



**TITLE**

“Equip the child to live life to the full”: An exploration of the extent to which teacher can sustain a sense of vocation in their ministry

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**“Equip the child to live life to the full”:  
An exploration of the extent to which  
teacher can sustain a sense of vocation  
in their ministry**

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**Dissertation in partial fulfilment of:  
M.A. in Catholic School Leadership: Principles and Practice  
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## **Abstract**

This dissertation sets out to explore the extent to which teachers sustain a sense of vocation in their ministry.

It addresses a number of issues. It begins by considering the notion of vocation within Sacred Scripture and writings from the Magisterium. It goes on to examine the primacy of baptism as the sacrament of vocation and how the teacher sustains their sense of vocation in a neutral if not hostile environment.

The role of the ethos of the school within which the teacher operates is also discussed and to what extent the teacher is a co-creator of that ethos.

Data for examination and evaluation is gathered by means of a questionnaire circulated amongst teaching and support staff together with follow up interviews. Both instruments of investigation contained quantitative and qualitative questioning in order to construct as full a picture of the focus school as possible.

Finally the exploration comes to a close with a consideration of the implications for leadership in Catholic schools and what can be done to ensure a teacher's vocation is sustained.

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# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Aims, Objectives and Hypothesis

Taking the quote from His Holiness Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to St. Mary's University College, Twickenham in 2010, the overarching aim of this research project is to explore the extent to which teachers sustain a sense of vocation in their ministry.

The aims and objectives of this dissertation are to:-

- examine the meaning of vocation and how the sources express its significance
- explore how the teacher sustains their own sense of vocation with particular reference to John Bolland's book 'The Light of His Face- Spirituality for Catholic Teachers' 2007
- examine how the 'soil' (Gallagher 2001) has changed e.g. the prevailing secular culture demands that a practising Catholic swims against the tide
- reflect upon how the school's ethos and how it either supports or erodes the teacher's spirituality. If as it says in the Module Booklet 1, 'the school is the curriculum' (Murphy and Fincham; 2013:14) then, the hidden curriculum that the school presents will have as much an influence on the teachers within its walls as the children who teach there. How the teacher acts as co-creator of the school's ethos will also be considered. This research seeks to explore the symbiotic relationship between the teacher's spirituality and the continually evolving culture



of the school. Gerald Grace's seminal work 'Catholic Schools – Mission Markets and Morality' 2002 will serve as a key text in exploring this theme.

- Investigate the particular implications of the above for school leadership; how does the senior leadership team (SLT) embed systems and modi operandi to create a school ethos and culture which enables teachers to sustain their sense of vocation in their ministry and therefore equip the child to live life to the full?

## **1.2 The Hypothesis**

The hypothesis for this research is to test the assumption that the members of staff in the school under study are aware of the notion of vocation and its importance in sustaining teachers in their ministry.

The writer seeks to find out to what extent the members of staff at St Chad's agree that the school under study supports the vocation of all its members to

- recognise that sustaining vocation entails supporting mental well being, building confidence, spiritual formation and personal development eg equipping its members to live life to the full
- feel that the school actively promotes a culture in which these concepts are vital to all members of the school community.

## **1.3 The Rationale**

The writer is motivated to complete this research, as over a period of years, it has become apparent that the concept of teaching as a vocation has been

eroded. As demands from the government are ever increasing and consequent pressure on teachers to 'perform' are stronger than ever, the question arises – what influence does this have on the individual teacher's ability to sustain the sense of vocation in their ministry and what implications does it have for leadership teams?

In Module Booklet 4 p9.4, Grace (2002:3) is quoted

Catholic schools, along with other schools in England and Wales, have been subjected to an intensified work and surveillance culture and this raises questions about what effect the new 'performativity' culture in schools is having upon the spiritual development of both teachers and students.

This has had a significant and corrosive influence on the *raison d'être* of the purpose of education and like many other areas of life in the United Kingdom, has capitulated to the twin agendas of reductionist materialism and utilitarianism.

When a teacher is convinced of their vocation to teach, the wellspring of their faith must run very deep to sustain their mental well being and to maintain a broader sense of perspective to continue to live out their vocation.

This study is important to the researcher because

- i) in a broad sense, if schools are now the chief medium of the transmission of faith it is essential for all leadership teams to support and nurture the inner life of the teacher in order to fulfil the mission of the Catholic school and;

- ii) in a narrow sense, the school under study has identified pastoral care of pupils and staff members as an area for development and has therefore commissioned this research to plug the gap in an otherwise academically successful school

This study aims to explore the symbiotic relationship between the inner life of the teacher, the national secular culture in which they find themselves, and the school which serves as a middle ground where the national culture is viewed through the lens of faith.

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#### **1.4 The school context**

St. Chad's school<sup>1</sup> is a smaller than average size school. It is in the maintained sector and is primary phase. Pupils attend from a diverse range of social backgrounds, including 5% Irish Traveller community, although only a small proportion are entitled to or choose to claim free school meals, however this may increase as the pupil premium method of funding is embedded.

In fact, the actual number of children eligible for free school meals is 9%, so it is well below the national average. Attainment on entry is broadly in line with the national average. There are 26 children on the Special Needs register and 4 children have Statements of Special Educational Needs this is also below the national average.

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<sup>1</sup> For ethical reasons, a fictitious name has been adopted.

Over half (55%) come from minority ethnic backgrounds and there are increasing numbers of pupils coming into the school with English as an additional language, although only a few are at the early stages of learning English, however in Foundation Stage this is increasing. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. It is fair to say that, although there is a majority of children from ethnic backgrounds with English as an Additional Language, many of the parents are supportive and ambitious for their children as is often the case with migrant families.

Also, at least half of the year 6 leavers aspire to go to the selective grammar school in the neighbouring local authority/diocese which means that fifty percent of the children have external tutoring. 11+ preparation has been offered as an after school club in the past. With approximately one third of the children successful in their bid to 'go to the convent'; many have a narrow worldly view of success rather than a broad and balanced view of what human flourishing means i.e. to find one's vocation and live life to the full. All Catholic schools are called to be excellent rather than be outstanding.

In the most recent Ofsted report, the school is described as follows;

St.Chad's Catholic Primary School is slightly smaller than average. Over half its pupils are from minority ethnic groups; the largest of these groups are from Mixed, White (Other) and Black African heritage. The school has a small group of pupils from Irish Traveller backgrounds. The school has about half the average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities; the largest group of these have moderate learning difficulties.

There are 240 children on the roll with 85% baptised Catholics.

### **1.5 Methodology**

The writer intends to gather, by means of a questionnaire and follow up survey, the perceptions of the school's staff, both teaching and support, in regard to the school's ability to enable the individual teacher to sustain their sense of vocation in their ministry. The questionnaire will, inter alia, explore the extent to which the school provides opportunities to develop the formation of all adult staff members.<sup>2</sup>

The questionnaire will include a series of statements and a Lickert scale to gauge staff perceptions of vocation together with an opportunity to give additional information that the staff may feel is relevant to the study.

In addition to the questionnaire, the writer intends to interview teachers and support staff regarding the formal continuing professional development and formation they receive as well as the informal, for example, via internal support networks within the educational establishment. The format of the follow-up interviews will be semi-structured to enable both 'hard' and 'soft' data capture in order to get a holistic view on the subject matter of the study.

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<sup>2</sup> Formation in the Catholic context is a broader concept than Continuing Professional Development. It incorporates personal and spiritual development and their impact on the common good of the broader community. In 2007, Bernadette O'Keefe and Richard Zipfel wrote a report on how Catholic schools promote civic inclusion and participation in Formation For Citizenship In Catholic Schools, published for the Centre for Faith in Society, Von Hugel Insititute by Matthew James Publishing.

As the profile of vocational education is addressed specifically, the writer hypothesises that by comparing the results from the interviews and questionnaires, the school as a whole will move on to a more explicit vision of vocational education and will itself be better equipped to enable every child to 'live life to the full'.

## **1.6 Summary**

In Chapter One, the aims and objectives of the study have been set out; namely, to explore the extent to which teachers can sustain a sense of vocation in their ministry; the influence of the prevailing secular culture on their faith and that of their pupils; how the school's ethos synthesises these elements; and the implications of the above for school leaders. The study will test the hypothesis that the notion of vocation is important to teachers in sustaining their ministry.

The rationale has been explained and the school described in detail to provide the background within which the study will be conducted.

In order to contextualise the small scale research, in the next chapter, I will explore the field of literature on

- teacher spirituality and vocation
- the influence of the secular society and the challenges it presents for teachers in schools with a religious character
- the importance of school ethos and culture and the individual's contribution to it
- the implications of all the above for school leadership teams

## Chapter 2

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This second chapter has been sub-divided into 5 sections in which I will explore the sources and what they say about vocation, spiritual capital, sustaining one's ministry, school ethos and the implications for leadership.

These sections will fulfil the aims of the dissertation as stated in Chapter 1 and thereby set the scene for the hypothesis of the small scale research which follows in Chapter 3; namely to test the assumption that the members of staff in the school under study are aware of the notion of vocation and its importance in sustaining teachers in their ministry.

In Chapter 1 the primary reason for the study was given as an exploration of how the teacher can sustain their own sense of vocation in their ministry; using John Bolland's book 'The Light of His Face' as a key text. To paraphrase a quote from Pope John Paul II, Bolland sees that ministry as pivotal to the transmission of the faith,

The future of the church passes by way of its schools.

Bolland 2007:13

If the transmission of faith is now in the hands of the teacher, how much more important is the sustenance of that sense of vocation? The second focus for the study is to examine how the culture has changed and how it has had an impact on the ministry of teachers to be counter cultural. In this chapter, Jim Gallagher's work 'Soil for the Seed', amongst other works, will be exploring how the 'soil' is now very different and far less receptive to the 'seed' of faith.



The third aim of this dissertation is to look at school ethos and how it can either support or undermine the teacher in their bid to sustain the sense of vocation in their ministry; the fourth and final aim of the literature review will be to study the role of the teacher as co-creator of the school ethos which will then contribute to the conclusion in Chapter 5 what the wider implications are for senior leadership teams.

## **2.2 The Sources - Vocation and the Christian Teacher**

It is important to start with Sacred Scripture as our primary source of knowledge and wisdom. Within this context, the *raison d'être* of Catholic education has always had respect for the individual as made in the image and likeness of God with a divine origin and an eternal destiny.

‘So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.’

Genesis 1:27

Christ was made incarnate to illustrate that image of God and to speak in person to His people.

I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness.

(John 10:10)

Jesus is very clear about His purpose in this scripture; He came to give us a rich and satisfying life – temporal and eternal, physical and spiritual, in heaven and on earth. As all schools are based on Christ as their foundation, our purpose is His purpose. This objective was explored in the constitutional

document of Vatican II *Gravissimum Educationis* – *The Declaration on Christian Education* (1965: n.29) which stated that an aim of Catholic education was

... to promote the fullest development of the human person and to integrate Christian education more closely with the whole pattern of life.

