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## TEACHER COMMITMENT AND LONGEVITY IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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*This study investigated the characteristics of job satisfaction that lead to commitment and longevity in the Catholic school system for full-time Catholic elementary school lay teachers. The study was conducted using 339 teachers in the Archdiocese of New York who were part of the Catholic school system for 10 or more years. Data were collected through survey questionnaires and interviews. Using a theoretical framework relevant to job satisfaction, motivation, and adult development, the data were analyzed to determine how teachers are influenced by the work, the workplace, and other members in the workplace in determining their job satisfaction. The results of the study indicated that Catholic elementary school lay teachers place high priority on characteristics such as autonomy, administrative recognition and support, student motivation, and positive relationships with colleagues. Participants also stated that these characteristics are the conditions of the Catholic school system that encourage them to remain in Catholic school teaching. For the Catholic elementary school lay teachers in this study, commitment stems from the cultural bonds between the teacher and the school that reflect the shared values and beliefs held by both.*

The majority of teachers in the United States today work in public school systems. However, a considerable number of teachers work in Catholic school systems (Henke, Choy, & Geis, 1996; National Center for Education Statistics, 1996). Much of the research pertaining to job satisfaction within the teaching profession relates specifically to teachers, both elementary and secondary, who are members of the public school system.

Based on 1997 data, Catholic elementary schools provide a valuable service to over 2 million children in 7,000 schools nationwide (National Catholic Educational Association, 1997). This represents a large number of people who rely on the Catholic system of education. Knowledge regarding the characteristics of job satisfaction, commitment, and longevity for Catholic elementary school teachers may prove beneficial to principals and central office administrators who seek to hire and retain committed, skilled, and knowledgeable teachers for their schools.

Administrative leadership, teacher autonomy, student behavior, and the atmosphere of the workplace are characteristics of both job satisfaction and commitment for Catholic elementary school teachers. Components of the Catholic school workplace that encourage teachers to remain include the freedom to make curricular decisions, full control over issues related to classroom management, collegiality among members of the school, support and recognition from the school principal, and the behavior and motivation of the students.

The purpose of this study was to identify characteristics of job satisfaction for elementary school lay teachers that may be associated with commitment and longevity in teaching in Catholic schools. The study was conducted using participants from diocesan schools of the Archdiocese of New York. The research questions which guided the study were:

1. How do full-time Catholic elementary school lay teachers in the Archdiocese of New York perceive their job satisfaction?
2. What, if any, difference is there in the perception of job satisfaction between male and female lay teachers in the Catholic elementary schools of the Archdiocese of New York?
3. To what characteristics do full-time Catholic elementary school lay teachers contributing 10 or more years of professional service attribute their commitment to teaching in a Catholic school?
4. What motivating factors influence Catholic elementary school lay teachers to remain in Catholic schools?

This study obtained input from those full-time elementary school lay teachers who a) have demonstrated long-term commitment to teaching in Catholic schools for a period of at least 10 years, and b) have as a full-time career a teaching position in the Catholic school system. Using a theoretical framework related to job satisfaction, motivation, and adult development, this study provides educators with knowledge of the Catholic elementary school teacher's job satisfaction, commitment, and longevity in teaching in a Catholic elementary school.

Job satisfaction for the majority of teachers in elementary schools is critical to the length of time these individuals remain in the profession.

Characteristics of job satisfaction include factors such as adequate salary and benefits; sufficient administrative support; appropriate resources for teaching; opportunity to develop new skills; important, challenging work; and positive relationships with colleagues (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Darling-Hammond, 1984; Grissmer & Kirby, 1987; Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1959). Not only do these characteristics influence teachers' length of tenure in the profession, but they are also influential in teachers' length of stay in a particular school system (Bobbitt & Whitener, 1992; Choy et al., 1993). Billingsley and Cross (1992) refer to teachers' reaction to job satisfaction characteristics as commitment. Commitment as defined by Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982) may be attitudinal or behavioral.

