, rather than tensions, in their praxis and that they responded to these challenges in idiosyncratic ways, adapting their pedagogy to the needs of their students.

Conclusions and Implications

The data in this study revealed the extraordinary finding that religious studies teachers, and other stakeholders in Catholic high schools, see the religious studies teacher's role as representing, as *being*, Church. Unlike a math, science, or literature teacher, who does not represent the personification of math or science or literature to his or her students, religious studies teachers represent the Church, every hour of the day. The teaching of religious studies is a vocation, and the teachers have been "ordained," by the administration, the students, the alumni, the parents, and the public-at-large as those individuals who are "anointed" to guide the school's youth along their faith journeys.

Religious studies teachers not only teach the faith, but they live the faith. Their faith journeys are unfolding at the same time as the faith journeys of their students. At their best moments, these teachers embody what they, the school, and the Church want their students to become. This means that religious studies teachers are teaching, or modeling, something far beyond the specific content of the courses. Teachers of mainstream academic subjects are not expected to embody their discipline in the same way that students and other stakeholders expect religious studies teachers to model Church.

This finding implies that the principal, the administration, and even teachers themselves might continue to look for, and provide, opportunities to keep this vocational fire burning. How can these stakeholders support the religious studies teacher in his or her own faith journey in order that the teacher may support his or her students' faith journeys? This might happen by providing retreat opportunities, supporting access to spiritual direction, funding for literature in the field and conferences of religious studies

educators, and time for collaboration with religious studies teachers from other schools, among other possibilities. This finding also implies that past practice of using the religious studies department as a place to plug in a teacher in need of an extra section would be counter-productive to the Catholic culture of the school and to the faith development of the students.

Second, religious studies teachers are practitioners of subsidiarity. They take the recommendations from the teaching Magisterium, such as the bishops' *Framework* (USCCB, 2008), and apply them at the grassroots level, as they confront the challenges found in the classroom. All of the participants in this study indicated that they understood the bishops' *Framework,* considered it when developing their curricula, yet adapted it for the actual students they taught. They resisted the apologetic and catechetical pedagogical approach reflected in the *Framework*. Instead, they took the content and molded it to their needs.

In this sense, religious studies teachers share similar experiences to those of educators in mainstream subjects. A useful concept here is Michael Lipsky's (2010) idea of street level bureaucrat. Street level bureaucrats are those policy implementers found at the lowest level in the hierarchy. Yet for their constituents, the street level bureaucrat represents the institution or policy as a whole. The street level bureaucrats adapt and reframe policy in ways that serve the constituents. In the case of education, teachers take policy and interpret and adapt that policy in the field. Educators are engaged in a dance between accommodation to policy and standards and resistance to policy and standards in order to best meet the needs of their students. This seems to imply that the imposition and enforcement of more prescriptive standards, whether on the part of departments of

education or on the part of the Catholic bishops, would hamper the effectiveness of the teacher in the classroom.

Recommendations

My key recommendation is that this study be replicated in diverse geographic areas of the country. This study was of very limited scope, with only four participants located in Catholic high schools on the West Coast. Such studies would help to compare possible regional differences in religious studies teachers' perceptions of role, challenges, and practice. Researchers might also design a two-tiered study to identify possible changes in perceptions of role, challenges, and practice for religious studies teachers whose dioceses are not mandating the scope and sequence of the bishops' *Framework* (USCCB, 2008) at the outset of the study, but whose dioceses do implement the study later. The NCEA might assist in providing funds, or recommend resources for funding, of these studies.

The religious studies teachers who participated in this study are already adapting the content of the *Framework* (USCCB, 2008), collaborating with colleagues, and finding ways to support their spiritual growth. As a secondary recommendation, I would encourage those of us who teach religious studies to share our experiences with teachers around the country by writing for print publications, such as *Momentum* or *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, by blogging, and by engaging in social media chats, such as #catholicedchat on Twitter. As Lipsky's street level bureaucrats, religious studies teachers have devised adaptations that work for their students and that can be inspiring to their colleagues.

Closing Remarks

As I bring this study to a conclusion, I find myself most grateful to the religious studies teachers who participated in the study. They were forthcoming with their thoughts and practice. The participants were aware that I, too, am a religious studies teacher. In a way, this allowed for the conversations to flow easily, as there were basic understandings between us of concepts, vocabulary, and resources. At the same time, I was concerned that this knowledge might influence the interviews. The participants were eager and open about sharing their thoughts and discussing their practice. It was tempting to enter into an intellectual discussion that one might have over dinner. As a result, I sometimes found myself saying, "That's a conversation for another day."