The title of this dissertation begins with a quote from His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. In 2010 when he led 'The Big Assembly' he undoubtedly had the scripture (cited above) in mind, as he considered the purpose of Catholic education; such purpose was reiterated in the latest edition of 'The Red Book':

This is the goal of Catholic education: to draw out the potential in each person to the full, in a community which recognises the centrality of Christ as our guide and inspiration.

(Our Catholic Schools: Diocesan  
Inspection Committee 2010:7)

In summary, in this chapter, I shall explore the literature which examines how the teacher can sustain their sense of vocation in their ministry; the influence of the wider culture on that ministry; the extent to which school ethos can support that ministry and what role the teacher plays in creating that ethos.

Before addressing the means by which the teacher can sustain their sense of vocation; it will be necessary to examine what exactly the concept of vocation in a Christian context constitutes.

Lydon (2011) builds on the notion of the sacramental perspective, which was devised by Otto Semmalroth. Semmalroth, writing in the 1950s, first introduced the notion that Christ is the primordial sacrament; this idea was taken and developed by Rahner and Shillebeeckx in 'The Church as Sacrament' 1961 and 'Christ the Sacrament of Encounter with God' 1960. In his PowerPoint on the Sacramental Perspective, Lydon asserts;

In these writings the idea of the Church as a basic sacrament makes no sense unless Jesus in his humanity is also seen as a fundamental or primordial sacrament.

Christ is the foundation, the centre, the source, the summit, the all-in-all for all baptised Christians.

Lydon continues

The sacramental perspective is , therefore, linked with the Universal call to holiness referred to previously (in Lumen Gentium) In that, in order to be “called to the fullness of Christian life,” the individual Christian must make a firm commitment to the radical call to discipleship received in baptism.

But what does that 'radical call to discipleship' received in baptism entail?

Baptism is the primary sacrament of vocation but this can be expressed as different callings. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1993) baptism confers on the recipient the roles of priest, prophet and king (nos. 897-913). At baptism, we are 'christened' e.g. made to be like Christ who undertook all

of the above roles. Therefore as baptised Christians we too should endeavour to mirror Christ's threefold ministry as priest, prophet and king in our everyday lives and as teachers in a more focused way in our ministry. Jesus is the priest because he became the ultimate sacrifice as well as being the original 'pontifex' or bridge between humanity and God the Almighty Father. Jesus fulfilled the role of prophet as many Old Testament figures are archetypes for Christ e.g. Elijah, Elisha and Moses who like Him were given the vision of what could happen if the people turned away from God's law. Jesus is also king in that as part of the Trinity he is judge, pantocrator of all His creatures.

Pantocrator (Παντοκράτωρ) is a translation of one of the many names of God in Judaism. In the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament Παντοκράτωρ was used to translate the tetragrammaton YHWH meaning 'I am who I am' and El Shaddai meaning 'God Almighty'. It appears only once by St Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians, yet is used far more frequently in the Book of Revelation referring exclusively to God the Father.

The most common translation of *Pantocrator* is "Almighty" or "All-powerful". In this understanding, *Pantokrator* is a compound word formed from the Greek words πᾶν, *pan* i.e. "all" and κράτος, *kratos*, i.e. "strength", "might", "power". This is often understood in terms of potential power; i.e., ability to do anything, e.g., omnipotence.

Another, more literal translation is "Ruler of All" or a more liberal translation would be, "Sustainer of the World". In this understanding, *Pantokrator* is a compound word formed from the Greek for "all" and the verb meaning "To accomplish something" or "to sustain something" (κρατεω). This translation speaks more to God's actual power; i.e., God does everything (as opposed to God can do everything). If we are to be like Christ in our ministry as teachers we need to be mindful of the way in which we 'rule' and 'judge' what goes on in our classrooms.

It is by virtue of our baptism that the Catholic teacher shares in Christ's threefold mission. Interestingly from an educationalist's point of view, in Canon law this mission is alternatively described as the Mission of Sanctifying (priest as conduit for sacraments), the Mission of Teaching (prophet), and the Mission of Ruling (king). As teachers or leaders in schools we have a mission to prophecy by virtue of our baptism as enshrined in *Lumen Gentium* (1965: para 31).

These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world

This primal vocation or first sacrament of vocation can be lived out by the laity, e.g., the baptised Catholic teacher, in the following ordinary ways. The priestly role of the baptised person is to carry out their daily work in a spirit of sacrifice e.g. to sanctify their schools, workplaces and homes. The baptised

are also 'priestly' in that, for example,<sup>3</sup> they assist the liturgy as readers during school masses, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.

The prophetic/teaching role of the baptised person is to evangelise day to day conversations with pupils during registration or playground duty, drawing analogies with the spiritual and the secular. Thirdly and finally, the kingly/judicial role of the baptised finds its expression in the home or classroom via the normal decision-making made by parents and teachers. Similarly, the three roles of the baptised can be made manifest in the classroom and school as teachers read the Liturgy of the Word in assembly (priestly function); teach mind-opening concepts during lessons (prophetic function) and uphold Gospel values such as truth and justice in the class when the children have chosen the easy thing to do rather than the right thing (kingly function).

'Equipping the child to live life to the full' means modelling and promoting all these functions of the baptised as part of their training in vocation.

This is an ongoing part of teacher formation and the deeper one goes into the mystery of the sacrament, the richer one's understanding of this call becomes. Lydon continues to flesh out the uniqueness of the teacher's vocation

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<sup>3</sup> Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are lay faithful ( not a bishop, priest or deacon) who distribute Holy Communion when the ordinary minister is absent or impeded *Redemptionis sacramentum*, 133

By engaging in the ministry of teaching, the individual Christian is responding to his or her primary call to be a disciple of Jesus in a distinctive manner... This fundamental calling demands that all teachers model their ministry on that of Christ.

In other words for a committed Catholic teacher their ministry is to 'incarnate' Christ Himself.

Teachers, by their life as much as by their instruction bear witness to Christ the unique Teacher

Gravissimum Educationis n8 1965

Whilst it is apparent that there is wide corpus of literature dedicated to the notion of the vocational nature of teaching, including Bolland 2007, Palmer 1998 and O'Malley 2007, it is worth posing the question – does lack of knowledge and understanding of the theology of vocation mean that teachers do not have a sense of vocation in their ministry?

Correspondingly, how many schools regularly revisit the demands of the vocation to teach during inset or staff meetings? Without explicit articulation of the depths of this call to vocation by virtue of baptism – how can any teacher sustain their ministry? And what about the unbaptised teacher in the Catholic school, how are they to be included in this vision of Christ-centredness? If the waters of baptism are a symbol of the heritage of abundant life – what is the basis of your vocation if you have not received them?

Sullivan (2001) explores in detail the tension between distinctive and inclusive elements of Catholic Education. He states that in Catholic schools;

...members of staff who are not Catholics will be able to contribute both positively and with integrity.

To do this, the Catholic school must maintain a balance between its distinctive mission 'to transmit.. a divinely sanctioned message for life ( and eternal life)' with its vocation to inclusivity that the message must

'take into account [people's] differing situations and experiences, their insights and perplexities, their challenges and needs, their hopes and fears.

Sullivan takes 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 as the biblical warrant for inclusivity

<sup>19</sup> Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. <sup>23</sup> I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

So the unbaptised or unchurched teacher must be immersed in the rhetoric of vocation but more importantly, they must witness at first hand the reality of that vocation manifested in the attitudes and behaviour of the baptised Catholic teachers within the school. Equally, their opinions should be sought in order to enable the leadership to synthesise faith and culture in the context of the school.

Such lack of knowledge and understanding is not limited to unbaptised Catholics; for a variety of reasons well beyond the scope of this study, the



general knowledge and understanding of doctrine has declined amongst even the most committed practicing Catholics.

In answer to the question posed at the beginning of this section, the writer asserts that all teachers have a sense of vocation e.g. to make a difference. However, lack of knowledge and understanding of what vocation means in a Catholic Christian context may result in an inability to express themselves regarding their ministry.

### **2.3 'Spiritual Capital' –its meaning, its practice and its loss**

'Spiritual Capital' is a term coined by Professor Gerald Grace which he defines as

resources of faith and values derived from commitment to a religious tradition

(Grace 2002:236)

The question that needs to be addressed is this: how does the teacher continue to sustain that sense of vocation through the grace of baptism when the cultural values are moving increasingly away from those of the Gospel?

Gallagher quotes from 'The Catholic School' (1977 nn66-7) where it states

One must recognise that, more than ever before, a Catholic school's job is infinitely more difficult, more complex, since this is a time when Christianity demands to be clothed in new garments, when all manner of changes have been introduced in the Church and in secular life, and , particularly, when a pluralist mentality dominates and the Christian gospel is increasingly pushed to the sidelines.

Given that this was written over 35 years ago, it appears that the writing was on the wall even then. Gallagher lists the changes in society that have eroded the 'spiritual capital' (see below) of the Catholic school.

Among factors that affect schools are population shifts, falling roles, urban redevelopment, decline in religious practice and commitment, the breakdown of family life, our multicultural and multi-faith society.

(Gallagher 2001:269)

Grace (2002:237) further identifies the increasing absence of teaching priests and religious within educational leadership as a fundamental erosion of spiritual capital in Catholic schooling.

In terms of the maintenance and enhancement of the Catholic educational mission, this cadre of leaders (despite the individual failings of some of its members) has been overall a powerful asset for the system – the animating spiritual capital of Catholic schooling.

Grace goes on to state that the new leaders e.g. lay teachers now have only their own spiritual capital, based on their personal experience, to draw upon.

There are many consequent implications for the leadership team of a Catholic school; it is the underlying Catholic culture, which has changed for everyone, whether they are clergy leading the faithful, parents bringing up children as first educators in the faith or teachers trying to sustain their sense of vocation. The nature of the change in the culture has been explored extensively by Jim Gallagher, in his book 'Soil for the Seed' (Gallagher 2001)

and his reflections form the basis of the next part of this chapter where the influence of the change in the 'soil' is examined.

It begs the question does a change in culture equal a loss of 'Spiritual Capital'? It is worth exploring, for a moment, the notion of spiritual capital and its potential influence on the teacher's ability to sustain their sense of vocation in their ministry.

'Spiritual capital' is a term which can refer to the mastery of and degree of attachment to a particular religious culture (Finke 2003). It might also be thought of as a sub-species of social capital, referring to the power, influence, knowledge, and dispositions created by participating in a particular religious tradition (Berger & Hefrer 2004). Most recently, however, its meaning has been refined to a

power or advantage not rooted in material intellectual or social realms;  
(Liu 2007)

Liu also defines it as

For people believing in God, spiritual capital may be considered as the degree of connectedness with the God.

<http://www.researchmethods.org/be4capital6> as at 27.7.13

It is clear that the changes in society listed above (family breakdown, pluralism, multiculturalism, materialist reductionism, aggressive atheism) have led to the erosion of religious literacy amongst the faithful and unchurched alike.

The consequences of which, are that, in any given educational establishment, there is an ever diminishing source of spiritual capital to draw upon.

So teachers are striving to maintain their sense of vocation against a background which is at best, apathetic and at worst, openly hostile to the ministry that they feel called to perform. Any sustenance in the ministry to teach occurs despite the prevailing culture rather than because of it.