Attitudinal commitment is marked by a) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and c) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (Billingsley & Cross, 1992). Behavioral commitment, on the other hand, relates to the process by which individuals become bound to an organization and is characterized by individuals' development of a psychological attitude consistent with their behavior (Reichers, 1985).

Those variables that generally attract teachers to become educators are not always the same as those characteristics of education that retain them. For example, individuals pursue teaching as a career in order to help children, improve society, and convey knowledge; they remain as part of the profession because of community, autonomy, personal and professional growth, and self-realization (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Colarusso, 1994; Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Lortie, 1975; Sarason, 1977). Rosenholtz (1989) states that commitment to the workplace results when people experience their work as meaningful and consistent with their values and beliefs.

Studies show that approximately 40% of teachers leave the profession within the first 7 to 10 years of teaching (Fullan, 1991; Grissmer & Kirby, 1987; Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 1992). Such studies purport that lack of administrative support, low wages, pursuit of a noneducation career, general dissatisfaction with teaching, and little opportunity to influence the organizational structure are characteristics that influence teachers' decisions to leave the profession (Perie & Baker, 1997). Demands of family and personal needs during the course of an individual's life also influence one's decision to remain in the teaching profession. Elementary school teachers who leave the profession identify lack of job responsibility, lack of autonomy, few opportunities for personal and professional development, and little chance to influence organizational decisions as their reasons for abandoning teaching (Brodinsky, 1984; Feistritzer, 1983; Johnson, 1990; Natale, 1993).

Attrition continues to be a concern for educators at the elementary school level, and the profession continues to make attempts to improve its image in order to attract teachers who possess strong commitment and skills. Mowday

et al. (1982) assert that attrition is directly correlated to the level of commitment individuals have toward their work organization. The responsibility for strengthening the link between the individuals and the organization rests with the organization's administrators (Mowday et al., 1982; Shedd & Bacharach, 1991). Patterns relative to each phase of an individual's life cycle, as well as the motivation an individual possesses, appear to be fundamental to longevity in teaching.

As of 1991, 153,276 teachers were employed by the Catholic school system nationwide (National Catholic Educational Association, 1997). Lay people comprise 91.6% of these teachers. Studies indicate that a large percentage of these lay teachers have spent 5 to 10 years teaching in the Catholic school system (Kushner & Helbling, 1995). Retaining teachers who are experienced and committed to the mission of Catholic education is fundamental to the continued success of the Catholic school system. Experienced teachers provide a sense of continuity in the school environment. This continuity may help to foster the maintenance of the school culture, which is passed on to students and new teachers entering Catholic school teaching.

In addition, recruiting and retaining teachers who share similar ideas about culture encourages the formation of a strong sense of community, which is defined by shared values and beliefs (Sergiovanni, 1996). As do all communities, Catholic school communities rely on the individuals who define them to carry out the objectives of the organization. Because Catholic identity is paramount to the goals and objectives of Catholic schools, recruiting and retaining teachers who espouse a commitment to the purpose of the school are essential.

Information regarding what satisfies teachers and encourages them to remain in Catholic schools may be useful to principals in their attempts to hire individuals committed to supporting the culture and Catholic identity of these schools.

## METHODOLOGY

A random sample of 600 teachers from a combination of urban, suburban, and rural schools was surveyed. The sample was drawn from a population of 1,408 teachers who fit the study criteria as determined by using school census information provided by the superintendent of schools. Of the 600 surveys mailed, 339 completed surveys were returned and usable for the study. This represents 56.5% of the population surveyed. In addition, a pool of 11 volunteers obtained from the survey questionnaire participated in a semi-structured interview intended to enhance the information obtained from the surveys.

A survey instrument designed to obtain participants' responses to characteristics of job satisfaction as suggested in the research literature was used.

Validity of the instrument was determined through review by a panel of experts composed of teachers, administrators, and university professors. The survey was pilot tested using 24 nonsample Catholic elementary school lay teachers as a means of establishing face validity of the instrument, question clarity, comprehensiveness, and acceptability.