I was surprised that the participants did not experience the bishops' *Framework* (USCCB, 2008) as a tension. While they all mentioned it and discussed how they were incorporating the concepts into their curricula, any concern they expressed was minimized in that the scope and sequence of the *Framework* had not yet been mandated in their dioceses. Following on Schroeder's (2013) study that explored the experiences of religious studies teachers working in a diocese where the *Framework* had already been implemented, I think it would be interesting to follow the four participants in my study, should the *Framework* be implemented in their dioceses in the future. This might offer a useful comparison.

A final observation I came to through the interviews was the genuine love and dedication that the participants have for their profession. This passion drives them to be the best teachers they can be. They are personal models of faith and of Church beyond the hierarchy. It also drives the participants to be advocates for their students. They push

for the support from administrators, superintendents, and bishops that will help them make religious studies courses meaningful and relevant.

A little over a year ago, the College of Cardinals elected Pope Francis. Throughout the year, Pope Francis has surprised the Catholic faithful, as well as the general public, with his refreshing presence, accessibility, and faithful eye on the Gospel. He models what it is to love as Jesus loved. Many Catholic religious educators, including this researcher, see this teaching of love and relationship with God to be the primary mover in Catholic schools.

I found it particularly poignant when participant Francis stated:

> So here's a teacher in the middle, kind of mediating with the student to the Church and the Church to the student. And either on the opposite sides have no appreciation for the other. I feel kind of like . . . how the prophets might have been in terms of representing God to the people and the people to God . . . . I guess the official Church doesn't know that the teacher that teaches religious studies is that [Church and mediator] for the students. (First Interview)

Religious studies teachers are a vital element of the Church. For many teens these teachers are the model and heart of the Church and the only Church the students may know. At times, it seems that the bishops may not trust religious studies teachers to represent or teach the faith. This may be why they were compelled to develop the *Framework* (USCCB, 2008). Despite concerns on the part of the teaching Magisterium, the teachers whom I interviewed have left me with confidence that the Church is thriving in Catholic high school religious studies classrooms. The teachers live the same presence, accessibility, eye on the Gospel, and love, that Pope Francis brings to the greater Catholic community.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SCRIPT OF SCREENING PHONE CALL

SCRIPT OF SCREENING PHONE CALL

My name is Laura Ramey and I am a doctoral student at the University of San Francisco. You were referred to me by [insert referring person's name] as a person who may be interested in participating in my study. I will be interviewing a small number of high school religion teachers in the Bay Area and suburbs. My study will explore how religion teachers perceive their role, as well as what and who influences their teaching.

To participate in the study it is vitally important that you be willing to be honest and candid about your perceptions and experiences in teaching religion, including any tensions or conflicts that come up for you. You may choose a pseudonym that I will use to refer to you in the study. I will not disclose your identity and I will not identify the school where you teach.

Would you consider being a participant in this study? What questions may I answer for you?

Thank you for your consideration. I will be determining the final participants within a week and will contact you by phone or email.

Thanks again.

APPENDIX B

SCRIPT OF CONFIRMING CALL AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

SCRIPT OF CONFIRMING CALL AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Hi, [insert name]. I'm calling to formally invite you to be a participant in my doctoral study of religion teachers and their perceptions and experiences of teaching religion. Is this still something you would like to do?

Great! Let's set up a date and time for the first 90-minute interview. [Followed by discussion of possible dates, times, and locations.]

I'd like to collect a little demographic information.

1. What is your educational background as far as formal degrees and majors?
    - B.A., major
    - Master's Degree, major field
    - Doctorate Degree, major field
2. Do you hold a teaching credential in any subject area?
    - What subject area?
    - Where did you get the credential?
3. What preparation in teaching philosophy, methods, and practice, have you received?
4. How many years have you been teaching religion in a Catholic high school?
5. How many years have you been teaching religion in your current school?

Thanks for your responses. When we meet for the first interview, would you please bring in artifacts of your teaching? When choosing the artifacts, focus on one course that you currently teach or taught last semester. The artifacts I'd like to take a look at are your course syllabus, a list of any key texts or videos you use in the course, and documents from three key assignments you use in the course. If you have a teacher website, would you be willing to share it with me? If so, would you please email me the

link?

Thanks again. You have my email address. My phone number is: (###) ###-####. I'm really glad you agreed to participate in the study and I look forward to meeting with you on [fill in the date and time].