Therefore, having examined the concept of vocation and the culture in which it has to survive, it is worth repeating the paraphrase

The future of the Church passes by way of its schools

Bollan 2007:13

If teachers are to sustain their sense of vocation they need to have a deep and considered understanding not only of vocation as their personal God-given call but also of their collective vocation as Catholic teachers in Catholic schools to ensure that the faith is passed on to the next generation. It is no small endeavour and in many ways the odds are not in the teachers' favour.

Bollan 2007:14 neatly sums up the reality of working in a Catholic school in the twenty-first century he writes that there is

...a fraught interface between a faith commitment and a demanding professional life in an increasingly secular environment.

Bollan describes a scene from the film 'American Beauty' which vividly paints the religious hinterland of the pupils in our schools. The character in the film is entranced by a film of a white bag 'dancing' in the wind. That wind suddenly arousing his awareness of an 'unseen force and consoling presence'. He goes on to write that the majority of people in the developed world are happy to leave 'incredibly benevolent force' (i.e. God)

...without a name and our relationship with it free of the constraints of words and images.

However, as Catholic Christians we have the deposit of faith i.e., thousands of years of religious writings and experiences. For teachers, the richness of that deposit of faith is displayed in the countless images in scripture and poetry, art and architecture.

Just as O'Malley (2007:13) uses the image of the Paschal Mystery to help us make sense of the vicissitudes of life, Bollan uses the scriptural image of the Transfiguration to help teachers see the learning environment as a place of transformation. In his chapter 'Tell and Show', Bollan draws an analogy between the disciples as learners (2007:22) and the use of 'eye contact' by the teacher.

The Transfiguration is chiefly a visual experience: the 'lesson' is conveyed by looking at Jesus...Teachers are only to aware of the value of illustration; a well-used image can be twice as effective as words.

The Transfiguration invites teachers to make eye contact with Christ and to see themselves reflected in that light. Teachers in turn are called to look at others in the same way, especially those poorest of children who are starved of love and frequently ignored.

.. (Bollan: 2007:25)

It takes a certain degree of mindfulness to realise that classroom lessons can be a source of sustenance in your ministry as teacher, however once the teacher has tuned in, they can be an unending supply of spiritual nourishment.

For the committed Catholic teacher, regular reception of the Sacraments is a profound resource by which to sustain one's sense of vocation.

For Bollan (2007:66), regular reception of the sacraments is vital for teachers to sustain their sense of vocation in their ministry,

Not only should they be aware of the ways in which God uses the stuff of everyday life to communicate with us, they should also be conversant with the eternal truths which are being communicated. Although every Catholic should be leading a sacramental life, teachers need to be 'up close' to the sacraments as befits people who are leading others on this journey.

While a full exploration of the seven sacraments is beyond the scope of this study, I would like to hone in on the two sacraments that are received regularly and not as rites of passage in life's journey; namely, the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

If there is any word which catches the substance of a Catholic teacher's life (or what it should be) then that word is 'Eucharistic'....it is the perfect synthesis of the mission and purpose of Catholic education. Any talk about the sacraments must include a sense of what is happening beneath the surface.

Bollan 2007:73-74

As teachers, our sense of vocation can be refined if we can see the

incarnational perspective of our daily lives. We are aware of the immanent  
eg assembly on Monday morning and the transcendent – simultaneously  
lifting up every child in prayer to God the Father at that gathering. We take  
the ordinary eg the literacy lesson and we transform it into an opportunity to  
communicate the notion that the Christian can find God in all things.

Although a curriculum is being delivered and learning being assessed,  
there are also implicit messages and unseen interactions taking place.  
At the heart of education, as with the Eucharist, are communication  
and transformation.

Bollan 2007:74

While receiving the Eucharist is a frequent occurrence for the committed  
Catholic teacher, celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation is usually less  
so. Again, the demise in the popularity, for want of a better word, of  
Reconciliation is a subject for another dissertation. However, in the context  
of the classroom and the Catholic school, what other sacrament is mimicked  
or invoked as frequently as reconciliation, i.e. the need to say sorry and  
receive forgiveness, as is played out a thousand times in the playground?

I personally prefer its alternative name, the Sacrament of Peace, which has  
completely different overtones. Having received it, the person is left in  
peace, free to make a better choice next time. Bollan defines sin, from  
which reconciliation liberates us, as a

...disconnectedness (which) also affects our relationships with others  
introducing jealousy, insecurity and self-interest into our dealings with  
others.

Most Catholic teachers, at some point in their careers, will recognise these feelings as present in the staffroom as much as they are in the classroom.

Central to the efficacy of this sacrament, Bolland asserts, is a thorough examination of conscience, although the term, he acknowledges, carries 'unpleasant associations'. For non-Catholic teachers, this can be explained as an interior variation of being a 'reflective practitioner'. Being able to look at one's motives in any given situation with some distance and to see the course undertaken as separate from yourself as an individual and to re-play in your mind what you would change if faced in a similar situation. For the Catholic teacher, it is also to look at one's actions through God's eyes and in the light of scripture and tradition find an alternative way of dealing with such situations in future.

For the teacher reflecting on

Inconsistent choices and actions, infidelities great or small, unloving thoughts and words; these are all ways in which we detach ourselves from God's love (sin) and unplug ourselves from communion with those around us.

Bolland 2007:80

In order to sustain one's sense of vocation, having an awareness of when you have felt jealous or insecure due to a promotion of a colleague enables you to re-connect yourself with God via reconciliation and to reflect on what God is calling you to do in the situation.



## 2.4 School Ethos, culture and its role in sustaining vocation

Having reflected on the teacher's ability to sustain their sense of vocation via their knowledge and understanding of their baptismal mission and frequent celebration of the sacraments, I will now turn my attention to the school ethos and how it underpins or undermines that sense of vocation.

So, what is culture and how can it develop teachers' ministry?

The deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic "taken for granted" fashion an organisation's view of itself and its environment

Schein, 1985:6 quoted in Module Booklet 2  
Murphy and Fincham 2011

Or as Deal and Kennedy (1983) put it it is 'the way we do things around here.' Having explored the ways in which the teacher formation can help sustain that sense of vocation it is interesting to note that for Stoll & Fink (1995)

The leadership of the principal in shaping culture is highly significant.  
Module Booklet 2 4.2

Therefore if the leadership does not expressly and practically verbalise the importance of vocation within the school, or model Catholic values in their interactions and decisions, then the spiritual capital of the school is eroded and the teacher is disempowered from sustaining their sense of vocation in their ministry. Charles Handy (1993) examined the different types of cultures that can emerge in organisations and named them after Greek gods. In a Zeus culture – centralised power is the key ingredient; in order to 'get on' a teacher must connect with the head teacher personally; an Apollo

culture would characterise itself as one based on procedural practice; an Athena culture is based on a network of small teams (perhaps the one that best embodies the Catholic principle of subsidiarity); and lastly a Dionysus culture places the individual as pivotal in achieving the ends of the organisation. In practice, a school is probably a mixture of all these approaches but in varying proportions and emphases. In relation to the focus of this study the combination of cultures most likely to support teachers in their ministry are the Athena and Dionysus culture. However, this could result in a school which is task oriented, and potentially difficult to manage without an overarching 'steer' from the leader.

Ethos is a far more commonly used term in educational circles than culture and sometimes these words are used interchangeably. However, ethos is akin to the soul of a school; it is its 'spiritual dimension' (Fincham & Murphy 2011:4.4). However, without a large deposit of spiritual capital, the school will not fulfil its purpose in defining what makes a Catholic education distinctive.

Spiritual capital is defined here as resources of faith and values derived from commitment to a religious tradition.

(Grace: 2002:236)

In a nutshell, school culture illustrates 'what we do around here' whereas ethos demonstrates 'why we do it and what keeps us going'.

So having examined the nature of school culture and ethos, I now turn my attention to the role of the teacher as co-creator of the school's culture and ethos.

We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean.  
But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.

Mother Teresa

Hitherto, the focus of this literature review has been on the symbiotic relationship between the macro management of a school e.g. the big picture or ethos and the meso management e.g. how the culture informs day to day interactions between members of staff, phase teams and key stages. As the purpose of this study is to look at how the lone teacher can sustain a sense of vocation in their ministry, the attention is now turned to the micro management of a school eg the culture of 'what we do' inside the classroom.

Bollan (2007) intimates that having a mindful approach to everyday occurrences in the classroom and using the examination of conscience to focus on where there was 'light' in the teacher's day presupposes a continuing development in the formation of the adult concerned.

In secular terms this may be described as simply being a reflective practitioner. However, for Catholic teachers it takes on a supernatural element where the individual maintains a conversation with God regarding how efficiently they are carrying out His purpose for their lives and asking Him to bless their ministry.

Just as the head teacher's spirituality sets the tone over the whole school in their baptismal function as pantocrator, the teacher likewise is the sustainer

of the classroom climate. So, how does climate differ from culture and ethos?

Climate (is) the atmosphere within any individual classroom, workshop or sports field which may or may not be a reflection of the whole school ethos and culture.

(Module 2 Booklet Fincham & Murphy 2011:4.5)

When considering the class teacher as co-creator of the school's ethos and culture, classroom climate cannot be overlooked.

I think that not enough attention has been given in the past to the importance of the climate or 'micro-climate' within each individual classroom in the school. A school with a very warm and positive whole school ethos may include one or more classrooms where the pupils' perceptions are of a climate that is cold and negative.

Module 2 Booklet Fincham & Murphy 2011:4.5

In a school where news of good practice 'leaks out' for example a Higher Level Teaching Assistant remarks having covered a lesson, 'I love Year 4, they always make allowances for Child A, who has learning difficulties', the time and effort expended by the class teacher in making the climate 'a hospitable space for learning' for all children whatever their barriers to learning are, Sullivan 2000:185, (as quoted in Module booklet 2 Fincham and Murphy 2011:4.5) can result in other teachers trying to emulate their approach.

Ad hoc remarks regarding attitudes to learning by the teacher combine to create a climate within which children can thrive; the children, then model the same attitudes to each other and so the climate is established. The power of the teacher's words is immense and to return to the quote which is

at the beginning of this section, a remark here and there may seem like a drop in the ocean but the ocean would be less if that drop was missing. In other words, without modelling those attitudes verbally and regularly the ocean would dry up and the classroom climate would desiccate.

I believe that within one building of 240 pupils and 25 staff there exists not one school with one culture, one ethos and one climate but 265 school co-existing simultaneously; the interplay between leader and leader, leader and teacher, teacher and teacher, pupil and teacher and finally pupil and pupil combine to create the microclimates within that school.

## **2.5 Summary**

Having examined what the canon of literature has had to say on what the teacher can do to sustain their sense of vocation in their ministry, how the prevailing culture both within and without the school supports or impedes them, and lastly how they act as co-creators of that ethos, in the next chapter I shall set out how I designed my small-scale research project to test the hypothesis of this study.