The survey was presented in two parts. Part 1 obtained demographic data from the respondents. Part 2 consisted of questions relevant to respondents' perceptions of characteristics of job satisfaction such as administrative leadership, student behavior, teacher autonomy, and workplace atmosphere. Respondents were asked to rate each of 12 characteristics listed on the survey instrument in terms of their importance to job satisfaction. In addition, respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with 27 aspects of teaching in the Catholic school system, and to rate the importance of 14 possible steps the Catholic school system might take to encourage them to remain as teachers in the system. A four-part Likert-type scale was used for all ratings. Following the collection of survey data, interviews were conducted with 11 teacher volunteers.

## FINDINGS

### DEMOGRAPHICS

All of the respondents were employed in preK-8 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of New York. Eight percent of the respondents were males and 92% were females. Teachers from urban, suburban, and rural schools were represented in the data.

The majority of respondents are between 42 and 55 years of age and possess on average 10 to 19 years of experience teaching in Catholic schools. Tables 1, 2, and 3 provide detailed information regarding these data.

**Table 1**  
**School Location and Number of Respondents by Gender**

<b>School Location</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>%</b>
Urban	22	6.5	126	37.2
Suburban	4	1.2	165	48.7
Rural	-	-	22	6.5
Total	26	7.7	313	92.4

Note: A dash represents a value of zero. Percentages may not always add up to 100% due to computer rounding or the omission of responses by survey respondents. The base for each question is the total answering the question.

**Table 2**  
**Percentage Distribution of Survey Respondents by Age**

<b>Age</b>	<b>% of Survey Respondents</b>
28-34	3.2
35-41	13.0
42-48	27.1
49-55	26.0
56-62	15.3
63-69	12.4
70+	2.1
Total	99.1

**Table 3**  
**Percentage Distribution of Survey Respondents by  
 Number of Years Teaching**

<b>Number of Years Teaching</b>	<b>% of Survey Respondents</b>
1-9	-
10-14	21.2
15-19	32.4
20-24	18.6
25-29	11.5
30-34	6.8
35-39	4.9
40-44	1.8
45-49	.6
50+	.3
Total	98.1

## **PERCEPTIONS OF JOB SATISFACTION**

Several factors stood out as being strongly associated with teacher job satisfaction. Administrative leadership, student behavior, teacher autonomy, and the atmosphere of the workplace influence teachers in their career and add to the satisfaction teachers experience in their work.

Teachers in this study stated that recognition and support from school administration were very important to them in determining their job satisfaction. A total of 72.9% of the teachers surveyed made this statement. Student characteristics associated with teacher satisfaction include student motivation to learn and minimal student discipline problems. Eighty-five percent of responding teachers stated that student motivation to learn was very important to their job satisfaction, and 60% stated that minimal student discipline problems was very important.

Control over one's own classroom and curricular decisions also proved to be significantly important to teachers' job satisfaction. Seventy-nine percent of the teachers surveyed stated that such autonomy was very important to them.

In the category of workplace atmosphere, those factors strongly associated with teacher satisfaction were positive relationships with colleagues, sufficient resources and materials for the classroom, adequate time to plan and prepare lessons, and appropriate class size.

Specific to Catholic school teaching is the ability to work in an atmosphere permeated by the principles of the Catholic faith. Almost two thirds, or 63%, of the teachers who responded to the survey rated the opportunity to be an active member of a faith community as very important to their job satisfaction.

Less important, yet necessary for teachers' job satisfaction, were characteristics such as opportunities for professional advancement and opportunities to influence school policies and practices.