APPENDIX C

CONFIRMING EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

CONFIRMING EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear _____,

Thanks again for agreeing to participate in my doctoral study on religion teachers. This email is to confirm our first interview:

Date: [to be filled in]
Time: [to be filled in]
Place: [to be filled in]

I have attached the Informed Consent Form. Please read it. We will review the consent form at the beginning of our first interview and I will ask you to sign it. I will also provide you with a print copy of the consent form at that time.

In addition, please bring the artifacts of teaching practice that we discussed earlier to the interview:

- Course syllabus
- Name of textbook and any other key readings or videos
- Documents of three key assignments used in this course
- Your website URL, if you wish to share that

You may reach me via my email address, lramey4@sbcglobal.net, or by calling (###) ###-####.

I am delighted that you will be joining me in this study.

Sincerely,

Laura W. Ramey

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Purpose and Background

Laura Witter Ramey, a doctoral student in the Catholic Educational Leadership Program in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco and teacher at Junípero Serra High School in San Mateo is conducting a research study on the perceptions of Catholic high school religion teachers of their roles as religion teachers, of their professional preparation for teaching religion, and of their experiences in navigating the inherent tensions found in teaching religion. This information will be helpful in providing the Catholic educational community with insights into the experiences of teachers entrusted with teaching religion to high school students. The research is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree at the University of San Francisco.

I am being asked to participate because I teach religion in a U.S. Catholic high school, I have been recommended to the researcher as a teacher who is interested sharing these perceptions, and I have expressed an interest in being a participant. I was initially contacted by telephone.

Procedures

If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will be asked to participate in two face-to-face interviews with the researcher, during which time I will be invited to share my perceptions and experiences of teaching religion classes in a Catholic high school.

2. The first interview will explore my perceptions of my role as an instructor of religion. I will also be asked to share my perceptions of influences, tensions, or conflicts that I have experienced in the teaching of religion in a Catholic high school.

3. The second interview will begin with a discussion of the teaching artifacts I provided to the researcher in the first interview. I will then explore how I have responded to the influences, tensions, or conflicts that were brought up in the first interview. I will also be asked to discuss how I have developed my teaching practice in response to these influences, tensions, or conflicts.

4. The interviews will take place in person, with the researcher, at a time and place that is convenient to both of us. Each interview will last approximately 90 minutes. The interviews will not take place at my school. The interviews will be voice-recorded.

5. Prior to the second interview, I will be provided with a transcript of the first interview so that I am able to make any corrections or additions for clarity or accuracy. We will discuss any corrections or clarifications to this transcript during the second interview.

6. Following the second interview, I will be provided with a transcript to review for corrections or clarifications that I feel are necessary for clarity or accuracy. These corrections or clarifications will be transmitted to the researcher in an email or phone call.

7. Following the two interviews, the researcher will study the transcripts, extracting themes and sub-themes of my perceptions of teaching religion in a Catholic high school. This reporting of themes and sub-themes will make extensive use of my own words, both written and spoken, as well as the words of the other study participants. A brief demographic profile will be created based on information that I share in the phone call indicating that I have been selected as a participant in the study. During the first interview, I will be given the opportunity to review my profile, if I so desire. If there is anything in the profile that is inaccurate or with which I am not comfortable, I may ask that it be adjusted or removed.

Risks

The nature of the process of in-depth interviewing, involving personal experiences and perceptions of research participants, may cause discomfort at times. The researcher will do what she can to minimize these occasions.

While I will not be directly identified in the research itself, extensive descriptions of me and my perceptions of teaching religion will be included in the research report, which could result in someone identifying me as a participant. By using pseudonyms for me and my workplace and keeping all research materials in secure locations, the researcher will work to minimize the possibility of my identity becoming known.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to me for participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this research study is to increase understanding of the experience of teaching religion in Catholic high schools, particularly in light of any tensions or challenges that arise from teaching religion.

Reimbursements/Compensation to Subjects

I understand that I will not be compensated financially for participation in this study.

Confidentiality

My identity as a participant in this study will be kept confidential. The researcher will publish her research in a doctoral dissertation. Confidentiality is important; therefore, no real names of participants or workplaces will be used. Only the pseudonym I have chosen will be used in the transcripts, and pseudonyms will be used in the dissertation and any future publications. Informed consent forms and contact information sheets will be kept in a secure place.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. I can decide to not participate or to discontinue my participation at any time during the interview process, up to and including my review of the transcript of the second interview.

Costs/Financial Considerations

The only anticipated cost to the study participants will be the time I set aside for the interviews. I will not be compensated in any way for taking part in this study.