## Chapter 3

## **Chapter 3: Research Methods**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The aim of this investigation is to find out whether the adult members of staff in the focus school were aware of the concept of vocation as being at the heart of Catholic education; what did it mean 'to equip the child to live life to the full' and to discover if and how the staff have been encouraged to live out their vocation.

With this in mind, in Chapter 2, I conducted a literary review to reflect upon the principles of how teachers' spirituality can sustain that sense of vocation in their ministry, the challenges presented by a changing and increasingly critical secular culture, the role of school culture, ethos and climate and how this can underpin or undermine teachers' sense of vocation and lastly, the role of the individual teacher themselves, in co-creating the spirit of their Catholic community.

Consequently, in this Chapter, I shall set out to determine appropriate the research tools with which to conduct my investigation of practice in a case study school, considering and explaining why those which I selected to be appropriate.

### **3.2 Approaches to research**

It was with the above in mind that I then set about considering, from the range of options available to me, which research tools would be suitable to gain insight into how teachers sustain their sense of vocation.

There are two main paradigms or approaches in the collection of data. The first being quantitative research; this involves hard data, collecting sets of facts and comparing them with each other.

Numerical data and, typically....structured and predetermined research questions, conceptual frameworks and designs'  
Punch 2005:28

This approach results in generalisable conclusions drawn from the facts gathered in the research. The second paradigm is qualitative research; this involves collecting soft data for example the perceptions of individuals in a given situation.

Qualitative research not only uses non-numerical and unstructured data but also, typically, has research questions and methods which are more general at the start and become more focused as the study progresses.

Punch 2005:28

Therefore, given that an aim of this research is to explore teacher perceptions of what sustains their ministry, qualitative research appears to be a legitimate option as it would provide the researcher with a suitable means of eliciting broad information about the perceptions of teachers within the case study school. However, in many research projects there is still a need for some 'hard' data e.g., gender of participant, length of service and this study is no exception. Bell (2010:6) writes that qualitative researchers 'often doubt whether social 'facts' exist and question whether a scientific approach can be used when dealing with human beings'. In my opinion social, facts do exist but their existence only lasts as long as the dynamics within the school remain the same; changes in middle or senior leadership roles alter the 'facts'. This research is concerned with adult



perceptions of the school's culture and ethos and its efficacy in sustaining their sense of vocation.

### **3.3 Case study as a tool**

... can be particularly appropriate for individual researchers because it provides an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth.

(Bell; 2010:8)

I selected this approach because it enabled me to study the concept of sustaining the ministry in great depth within the focus school. However, the disadvantages of this method are that when the researcher is concentrating on a single focus it is difficult to cross-check information and consequently, generalisation is not always possible, unless, to borrow a legal term, the case study example stands on all fours with existing research. Denscombe (2007: 43 quoted in Bell 2010:9) writes

This means the researcher must obtain data on the significant features (catchment area, the ethnic origins of the pupils and the amount of staff turnover) for primary schools in general, and then demonstrate where the case study example fits in relation to the overall picture

I refer again to the school description contained in Chapter 1 where any future researchers may ascertain for themselves whether their own situations mirror this case study. Bassey's views on relatability (see below) persuaded me of the advantages in the case study approach.

Bassey (1981:85 quoted in Bell 2010:9) contests that it is not the 'generalizability' which is key to the research but the 'relatability',

...the extent to which the details are sufficient and appropriate for a teacher working in a similar situation to relate his decision making to that described in the case study

As the focus of this study is the extent to which teachers sustain their ministry; I believe that the findings will enable me to draw conclusions to which teachers in other schools can relate.

### **3.4 The Description of the School**

I refer to Chapter 1 of for details of the school

### **3.5 Research Design**

Having explored the approaches to research and case study in particular as a tool, it became evident that in this situation, the qualitative approach needed a heavier weighting than the quantitative approach in designing this research. Therefore I examined the questionnaire and the interview as tools to carry out the investigation.

#### **(i) Questionnaire**

Questionnaires are a flexible tool in gathering data in that they can incorporate both quantitative data and qualitative data; they are inexpensive both in terms of time, materials and cost. They are relatively easy to arrange as they may be distributed easily, allowing standardised answers so that data collected is simpler to process and less likely 'to be contaminated through variations in wording' (Cotgreave et al 2000 in Research Module Booklet Murphy & Fincham 2013).

However, in designing the questions wording must be clear and unambiguous in order to produce robust responses.

In surveys all participants are asked the same bank of questions and any data generated is less likely to be affected by interpersonal factors therefore maintain a certain degree of objectivity.

For the above reasons I decided to select a questionnaire as one of my research tools. However I did bear in mind the disadvantages, the most common of which is a low response rate with responses that were incomplete or poorly completed. I devised a stratagem to encourage the greatest participation possible by follow up reminders.

I was also aware that the precoded questions can bias the findings towards the researcher's rather than the respondent's perspective and participants can find it frustrating to complete; I endeavoured to limit these disadvantages by careful drafting, consultation and piloting with my supervisor prior to distributing the questionnaires.

## **(ii) Interviews**

An advantage of conducting interviews is that the participant has the opportunity to reflect on the questions posed and answer them in depth. Such depth can lead to important insights emerging from the study for the researcher and the school concerned. The participants' priorities, opinions and ideas can be accessed and a personal view can be gained via the opportunity to expand or explain their perceptions.

The interview also allows for a certain degree of flexibility in that where a new 'line of enquiry' emerges, the researcher has the opportunity to probe

and develop the participant's contribution. Unlike the questionnaire, the interview gives far more direct contact with participants, allowing data to be checked for accuracy and enabling tone and body language to inform the researcher's data. An additional advantage is that there is a high response rate as interviews are pre-arranged and scheduled for a convenient time and location. Interviews can have a very positive effect because they give a forum for participants to air their views and feel that they are being listened to.

A disadvantage of the interview as a research tool is that, unlike the questionnaire, they are time-consuming to conduct, transcribe and to code. Due to the personal responses of an interview, data can also be more difficult to analyse and the research must strive to maintain consistency and objectivity. The 'interviewer effect' is also a cause for concern, because the interviewee may give what s/he perceives to be the socially acceptable answer. Also, the identity of the researcher can influence what people say and what they are prepared to reveal about themselves.

However, the methods of recording the data can be threatening and lead to the participant feeling inhibited about providing responses. Tactless interviewing can be seen, at best, as an invasion of privacy and lead, at worst, to participants wishing to withdraw from the study if they are upset.

Nevertheless, I selected the questionnaire and the interview as my research tools due to their complementarity in terms of direct contact, time, cost and materials.

### **3.6 The Sample**

As one of the title of this research suggests, the sample needed to be as broad as possible to enable the 'exploration'. I interpreted the term 'teacher' broadly to include learning support assistants (LSAs), higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) and nursery nurses (NNEBs). The people who were invited to participate in the study were all members of staff who worked with children either in class, small groups or one-to-one. No distinction was made between teacher/LSA/HLTA/NNEB. Administrators, cleaners and site managers were not included in the sample. Participation was entirely optional; those who chose to return questionnaires or agreed to participate in interviews crossed all boundaries of age, sex and education.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations were paramount in this, as in all, investigations. It was important to establish a research contract so that all parties are

Clear about the nature of the agreement you have entered into with your research subjects

(Blaxter et al. 2006: 158-9)

During the initial Learning Support Assistant meeting and subsequently, the principle of 'informed consent' was maintained by careful explanation and consultation of the participants before any data collecting began (Oliver 2003:28-30). Unlike the teaching colleagues the invitation to take part was met with some hesitation on the part of the support staff.

Research ethics is about being clear about the nature of the agreement you have entered into with your research subjects or contacts...it involves reaching agreements about the uses of this data, and how its analysis will be reported and disseminated. And it is about Keeping to such agreements when they have been reached.  
Blaxter et al 2006: 158-9 quoted in Bell 2010:47

With each questionnaire a consent form was supplied and verbal reassurance given by the researcher that confidentiality will be maintained for everyone.

A concern that was raised by more than one participant was the issue of confidentiality. There was an awareness that while the participants trusted my promise as the researcher that their responses would remain confidential, there was also an uneasiness that true anonymity could not be guaranteed in such a small school. This echoes Sapsford and Abbot 1996:319

Confidentiality is a promise that you will not be identified or presented in identifiable form, while anonymity is a promise that even the researcher will not be able to tell which responses came from which respondents.

The key question to be borne in mind was: can this research do anyone any harm? Thanks to careful consideration and conversation with my supervisor, the questions were drafted in such a way as to neutralise any potential harm and before every interview a preamble was read which re-emphasised that participation was entirely voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time. Only my supervisor and I would have access to the data which would remain confidential conforming with the Data Protection Act where it is stored electronically.

My primary ethical consideration was to ensure that the conclusions of the research would be taken seriously and not subject to any suggestions of bias. Pastoral care of staff and pupils had been identified as a gap in the school development plan, so there was an awareness that the conclusions may not be entirely positive. I was also aware that being an 'inside' researcher, there was a danger of a lack of objectivity in my research and a fear that it would affect my role in the organisation.

It is important, when conducting research that one guards against any potential bias. Undertaking an action research project necessitates that the researcher is often an insider. However, this can lead to a conflict of interests and may give the researcher an ethical cause for concern. To illustrate, Bell gives a recount of a full-time teacher and part-time researcher who found at times there was a conflict in the roles; on one hand there was a distinct advantage,

For example he had an intimate knowledge of the context of the research and of the micro-politics of the institution. Travel was not a problem and subjects were easily reached. He knew how best to approach individuals and appreciated some of their difficulties. He found that colleagues welcomed the opportunity to air problems and to have their situation analysed by someone who understood the practical day to day realities.

Bell 2010:56

On the other hand, such 'insider knowledge' inevitably led to the researcher fearing that objectivity was more difficult to attain. This experience certainly resonates with me as pastoral support within the whole school community had been identified by myself and the head teacher as an area for development long before the research had been embarked upon. During

the gathering of the data, where good pastoral practice was not consistent within the staff body, a loss of morale was the result and this made objectivity more difficult to maintain as did Stephen Water's first experience of research as quoted in Bell above.

### **3.8 The Pilot Study**

Having discussed the ethical considerations above, I drafted a pilot questionnaire, submitted it to my supervisor and ran the pilot questionnaire / interview schedule with colleagues from the Master's course to identify any ambiguous or misleading questions. I duly amended the drafts.

### **3.9 Procedures**

#### **(i) The questionnaire**

Primarily, the questionnaire was distributed in a sealed envelope together with the consent form in all the pigeonholes in the staff room. Those invited to take part were adults who played a role in teaching and learning within the classroom. They included specific learning support assistants (those attached to children with a statement of special educational needs), general learning support assistants, Early Years Foundation Stage Practitioners, class teachers, and members of the senior leadership team who still had a teaching responsibility. The focus and purpose of the study was announced at a special LSA meeting with the head teacher, with a special emphasis that participation was entirely voluntary and confidential. A two week period was given to return the completed questionnaires to the researcher either via pigeon hole or by hand, to be collated and analysed later.