Two measures of teacher compensation, namely salary and benefits, were examined with regard to job satisfaction. Compensation in the form of salary and benefits showed little relationship to overall job satisfaction for teachers in the Catholic elementary schools of this study. Forty-three percent of the survey respondents indicated that salary and benefits were very important to them in terms of job satisfaction in general, and 51% of the survey respondents stated that salary and benefits were somewhat important to job satisfaction. In addition, 64.3% of the survey respondents stated that they were either somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with salary as an aspect of teaching in the Catholic school system. Of the teachers surveyed, 21.8% indicated that they were either somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with benefits as an aspect of teaching in the Catholic school system. However, in response to their overall job satisfaction in the Catholic school system, 46.3% and 44.2% of the teachers surveyed stated that they were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the Catholic school system as a workplace. Table 4 presents data relevant to respondents' perceptions of job satisfaction.

**Table 4**  
**Percentage Distribution of Survey Respondents by**  
**Characteristics of Job Satisfaction**

	VI	SI	SU	VU
Student motivation to learn	85.0	13.6	.9	-
Appropriate class size	50.7	44.0	3.2	.6
Salary and benefits	43.1	51.0	4.1	.6
Positive relationships with colleagues	73.2	23.0	2.9	-

	VI	SI	SU	VU
Minimal student discipline problems	59.6	35.4	4.1	.6
Opportunity to be an active member of a faith community	62.8	29.5	5.9	1.5
Opportunities for professional advancement	40.1	40.4	13.9	4.1
Recognition and support from school administration	72.9	22.7	2.9	.9
Sufficient resources and materials for the classroom	65.5	29.5	3.8	.6
Opportunities to influence school policies and practices	43.4	49.0	6.5	.9
Control over own classroom and curricular decisions	79.4	20.4	-	-
Adequate time to plan and prepare lessons	72.6	24.5	2.4	-

VI=Very Important; SI=Somewhat Important; SU=Somewhat Unimportant; VU=Very Unimportant.

## SATISFACTION TEACHING IN A CATHOLIC SCHOOL

The portion of the survey instrument which examined job satisfaction dealt with the level of satisfaction teachers experience in the Catholic school system relative to their personal experiences teaching in Catholic schools.

Strong associations existed between several aspects of the Catholic school system and teacher satisfaction. Primarily, the opportunity to teach Catholic values and the importance of the work they do is very satisfying to the teachers who responded to the survey. These factors were followed, in order of importance, by teachers' experiences with autonomy over their own classrooms, the Catholic-Christian environment in which they work, and job security.

Of the 27 issues presented on the survey questionnaire, most were seen by teachers as either very satisfying or somewhat satisfying. Only salary as a characteristic of job satisfaction was seen by the majority of teachers as somewhat dissatisfying. Table 5 details this information.



**Table 5****Percentage Distribution of Survey Respondents by Satisfaction with Aspects of Teaching in the Catholic School System**

	<b>VS</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>VD</b>
Autonomy over your own classroom	74.6	23.0	.6	.9
Availability of resources and materials for class use	45.4	44.0	7.1	2.7
Benefits	44.2	33.3	12.7	9.1
Control over the curriculum	38.6	53.7	5.3	1.8
Class size	37.2	45.4	11.8	5.3
Catholic/Christian environment	68.4	28.0	2.7	.6
General work conditions	59.3	33.9	4.4	1.2
Importance of the work	86.4	11.8	.9	.3
Job security	67.6	27.1	2.4	1.5
Opportunity to teach Catholic values	83.8	15.0	.6	.3
Opportunities for professional advancement	32.4	52.5	10.3	3.8
Opportunities for teacher development	25.4	57.5	12.7	3.5
Overall job satisfaction	46.3	44.2	8.3	.3
Presence of a faith community	54.0	38.3	6.5	.3
Personal intellectual challenge	44.0	45.4	9.7	.6
Professional caliber of colleagues	44.2	44.0	9.4	1.8
Procedures for performance evaluation	42.2	48.1	7.4	2.4
Professional prestige	29.2	48.7	15.6	4.4
Recognition and support from administrators	42.2	37.8	14.5	4.7
Salary	5.9	29.5	36.9	27.4
Safety of school environment	51.0	36.6	10.9	1.2
Student motivation to learn	32.4	46.9	16.8	3.8
Student discipline and behavior	25.1	51.0	18.3	5.6
Support from parents	24.5	50.4	20.1	4.7
The esteem of society for the teaching profession	12.7	36.6	33.9	16.2
Teaching load	20.9	49.0	24.5	5.6
Your influence over school policies and practices	25.4	53.1	17.7	3.8

VS=Very Satisfied; SS=Somewhat Satisfied; SD=Somewhat Dissatisfied; VD=Very Dissatisfied.