Dissemination of Interview Data

I understand that I am being interviewed as part of a doctoral research study and that direct quotes from my interviews, both short and long, will be recorded in the dissertation. I also understand that the information I provide for this study in the interviews may be used in future articles written by the researcher for publication and in future presentations related to the study. I understand that my real name and the real name of my workplace will not be used in any published materials related to this research. I understand that, by signing this Informed Consent Form, I am giving permission for my words to be used for these purposes.

Contact Information

If I have questions or concerns about this study, I may contact Mrs. Laura Ramey, via email at lramey4@sbcglobal.net, or via phone at (###) ###-####.

Consent

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and received answers. My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

_____

Subject's Signature Date of Signature

_____

Subject's Phone Number Subject's Email Address

_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date of Signature

APPENDIX E

IRBPHS EXEMPTION

IRBPHS EXEMPTION

IRB Application #12-137 - Exempt

October 16, 2012

Dear Laura Witter Ramey:

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 study has been deemed to be exempt from IRB review based on the following conditions:

Unless otherwise required by department or agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are exempt from this policy:

1) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

This application does not require IRB review.

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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Counseling Psychology Department
Education Building – Room 017
2130 Fulton Street
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---
http://www.usfca.edu/soe/students/irbphs/

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The first research question is: How do U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers experience their role as instructors of religious studies? The first interview prompt reflects this research question.

1. How do you understand your role as a religious studies teacher in a Catholic high school?

    - What is your experience of your role as a religious studies teacher?
    - What additional roles do your see yourself having? Please describe them.
    - You're not a math teacher or an English teacher. How do you see your role as different from those teachers?

The second research question is: What do U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers experience regarding the challenges or tensions inherent in teaching religious studies? The prompt invites a descriptive response. Follow-up probes will be dependent on how teachers respond to the prompt.

2. Please describe some of the influences, challenges or tensions that affect you and how you teach religion.

    - Teachers in mainstream disciplines must adhere to state standards, or feel a pressure to teach to standardized tests. Please tell me about any similar influences that may affect your teaching.
    - What other forces or expectations do you feel influence your teaching? Please describe them.
    - Who are the people who influence your practice as a religion teacher? Describe how they influence you.
    - Catholic high schools include diverse student bodies. What challenges, if any, does this diversity pose to your teaching of religion?
    - Please describe any challenges or tensions that you experience, in as much detail as you feel comfortable.
    - How serious do you perceive these challenges or tensions to be? Please explain.

I will then proceed with the second interview based on the third and fourth research questions. In the course of this interview, I will also ask about the artifacts that were provided during the first interview, probing for connections between the documents and the teacher's previous discussion of role, influences, and tensions or conflicts.

The third research question is: How do U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers respond to and navigate these challenges and tensions in their practice in the classroom? The next prompt addresses this research question. Follow-up probes to this prompt will be more specific, based on the responses in the first interview.

3. In the first interview, you mentioned some challenges and tensions. How do you navigate the challenges or tensions that you mentioned?

    - What methods have you developed to deal with any particular challenges or tensions
    - In what ways, if any, have you adjusted your curriculum as a result of these challenges or tensions?
    - In what circumstances have you not felt the need to adjust your curriculum?

The fourth research question specifically addresses the teacher's pedagogy: What pedagogical methods have U.S. Catholic high school religious studies teachers developed that help them to address the challenges or tensions?

4. How has your teaching practice changed or developed to address any of the challenges or tensions that you have discussed?

    - What pedagogical methods, or teaching activities, have you used to help navigate this tension or conflict? In other words, how are you dealing with this challenge or tension through your teaching?
    - In what ways does this challenge or tension affect your perception of your role as a teacher of religious education?

APPENDIX G

THANK-YOU EMAIL AT CONCLUSION OF THE INTERVIEWS

THANK-YOU LETTER AT CONCLUSION OF THE INTERVIEWS

Dear _____,

Now that our interviews have been completed, I wish to offer you my sincerest thanks for participating in this research. You have trusted me with your perceptions and experiences. You have clearly shown a concern for your students and for the future of religious education in Catholic high schools. I am grateful for having gotten to know you on this deep level.

It will take me several months to review, code, and analyze the data from the interviews. Once that is completed and I have written up the research, I will notify you, in the event that you may wish to read the entire study.

Again, my heartfelt thanks for all of the time you invested to make this study a success.

Sincerely,

Laura W. Ramey

APPENDIX H

LIST OF ARTIFACTS OF TEACHING PRACTICE

LIST OF ARTIFACTS OF TEACHING PRACTICE

- Course syllabus
- List of textbooks, other key readings, and key videos used in the course
- Three key assignments with accompanying documentation
- Teacher website URL, if available