During that two week period the researcher attempted to interview all teaching staff and learning support assistants. Due to time constraints, (the interviews were conducted during lunch hours) not all learning support assistants could participate as they work largely part-time (mostly mornings). The interviews were recorded digitally and then transcribed by the researcher.

### **3.10 Summary**

In this chapter, I have detailed the different methodologies open to me as a researcher and carefully considered their suitability to test out the hypothesis of this study. Having researched the advantages and disadvantages of a variety of research tools and approaches, I set out in detail why I selected the case study approach; using the questionnaire and interview as my favoured research tools. In the following chapter, my intention is to classify the results of my investigation by presenting them in tabular form, to compare the findings from both the questionnaire and the interview tools and to gauge the differing perceptions between class teachers and senior leaders. I will then endeavour to interpret them in the light of the theories and concepts arising from the literature review, making significant reference to the focus school and identifying any issues that arise for the leadership within that school, whether they are senior, middle leaders or leaders yet to emerge and to analyse my findings in the literature reviewed.

## Chapter 4

## Chapter 4: Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I examined the various research methods before giving reasons why I chose the research tools I considered suitable for triangulation.

In this chapter, I shall (a) present the data that I elicited from the questionnaire in tabular form and (b) summarise participants' responses to the interview questions. I shall then analyse and interpret these results in the light of the literature review and test the hypothesis set out in Chapter 1.

As stated at the outset, the aims and objectives of this dissertation are to:

- examine the meaning of vocation and how the sources express its significance
- explore how the teacher can sustain their own sense of vocation with particular reference to John Bolland's book 'The Light of His Face- Spirituality for Catholic Teachers' 2007.
- examine how the 'soil' (Gallagher 2001) has changed eg how the prevailing secular culture now demands that a practicing Catholic swims against the tide.
- reflect upon the school's ethos and how it either supports or erodes the teacher's spirituality.
- investigate the particular implications of the above for school leadership; how does the senior leadership team (SLT) embed systems and *modi operandi* to create a school ethos and culture

which enables teachers to sustain their sense of vocation in their ministry and therefore equip the child to live life to the full?

The hypothesis for this research was to test the assumption that the members of staff in the school under study were aware of the notion of vocation and its importance in sustaining teachers in their ministry.

#### **4.2 Presentation of results**

As indicated previously, in this section, I shall present the results of my investigation in two parts: (a) the questionnaire and (b) focus group interviews.

##### **(a) The questionnaire**

Twenty-one questionnaires were distributed to the staff; 9 were returned giving a response rate of 42%. Reminders were given at staff, LSA (Learning Support Assistants) and morning briefing meetings, reasons for the poor response will be discussed later. All staff who responded to the questionnaire were female.

The majority of the respondents, 6 out of 9 (66%) fell in the 35-44 age bracket. Seven out of nine (77 %) were Roman Catholic; 23% (2 out of 9) other Christian. The majority of respondents, 6 out of 9 (66%) were Learning Support Assistants.

There follows a series of tables corresponding to the statements presented in the questionnaire. Under the columns both the number of responses is recorded together with their equivalent percentage. Please note that due to rounding the percentage totals may not equate to 100% exactly.

Please tick one box for each of the statements below		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
This school:						
2.1	promotes teaching as a vocation among its staff	0	1 (11%)	1 (11%)	6 (67%)	1 (11%)

**Figure 4.1: This school promotes teaching as a vocation among its staff**

Please tick one box for each of the statements below		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
This school:						
2.2	actively promotes the mental well-being of staff	0	4 (44%)	5 (56%)	0	0

**Figure 4.2: This school actively promotes the mental well being of staff**

Please tick one box for each of the statements below		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
This school:						
2.3	actively promotes the mental confidence of staff	1 (11%)	4 (44%)	4 (44%)	0	0

**Figure 4.3 This school actively promotes the confidence of staff**

Please tick one box for each of the statements below		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
This school:						
2.4	provides opportunities (e.g., INSET, Continuing Professional Development, peer mentoring) to sustain the staff's sense of vocation	0	0	4 (44%)	4 (44%)	1 (11%)

**Figure 4.4: This school provides opportunities (e.g. INSET, Continuing Professional Development, peer mentoring) to sustain the staff's sense of vocation'**

Please tick one box for each of the statements below		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
This school:						
2.5	actively promotes the spiritual formation of the staff	0	1 (11%)	5 (56%)	3 (33%)	0

**Figure 4.5: This school actively promotes the spiritual formation of the staff**

Please tick one box for each of the statements below		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
This school:						
2.6	actively promotes the personal development of the staff	0	1 (11%)	5 (56%)	3 (33%)	0

**Figure 4.6: This school actively promotes the personal development of the staff**

Please tick one box for each of the statements below		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
This school:						
2.7	actively promotes the development of the whole child	0	2 (22%)	0	7 (78%)	

**Figure 4.7: This school actively promotes the development of the whole child'**

Please tick one box for each of the statements below		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
This school:						
2.8	has a culture which actively promotes mental well-being in children	0	0	1 (11%)	6 (67%)	2 (22%)

**Figure 4.8 This school has a culture which actively promotes mental well-being in children**

Please tick one box for each of the statements below		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
This school:						
2.9	has a culture which actively promotes confidence in children	0	0	1 (11%)	6 (67%)	2 (22%)

**Figure 4.9: This school has a culture which actively promotes confidence in children**

Please tick one box for each of the statements below		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
This school:						
2.10	actively encourages children to find their vocation	0	2 (22%)	4 (44%)	3 (33%)	0

**Figure 4.10 This school actively encourages children to find their vocation**

In section 3 of the questionnaire, the respondents were given the opportunity to add further open-ended comments about their own attitudes towards vocation in the school. Of the nine respondents, only three added further comments; two of whom were teachers the remainder a learning support assistant.

The additional comments ran as follows:

I think attitudes for children are from a class level and promoted by the individual teacher so I have commented based on my own class experience. I think staff well-being is something which happens now and again rather than being actively promoted, but I'm not sure of a solution of how to actively promote.

(Respondent 1)

Teachers are expected to work over and above accepted measures, tipping the work-life balance. Teachers are expected to do all of this because they chose this profession (vocation) as a 'calling' and should be doing it for the love of children and teaching. Financial incentives are given, offered to a few chosen ones. Fairness is not always transparent.

(Respondent 2)

The children very much come first. The staff are sometimes left not knowing what to do. It's becoming routinised but not in a good way.

(Respondent 3)

**(b) Focus groups interviews**

In addition to the questionnaire; I interviewed nine members of staff; six of whom were teachers, three were support staff. Of those nine, three had also completed questionnaires. Of those three, two were teachers and one a

learning support assistant. One member of the Senior Leadership Team contributed to the research.

I shall now present the responses to the interview questions without comment. For ease of reference I have grouped interviewees' responses in the order of the questions as they appeared in the questionnaire; this helps create an overall impression of the general attitudes of the staff regarding each specific issue.

Question 1. What do you understand by the term vocation in the educational context?

I would think that it is something that you are drawn to do coming from a religious standpoint it's something that you feel a calling to do, that's not everyone's experience but something that you feel strongly, it's the kind of job you do for love rather than a job you do for glory or cash I think.

(Interviewee 1)

I think vocation is something you give your life to, not just a job, but who you are and what you are about

(Interviewee 2)

Vocation is wanting to do the job because of the importance of the job

(Interviewee 3)

Vocation is a lifelong...commitment... of the way that you live your career through

(Interviewee 4)

A job what you have chosen to do not thrown into it or doing it because there is no other option it's a job what you do as you say a vocation you didn't hear a calling but you felt that its the thing what you were made for

(Interviewee 5)

Vocation? Many strands. The child's vocation could be their best possible starting position and how to help them achieve their goals



through various learning techniques through small groups perhaps?  
In regards to religious education, supporting their spiritual journey  
and remembering that the child is a whole child and supporting their  
various needs; at home in the community... their religious education.  
(Interviewee 6)

We all have a vocation that we want to play – that’s why we ‘re here.  
Our vocation with the children and caring for the children – it’s our  
number 1 vocation  
(Interviewee 7)

Vocation is something that you love to do and you want to see good  
results from so... vocation for me would be to see the children really  
enjoy all the activities that you put out and get excited about what  
they are going to do and actually achieve an objective from it as well.  
(Interviewee 8)

Vocation is a lifelong calling, in the educational context it has the  
same definition.  
(Interviewee 9)

Question 2 Pope Benedict said it is the Catholic school’s mission to equip  
the child to live life to the full. What do you think he meant by that?

Erm, I think, as a Catholic school, I think living life to the full would be  
to have a full life with God. To do everything you can in your life to  
improve that relationship but also have all the experiences open to  
you that you possibly can, I suppose.  
(Interviewee 1)

Thinking about the child as an all rounder, rather than thinking about  
academic achievement, thinking about not just written work  
(Interviewee 2)

Making sure that they are rounded people; that they have the  
opportunities that we wish for them not what they want with their  
limited understanding.  
(Interviewee 3)

In the way of teaching what the Catholic religion believes you should  
live your life and encompass that with their education- it would be  
through the morality of the decisions they make

(Interviewee 4)

..to bring up well rounded individuals not just focus on the academic side ... spiritual social side of development and that's how we bring up well rounded people

(Interviewee 5)

I think he meant ...I hope he meant in the whole sense of Christianity by being supportive to one another, to our peers, to our friends to our family and everybody else we come into contact with.

(Interviewee 6)

Making sure they reach all their potential that they are comfortable happy is my number one and encouraged to learn with their friends but they are individuals and they need lots of support.

(Interviewee 7)

To enjoy everything they do be it academic, relationships, just their whole being, being healthy,.. living, families, going to church...

(Interviewee 8)

To encourage and to embrace the whole of the child in terms of the academics, in terms of wider life and in terms of equipping them to serve their wider communities

(Interviewee 9)

Question 3. To what extent do you feel you are equipping the children to live life to the full? If so, please give examples.

I think I struggled because I think the group of children I have been quite challenging, a challenging cohort to being receptive to those kinds of things. But that's one of my big things and I do try my very hardest so I will talk about real life situations and my experiences, so today we were talking about making friendships at secondary school, because they are talking about transition so they were worried that if you have one certain friend doesn't want you mixing with other friends, you know, what can you do and I sort of shared my experience of that and I think that they know that you have been through the same things that they've been through, that you're a human being, you're not some kind of autobot at the front of the class and that you are teaching them. Erm, you know it's kind of a shared experience and they can feel reassured by it and with my previous class last year that was the sort of dialogue we had quite often

because they were more mature and more ready for that so that kind of started earlier I think.

(Interviewee 1)

I think you are restricted slightly by what you know you have to get done in a day; I would like to be able to give more time to those extra things, extra skills for the children. I think I am doing a good job, but I could definitely improve if I was given the opportunity.

(Interviewee 2)

I think we are; we are introducing new things; extending them on their way, we're early years so it's easier to react so if they want to make paper boats I went on the internet and we had a paper boat day; we get to react but we get to broaden them – they don't all go to the same places, we go through those steps and we get them ready.

(Interviewee 3)

In terms of what Pope Benedict has asked? Or me and my...? I try to make sure that all the children I teach have the best opportunities they can have and they are treated as equals and they are enjoying the experience of being in school, together as a class and as a community of our own and they are having fun at an age appropriate level and enjoying their life...they are only little... to equip them for life and to make sure they are having fun

(Interviewee 4)

We're not focussing on the well rounded individual.. we're focussing on the academic side making sure that we meet targets and tick boxes and to fit all the other bits in we don't have enough time to develop their spiritual side, their social skills, interacting with the children

(Interviewee 5)

In the nursery setting we do low key every day celebration of being ourselves. We do formal prayer time and talk about family, home life, different communities, different ethnic groups and how we all pray together.

(Interviewee 6)

I hope I am in the line that if the children are unsettled they will naturally come to me and they know that I will give them the time

(and cuddles if needed) which in the nursery setting is needed at all times

(Interviewee 7)

I think I am really good at that, what I enjoy is seeing the children achieve; I get great excitement if someone suddenly learns how to...I don't know.. Sound out their word box...I would be really excited about that and the child will know I am pleased and the child will be excited to carry on and be confident in their learning.

(Interviewee 8)

It's hard to define to what extent but I think I am mindful of encouraging the development of the emotional and social aspects of the child through the extra-curricular things that we run through the volunteering opportunities in our local community in other schools making links there. Through P4C lessons as well and your everyday practice being available to the children when they need you.

(Interviewee 9)

Question 5 Do you think that the school has supported you personally? If so, in what way? If not, why?

I've felt quite well supported, I've not been through major things but there have been a few things e.g., relationship breakdowns or family illness or worries and I felt that like if I needed to ask for time or I needed to that I could, but at times, yeh, I think that would have been given begrudgingly; I don't feel that anymore but earlier in my career, I did feel that but I don't feel that to be the case now.

(Interviewee 1)

I feel lucky I was well supported, I had quite a tough NQT year last year, I think it helped that my mentor was also a friend it wasn't so much somebody who was higher up, it was somebody I could talk to.

(Interviewee 2)

Yes, they do, they do support; I may not agree with the decisions they've done for me but it doesn't mean they're not supportive; they do want you to improve YES and we're adults so the onus is on us in lots of ways but if you want an opportunity in this school you can have it

(Interviewee 3)

Yeah I think everyone here wants to help you out if you are a bit upset about something if you have had a bad day or something, personally relationship problems, children problems... anything that's a problem outside these four walls I feel that there are people who will be a shoulder to cry on or a voice of opinion or advice.

(Interviewee 4)

The school is trying to support me in a way by booking in courses for CPD development but to me it feels like we're ticking boxes because there isn't anything they can offer me to further develop my career and that's it. The key stage managers are not supporting as they are meant to be supporting they are just there as a figure head not getting involved in any organisation which is connected with me or my class

(Interviewee 5)

Yes in lots of personal ways they have but sometimes it's as a second thought.... yes and no to that question.

(Interviewee 6)

100%. No, 110% while Jack's been ill

(Interviewee 7)

To a certain level it's ambivalence – I've never felt unsupported, I've never felt that any extra has gone into supporting me

(Interviewee 8)

Over the many years I think they have in some aspects supported me with family issues. I feel that as a small school I feel they could have done more to help more staff, perhaps... sometimes... it is difficult to see everybody's plight.

(Interviewee 9)

Question 6. Do you think you have been encouraged by the school to live out your vocation? If so, please give examples

Yeh, I think I've been professionally been encouraged; so, I didn't really know what my 'niche' was and I was given the opportunity to test out different things and then came across the philosophy, the P4C side of things and was encouraged to develop that as a something that was going to benefit the school; but as I was

interested, I was allowed that kind of freedom that I was going to do and I was going to explore a few things I wanted to do before I found that for myself.

(Interviewee 1)

I think you are definitely pushed to do your best all the time, but I don't know if it's always doing your best for the children always, it's about results but vocation for me is about academic plus everything else and I think that could be pushed more.

(Interviewee 2)

Mmm to live out my vocation...I suppose... I don't think I want to be a good teacher, I want to do it part-time; I've been allowed to albeit, it's not ideal from their point of view I not a .. and I've done well with that I've taken on other responsibilities eg ICT due to my knowledge (expertise- interviewer) and elected to go with that, I haven't had that 'I would like to do this'. They do think and I do think that it is right to get your classroom practice right and that's my vocation it's the classroom and not management so being left to do that is my ideal. The fact that I don't have to do and it's not expected to go on...is that to give support and to help each other is what we do but the opportunity is there to grab it. Ok if you need to do a staff meeting you can put it on your CV. I'm happy with what I am doing and I want my classroom teaching to be good and you are allowed to do that.

(Interviewee 3)

Yeah I think I am encouraged to do the best that I can do and so a bit like the children, I am praised for the things that I am doing well and thanked for the things that I am doing well and that helps you want to do more and want to achieve and want to be better at what you do. I think that every year I get better at what I am doing and the people who help me make me feel better about my future in this school

(Interviewee 4)

Maths is my area of expertise...I didn't chose it...Obviously I came to like it but it's not what I would have chosen it would probably have been history

(Interviewee 5)

Yeah, I think so because if ever I have wanted to .. learn to do something new I've always been allowed to do it and I think as well I've been in the school for 20 years and I think my job has changed

since being in Nursery to what I am doing now. That's probably why I am still here because I haven't done the same thing for 20 years.'

(Interviewee 6)

Yes as I was an Isa then I was upped to a nursery nurse but with working fulltime I have been left on my own... to my own devices so another bit of support would help

(Interviewee 7)

...my own vocation? I feel I have done that independently not necessarily in the school, in the church community and the parish definitely.

(Interviewee 8)

I think I have been given a lot of rope to pursue the passions I have with music, with the extra-curricular with the sport and I've never felt hindered by that in any way

(Interviewee 9)

Question 7 Do you have any other thoughts about the place of vocation in school?

I don't think that that is a particularly a word that I er, we would use, er as part of the Come and See we talked about Holy Orders in year 6 and we talked about vocation; when the children used that term they weren't really sure what it meant so we did spend some time unpicking what that meant in the Catholic sense but also what vocation meant in er the workplace sense; so I don't think it is something I am particularly familiar with and my class were not familiar with it as a concept this year.

(Interviewee 1)

No, not really sorry.

(Interviewee 2)

It's a tricky one, vocation because it can't be the same for everyone – teaching is my vocation, I'm very lucky I'm not reliant on the money; I'm not reliant on working here I can get a job elsewhere and I can get a job out of the industry, I've got experience (from other areas) I want my day to be fulfilling which is what I get. So going to another school where I'm not getting that so...it's... trickier. Vocation is tricky because other people have less choices, money worries whereas I ...I've been lucky to have nothing but choices.

(Interviewee 3)

No

(Interviewee 4)

The teacher has to be supported all around to support well rounded children the teachers need to be made to feel wanted, important....not just important when it suits the school because you need to do reports or you need to give in data..that you are needed all year round that you are doing a good job...not just oh yeah we like you...to have a good chat with teachers not an on the surface chat to show you are interested in what they think and how they feel; it's just 'how are you' 'yeh fine' and you've ticked your box and that's it, you know – 'I've done my developing bit' kind of thing and to help them develop and encourage them. If they need to move on or to offer their services because they have outgrown the place where they are...you know to be made aware that you are good and you can do whatever you really would like to do.

(Interviewee 5)

I think they could offer more training opportunities with regard to spirituality for all levels of staff and that in turn would gain the children to get a better access to all our issues.

(Interviewee 6)

No, no I haven't

(Interviewee 7)

No, not really.

(Interviewee 8)

No, I think its a part that never gets its own special attention even at this stage I think we need to start them thinking about what they want to be or where they want to go with their lives or how they make those steps there because if you start it in year 9/10 it suddenly becomes all too real and all too soon and then it would be nice if there was a bit more of that going on there was a point when we were inviting adults in to talk about how they got to where they are and what goes into their jobs and things like that that that would be good.

(Interviewee 9)

In this next section I will go on to compare the findings of the questionnaire and the interviews and differences; analysing and interpreting the



responses and highlighting the differences in perception between the learning support assistants, teachers and senior leaders.

### **4.3 Analysis and interpretation**

In order to examine and interpret the results of this investigation, I shall revisit the four themes set out in the Literature Review in Chapter Two. This will provide a basis for a methodical analysis. The four themes were

- (i) vocation,
- (ii) spiritual capital,
- (iii) sustaining one's ministry and
- (iv) school ethos

A pervading theme throughout will be implications for leadership within a Catholic school.

#### **(i) Vocation**

The hypothesis for this research was to test the assumption that the members of staff in the school under study were aware of the notion of vocation and its importance in sustaining teachers in their ministry. In Chapter 2, there was an exploration of what the sources have to say about vocation. The notion of vocation and its roots in the sacrament of baptism were examined in the light of the cornerstone of all Catholic education, the teachings of Jesus Christ. The foundational text, cited in the title being,

I have come in order that you might have life – life in all its fullness.  
(John 10:10)

While not explicitly mentioned, it was implicit from the both the questionnaire results and from the tenor of the interviewees that Jesus Christ was at the centre of their lives.

The sacramental perspective is, therefore, linked with the Universal call to holiness referred to previously (in *Lumen Gentium*) In that, in order to be “called to the fullness of Christian life,” the individual Christian must make a firm commitment to the radical call to discipleship received in baptism.

(Lydon; 2011)

In answer to the question ‘What do you understand by the term vocation in the educational context?’ The responses showed that the concept of vocation was well embedded within the staff’s sense of ministry. For example, in response to statement 2.1 (see Fig. 4.1) of the questionnaire an overwhelming majority of participants 77% (6 out of 9) either agreed or strongly agreed that the school promotes teaching as a vocation among its staff.

Only 1 respondent disagreed (11%) and one was uncertain (11%). Also, in answer to interview question 1: ‘What do you understand by the term vocation in the educational context?’ That notion of vocation rang out from the recurrent terms and themes in the responses. Phrases such as ‘A life-long calling’, ‘a thing you love to do’, ‘the thing that you were made for’ illustrated perfectly that deep rooted understanding. It was clear that the term vocation had significant meaning for many of the participants; for further elucidation, please see the full transcript of comments earlier in Chapter 4.

The understanding of the concept of vocation was well summarised in the comment

‘(Vocation is ) A job what you have chosen to do not thrown into it or doing it because there is no other option .....but you felt that it’s the thing what you were made for’

(Interviewee 5)

In order to sustain this aspect of teachers’ ministry, leadership teams must continue to foster and to maintain the profile of the notion of vocation through staff meetings and INSET days. Opportunities to speak about and reflect upon vocation will support and promote vocation as a living part of the school’s story and build up the deposit of spiritual capital; the next heading that was addressed in the Literature Review.

## **(ii) Spiritual Capital**

The second theme outlined in the Literature Review was spiritual capital. It is evident from the previous paragraph that the school enjoys a rich deposit of knowledge and understanding of the notion of vocation from the results of the investigation. One way spiritual capital can be built up by individual teachers is by reflecting on the primary sacrament, baptism. In Chapter 2 it was discussed that by virtue of our baptism, Catholic teachers have a vocation to fulfil in their daily working lives as priest, prophet and King *Lumen Gentium* (1965: para 31). From the data gathered during the investigation, it was evident that participants had an implicit understanding of their mission. In response to the question, ‘Pope Benedict said it is the Catholic school’s mission to equip the child to live life to the full. What do you think he meant by that?’ the participants confirmed their understanding of the model of Christ and his teachings as the foundation of their ministry.

.. he meant in the whole sense of Christianity by being supportive to one another, to our peers, to our friends to our family and everybody else we come into contact with.

(Interviewee 6)

To enjoy everything they do, be it academic, relationships, just their whole being, being healthy,.. living, families, going to church

(Interviewee 8)

Lydon (2011) explored the notion of the uniqueness of the teacher's ministry encapsulated in the idea of incarnating Christ himself in the classroom; echoing *Gravissimum Educationis* n8 1965

Teachers, by their life as much as by their instruction bear witness to Christ the unique Teacher

Again the notion of being Christ in the classroom or of fulfilling your kingly role as part of your baptism was implicit in the responses given during the interviews. Such concepts were tempered by the reality of work pressures in contemporary education as is borne out by the following quotes.

I think I struggled because I think the group of children I have been quite challenging, a challenging cohort to being receptive to those kinds of things (life and faith). But that's one of my big things and I do try my very hardest so I will talk about real life

(Interviewee 1)

I think you are restricted slightly by what you know you have to get done in a day; I would like to be able to give more time to those extra things

(Interviewee 2)

The data from the results also confirmed Grace's notion that lay teachers (i.e. without the benefit of the charism of a teaching order) now only have their own spiritual capital, based on their on their personal experience, to draw upon.

..my own vocation? I feel I have done that independently not necessarily in the school, in the church community and the parish definitely.

(Interviewee 8)

The results of the questionnaire demonstrated that the spiritual capital was being built up by the school's leaders. In response to statement 2.1 of the questionnaire an overwhelming majority of participants 77% either agreed or strongly agreed that the school promotes teaching as a vocation among its staff. Only 1 respondent disagreed and one was uncertain.

The implications for leadership appear to further develop the spiritual capital by finding new ways to re-articulate the call to teach.

### **(iii) Sustaining One's Ministry**

The questionnaire attempted to elicit information regarding the school's ability to support staff in sustaining their sense of ministry. For example, in answer to statement 2.4 'This school provides opportunities (e.g. INSET, Continuing Professional Development, peer mentoring) to sustain the staff's sense of vocation', 5 out of 9 agreed (56%) of which 1 out of 9, (11%) strongly agreed. Many responses at interview chimed with these findings.

Yeah, I think I've been professionally been encouraged; so, I didn't really know what my 'niche' was and I was given the opportunity to test out different things

(Interviewee 1)

Yeah, I think so because if ever I have wanted to ...learn to do something new I've always been allowed to do it

(Interviewee 6)

However, during the investigation it became apparent that not all participants shared the same views, one interviewee , perhaps unwittingly, highlighted the necessity of school leaders to ‘prepare the soil for the seed’ (Gallagher 2001) for all members of the school community.

I think they could offer more training opportunities with regard to spirituality for all levels of staff and that in turn would gain the children to get a better access to all our issues.

The data also confirmed Bolland’s (2007:14) theory that for teachers there is a fraught interface between a faith commitment and a demanding professional life in an increasingly secular environment.

One participant commented that the vocational side e.g. the spiritual and personal development of staff was not a high priority in the focus school.

I think you are definitely pushed to do your best all the time, but I don’t know if it’s always doing your best for the children always, it’s about results. But vocation for me is about academic plus everything else and I think that could be pushed more.

(Interviewee 2)

..we’re not focussing on the well rounded individual.. we’re focussing on the academic side making sure that we meet targets and tick boxes and to fit all the other bits in we don’t have enough time to develop their spiritual side, their social skills, interacting with the children.

(Interviewee 5)

The findings of the research also bore out the idea put forward by Stoll and Fink (1995)

The leadership of the principal in shaping culture is highly significant.  
(Murphy & Fincham; 2014: 4.2)

which leads neatly into the discussion to the fourth and final heading ‘School Ethos’.

#### **(iv) School Ethos**

From the data gathered from the research it was evident that the pressures mentioned in Bolland (2007:14) were also at play in the focus school. In answer to the statement, 'This school actively promotes the spiritual formation of staff', 6 out of 9 (67%) were either uncertain, 5 out of 9, (56%) disagreed, 1 out of 9 (11%). strongly disagreed (See Figure 4.5 as an illustration on p6).

These views were supported by the responses at interview. When posed the question during the interview 'Do you think you have been encouraged by the school to live out your vocation?' the replies included

...my own vocation? I feel I have done that independently not necessarily in the school, in the church community and the parish - definitely.

(Interviewee 8)

..vocation for me is about academic plus everything else and I think .

(Interviewee 2)

In Chapter 2, the types of cultures within schools as categorised by Handy (1993) were examined and as a teacher/researcher with insider knowledge, I would say that the predominant culture in the focus school was 'Zeus' culture. Handy described this as a culture where centralised power is a key ingredient and to get on the teacher had to have a personal relationship with the head. In the focus school, the management structure was pyramidal rather than flat. The senior leadership team consisted of 3

members; only one of whom was class based; two were practicing Catholic and one was a person of no faith. Spirituality did not 'ooze' from the senior leaders, as it had done in the past under previous heads and, for some respondents in the interviews, teacher formation and building up the spiritual capital of the school was seen as simply another box to tick. Two participants commented

For staff there was prayers on Monday, put it as 'we've got to do this  
(Interviewee 1)

It does seem it's lip service and we really need to delve into spirituality a bit more  
(Interviewee 2)

That thing we do on a Monday morning when we first do a prayer or a reading... to me it's just to go through the motions...nothing deeper behind it  
(Interviewee 5)

The responses in the questionnaire corroborated these findings.

For example in response to statement 2.2 'This school actively promotes the mental well-being of staff', there was a significant minority 44% (4 out of 9) who disagreed and a slight majority 56% (5 out of 9) who were uncertain, giving a largely neutral or negative return. Also, in response to statement 2.3 'This school actively promotes the mental confidence of staff the majority 5 out of 9 (56%) either disagreed (44%) 4 out of 9 or strongly disagreed (11%) 1 out of 9, the majority of responses being negative.



Relationships between senior and middle leaders on one hand, and the teaching staff on the other did not always extend to the creation of mutually supportive relationships. One interviewee stated,

The key stage managers are not supporting as they are meant to be supporting they are just there as a figure head not getting involved in any organisation which is connected with me or my class

(Interviewee 5)

One interviewee summed up the school's attitude in one sentence,

the focus is very much on the children themselves and I think that we think about what we can do for them. With a lot of the teaching we come very secondary to that

(Interviewee 9)

However, when asked the question in the interview 'Do you think that the school has supported you personally? If so, in what way? If not, why?' , it was apparent that the school had been very supportive to the majority of participants. Responses contained frequent positive phrases such as 'well supported' with a couple feeling extremely positive about the support.

100%. No, 110% while Jack's been ill

(Interviewee 7)

I feel lucky I was well supported

(Interviewee 2)

The research findings did return some interesting data. For example, in the questionnaire, the statement 'This school actively promotes the personal development of staff', elicited responses which tended toward the neutral or negative with 67% (6 out of 9) either disagreeing (11% - 1 out of 9) or being uncertain (56% - 5 out of 9); the minority agreeing (33% - 3 out of 9). Perhaps this was due to a lack of understanding of the meaning of

'personal development'. It was intended to encompass interpersonal and intrapersonal skills in the workplace.

In considering the findings from the investigation as a whole, the responses between the teachers, the learning support assistants and the senior leadership team were usually at odds with each other. Generally speaking whether responses were given via questionnaire or in interview, teaching staff were far more positive than learning support assistants. In the interviews, teachers' responses showed that they felt more supported professionally and personally. The member of the leadership team who participated was overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school.

The stark contrast between the attitudes arising from ethos of the management to staff and to the children was further highlighted in the questionnaire. For example, in response to the statement 'This school has a culture which actively promotes the development of the whole child' a large majority, 78 % ( 7 out of 9), agreed. In response to the statement 'This school has a culture which actively promotes mental well-being in children' 89% (8 out of 9) agreed or strongly agreed (22% - 2 out of 9). In response to the statement 'This school has a culture which actively promotes confidence in children' again 78% ( 7 out of 9) agreed, 11 % (1 out of 9) being uncertain.

When considering statements or questions regarding the school's attitude to the development, mental well-being, confidence and vocation of the child

there was an overwhelmingly positive tone by the majority of participants to the responses, thereby lending gravitas to the data.

So far the research has confirmed the theories, concepts and models drawn from the literature review in Chapter 2; however in terms of ethos or the soul of the school; the data from the interviews shows that, despite a superficial nod to the spiritual element of teachers' ministry, the individual teacher's experience, knowledge and commitment to the Catholic/ Christian faith has enabled the focus school to maintain its soul, its ethos, independent from the management style of the senior leadership team.

I think that not enough attention has been give in the past to the importance of the climate or 'micro-climate' within each individual classroom in the school. A school with a very warm and positive whole school ethos may include one or more classrooms where the pupils' perceptions are of a climate that is cold and negative.

Module 2 Booklet Fincham & Murphy 2011:4.5

Sharing one's faith, life experience and how one coped with difficult situations was very much dependent on the intrapersonal skills of the teacher.

One teacher confirmed this creation of the 'micro climate' in the following contribution.

I think that they know that you have been through the same things that they've been through, that you're a human being, you're not some kind of autobot at the front of the class and that you are teaching them. Erm, you know it's kind of a shared experience and they can feel reassured by it and with my previous class last year that was the sort of dialogue we had quite often

(Interviewee 1)

When looking at the question of sustaining one sense of ministry it appears that without a strong commitment to keep teacher spirituality, well-being and therefore confidence high profile, it falls on each individual teacher to dig deep into the well of their own resources to maintain their sense of ministry.

‘...my own vocation? I feel I have done that independently not necessarily in the school’

(Interviewee 8)

#### **4.4 Summary**

In summary, from my research, I believe the findings indicate that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century a teacher only has her/his own personal faith and life experience to create the ideal microclimate within the classroom. But without a pervading wider school culture continually being developed by the senior leadership team to foster that sense of ministry, the individual in the focus school has to be self-reliant in sustaining a sense of vocation in their ministry.

In the next chapter, I shall draw together issues that have emerged from this study and present recommendations for improved gospel-informed leadership practice.

Having presented, analysed and interpreted the data, in the next chapter, I will make my conclusions arising from the investigation, consider further implications for leadership in a Catholic school, propose new areas for research and make recommendations for the focus school.

## Chapter 5

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In the previous Chapter, the results from the investigation were presented, analysed and interpreted. The findings from the questionnaire were compared with the responses from the interviews within the framework set out in Chapter 2, the Literary Review. In this chapter I intend to set out how school leaders can use the data gathered to move their school on to be a Catholic community where sustaining one's sense of ministry is simply part of the school ethos and culture.

### **5.2 Implications for leadership in a Catholic school**

The implications for leadership of how to support teachers in maintaining their sense of ministry are both deep and wide. Reflecting on the responses from the investigation, it seems to me that leaders need to be aware of what is required to support teachers in maintaining their sense of vocation in their ministry. Here follows a list of implications arising from the data.

- The first being that the leaders must strive to create a culture amongst the staff where they explicitly refer to their own personal response to their vocation and how that manifests itself in practical day to day terms.
- The second implication is for the leaders of the school to maintain a narrative that
  - 1) accepts the challenges of being a teacher

- 2) remains positive and valuing the role, even in the face of difficult behaviour, ever closer monitoring and decreasing salaries in real terms
  - 3) and values the role from an eternal perspective rather than the latest OFSTED schedule
- The third implication is that leaders must create systems that enable the greatest flexibility for teaching staff to be able to fulfil their duties; e.g. having a clear schedule of when monitoring or data is expected which enables teachers to maintain a work life balance.
  - The fourth implication is that leaders strive to ensure that there are explicit policies on work life balance and that these are adhered to
  - The fifth implication is that leaders must consider how to incorporate mental well-being into professional development discussions as well as leading INSET/STAFF meetings on mental well being, offering counselling/coaching sessions, yoga/meditation classes.
  - The sixth implication being the building up the school community as a support network for teachers/teaching assistants, particularly in difficult year groups.

### **(i) Vocation and (ii) Spiritual Capital**

Leaders in Catholic schools, and by that, I mean all members of the school community have the responsibility to keep the notion of vocation alive by speaking about God's call and our response in the course of our everyday lives, eschewing the consumer jargon of 'choice'.

The use of the pupil voice via school councils is a way of embodying this 'vocation and response' model. In a Catholic school community, it is our duty to form leaders for the future not just in the wider world for the common good but in a more parochial sphere, i.e. in local parishes where young people appear to be disengaged from parish life. The use of pupil voice could be the beginning of closing the apparent generation gap.

In the focus school there was a very strong sense of vocation and a deep understanding of what it entailed which was supported and sustained by the collective opinion of the Catholic teaching staff. The implications being, for example when recruiting, to appoint staff with an active and lively faith whose witness will contribute to the spiritual capital of the school. When talking about potential future careers; children are challenged to search for God's plan for them rather than talk about life choices.

### **(iii) Sustaining ministry**

When talking to staff, using the term 'ministry', rather than 'job' or 'profession' if leaders are trying to support teachers in their work, changes the tone of the conversation and steps away from the target-driven classroom. It focuses on soft skills which, inevitably, are harder to judge.

### **(iv) School ethos**

Getting the school ethos, the soul of the school, 'right' lies solely at the feet of the senior leadership teams. Modelling relationships within teams rooted in Christ, treating everyone as made in the image and likeness of God,



being able to forgive 'seventy times seven' and to work actively to build up connections between different groups within the school community eg Foundation Stage and KS2 Maths team. The key appears to be to have the same expectations of happiness and well-being for the adults and children alike. A school where teacher's thriving is as important as children's thriving will more likely be a place where the ethos pervades all levels.

### **5.3 Limitations**

This investigation was a very small research project and was limited in scope due to the nature of a one-form entry school with a smaller than average staff. There were also time limits placed on gathering the data for the questionnaire due to the researcher also being a full-time teacher in the school. The investigation is also limited by the potential bias of the teacher-researcher; however much she has tried to ensure relative objectivity in presenting and interpreting the results. The findings may also not truly represent the state of affairs at the focus school because only 40% (9 out of 21) of the questionnaires were returned; it is possible that those who responded had some cause to raise within the school and perhaps the remaining 60% were very positive about for example, the school's ethos.

What uncertainties remain? The findings show a profound sense of vocation amongst the majority of the teaching and support staff but they also identify a lack of knowledge as to the theological basis of their ministry and therefore an inability to articulate it. It begs the question if spiritual formation were to be embedded in a school development plan would

teacher mental well-being and confidence improve and therefore child mental well-being confidence and progress improve?

Looking back at the investigation, I think I could have improved the drafting of the questions. The responses in the interviews occasionally did not elicit the kind of material I was looking for. Initially, I attributed this to lack of knowledge and understanding of the notion of vocation but if I were to conduct a similar study, I may have added a small preamble to the questions in order to clarify the information I required. In future I would ask for time away from class to conduct any research as it was difficult to maintain my usual classroom practice and have continue the investigation; especially in this case where global pastoral care had been identified as a gap in the school development plan and an obvious area for improvement. Having presented, analysed and interpreted the data, in the next chapter, I will make my conclusions arising from the investigation, consider further implications for leadership in a Catholic school, propose new areas for f research and make recommendations for the focus school.

#### **5.4 Future Research**

Future researchers may like to consider the impact of teacher well-being on children's progress as a subject for research. While it is not a high priority in the political educational establishment, I would like to see a government project rolled out over a large area e.g., a local authority which investigates rates of teacher well-being and correlates them to

achievement in class, the hypothesis being happier teachers lead to greater progress in children.

Future research students may be interested in a small scale piece of research based on how teachers maintain their sense of vocation after a critical event e.g., the death of a member of the school community whether it be a pupil or member of staff/after a public abuse scandal. Exploring how teachers cope in very difficult circumstances, e.g. a local tragedy, and sustain their sense of vocation in their ministry may enable leaders to create more emotionally intelligent workplaces.

Many man hours and financial resources are spent on improving school performance without looking at the influence of 'soft skills' on children, their attainment and achievement. A future researcher may wish to conduct an investigation on the effect in a school where soft skills are valued and taught explicitly in one classroom and not in another.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

### 5.5 (i) Vocation

- Having Vocation/Response and God's call as part of the everyday language and mentioned pervasively across the entire curriculum; perhaps as part of the annual review of the Mission Statement of the school the subject of vocation and response could be incorporated into RE lessons and staff continuing professional development and formation.

- Have a Vocations day and invite those who are called to do their work eg doctors, nurses, policemen, RNLI volunteers, teachers, priests and religious lead vocation workshops with classes

#### 5.5 (ii) Spiritual Capital

- Annual retreat /workshop for all members of staff
- Regular opportunities for staff prayer (compulsory and optional)

#### 5.5 (iii) Sustaining One's Ministry

- Regular ( half-yearly) questionnaires monitoring staff well-being
- Regular timely feedback from questionnaires to all members of staff
- Staff meetings or parts of staff meetings dedicated to work life balance

#### 5.5 (iv) School Ethos

- Annual week (e.g. September at the beginning of the school year) revisiting the school's mission statement culminating in a Mission statement assembly to which parents and governors are invited
- School ethos questions included in the staff questionnaire to gauge if the rhetoric matches the reality

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## **Appendix 1**

Example of Consent Form



NAME OF PARTICIPANT: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of the project: Equip the Child to live life to the full: an exploration of the extent to which teachers can sustain their sense of vocation in their ministry

Main investigator and contact details: Mrs Joanne Nelson, St Catherine Catholic Primary, Money Lane, UB7 7NX

Members of the research team:

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
3. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
4. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University College processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of participant  
(print).....Signed.....Date.....

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If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project:  
\_\_\_\_\_

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 2**

Example letter of request to participate in the research

Dear Colleague,

**Re: Request to participate in Research**

As part of my Masters Degree in Catholic School Leadership, I am conducting a survey about vocational education.

My research is concerned with an exploration of the extent to which teachers can sustain a sense of vocation in their ministry. I should therefore like to conduct a survey via a questionnaire and follow up interview. I am interested in receiving feedback from all members of staff regarding their perceptions of how the school addresses vocation for all stakeholders in the school.

Your views are important to me so I should be grateful if you would complete the attached questionnaire. It should not be too time-consuming. Participation in this survey is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to participate or if you do not wish to answer some of the questions, you do not need to give a reason.

However, if you share your views with us, you can be assured that the survey is both anonymous and confidential. Any information that could identify you as an individual will not be disclosed to anyone else under any circumstances. Statistical information held on computer will be subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act.

If you would like further information about the survey or have any questions related to it, please contact me at the address below.

I thank you in advance for your support.

Yours faithfully

**Joanne Nelson**

**Appendix 3**  
Example of questionnaire

**Working Title: ‘Equip the child to live life to the full’: an exploration of the extent to which teachers sustain a sense of vocation in their ministry.**

Thank you for taking part in this questionnaire. As a participant you will be identified by a random number only so that your anonymity will be maintained even if you later decide to withdraw from the study. The school’s identity will be also anonymised by virtue of a fictitious name in order to uphold confidentiality. Only the proposer and the supervisor will have access to the data collected.

**Questionnaire**

**Section One**

**Please circle the appropriate answer**

1. Your gender:

Male                      Female

2. Age bracket:

18 – 24                  25-34                      35- 44                      45-54                      55-64

3. Your religious affiliation:

Roman Catholic      Other Christian          Other faith                  None of these

**Section Two**

**Please circle the number which mostly closely reflects your own views (1 strongly disagree, 2, disagree, 3, neither agree nor disagree, 4 agree, 5 strongly disagree)**

This school:		
4	promotes teaching as a vocation among its staff	1 2 3 4 5
5	actively promotes the mental well-being of staff	1 2 3 4 5
6	actively promotes the confidence of staff	1 2 3 4 5
7	provides opportunities to sustain your sense of vocation	1 2 3 4 5
8	actively promotes the spiritual formation of the staff	1 2 3 4 5
9	actively promotes personal development of the staff	1 2 3 4 5
10	actively promotes the development of the whole child	1 2 3 4 5
11	has a culture which actively promotes mental well-being in children	1 2 3 4 5
12	has a culture which actively promotes confidence in children	1 2 3 4 5
13	actively encourages children to find their vocation	1 2 3 4 5

### **Section Three**

If you would like to add any further comments about the extent to which you think the school helps teachers to sustain a sense of vocation in their ministry, please provide them below:

## Appendix 4 Interview Schedule



## Interview Schedule

**Working Title: 'Equip the child to live life to the full': an exploration of the extent to which teachers sustain a sense of vocation in their ministry.**

Thank you for taking part in this interview. As a participant you will be identified by a random number only so that your anonymity will be maintained even if you later decide to withdraw from the study. The school's identity will be also anonymised by virtue of a fictitious name in order to uphold confidentiality.

Only the proposer and the supervisor will have access to the data collected.

1. What do you understand by the term a 'culture of vocation'?
2. Benedict XVI said it is the Catholic school's mission to 'equip the child to live life to the full'. What do you think he meant by that?
3. Do you feel you are equipping the children you support to live life to the full?

If so, how? If not, why?

4. Has the school supported you spiritually If so, how? If not, why?
5. Has the school supported you personally If so, how? If not, why?
6. Have you been encouraged by the school live out *your* vocation?

If so, in what way(s)?

7. Is there anything further you would like to add about the culture of vocation in this school?