## ENCOURAGING LONGEVITY IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Teachers participating in the survey were asked to rate 14 possible steps the Catholic school system might take to encourage them to remain in the system. Providing higher salaries and better benefits was very important to 77.9% of the respondents. This was followed by fostering a stronger commitment to creating a Catholic-Christian environment (66.1%) and dealing more effectively with student discipline problems (65.5%). Recognizing outstanding teachers and increasing standards for student performance were also stated as very important to a large percentage of survey respondents (60.2%). Table 6 presents these data.

**Table 6**  
**Percentage Distribution of Survey Respondents by Steps the Catholic School System Might Take to Encourage Teachers to Remain Teaching in the System**

	VI	SI	SU	VU
Allow teachers more authority in their classrooms	45.7	41.0	7.4	2.4
Allow teachers more authority in curricular decisions	46.0	43.4	7.1	1.2
Decrease class size	43.1	42.2	10.0	2.4
Foster a stronger commitment to creating a Catholic/Christian environment	66.1	24.5	5.9	.6
Increase parent involvement in the schools	30.4	48.7	14.2	3.8
Improve opportunities for professional advancement	47.2	36.6	12.7	1.2
Deal more effectively with student discipline problems	65.5	25.1	6.5	.3
Increase standards for student performance	60.2	31.9	4.4	.3
Provide greater opportunities for teacher development	53.4	36.9	7.1	.9
Provide more support for new teachers (i.e., mentoring programs)	51.6	35.7	9.1	1.2
Provide more resources and materials for the classroom	59.6	33.3	3.5	.6
Provide higher salaries and better benefits	77.9	19.5	1.5	.6
Recognize outstanding teachers	60.2	31.0	6.2	1.8
Reduce teacher workload	46.3	40.4	9.4	2.1

VI=Very Important; SI=Somewhat Important; SU=Somewhat Unimportant; VU=Very Unimportant.

## ANALYSIS

An analysis of the mean scores of all of the items from the survey questionnaire indicated that most of the respondents answered the items in a similar fashion. The homogeneity of the sample responses may provide some insight into the types of individuals who remain committed to Catholic elementary school teaching. There were no characteristics obtained from the background information that significantly influenced teacher job satisfaction in this sample. Teachers of both genders, varied ages, diverse geographic locations, and with various years of teaching experience in the Catholic school system indicated satisfaction levels and characteristics of job satisfaction that were strikingly similar.

The mean scores of the responses to the items on the survey questionnaire make several statements about teacher job satisfaction. For instance, teachers in this study are not particularly satisfied with the professional development opportunities provided by the Catholic school system. Responses also indicate that there is not an overwhelming satisfaction with the professional prestige of teaching in the Catholic school system. This corresponds with another set of responses, which shows that the teachers surveyed in this study expressed a sense of dissatisfaction with the esteem held by society for the teaching profession in general.

Although salary is not shown to be a priority of job satisfaction for the majority of respondents in this study, teachers indicated dissatisfaction with salary as an aspect of the Catholic school system, and stated that improving salaries was a step that the Catholic school system should consider as a means of encouraging teachers to remain in the system. The elementary school teachers who participated in this survey were not overwhelmingly satisfied with student motivation to learn and student discipline. In addition, teachers were only somewhat satisfied with parental support.

Finally, the mean scores show that teachers responding to this study's survey are only somewhat satisfied with their influence over school policies and practices. Several of these responses are in contrast to what previous research (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Chubb & Moe, 1990) states are factors contributing to the success of the Catholic schools, specifically shared decision making and more supportive parental involvement.

## INTERVIEW

The nature of the research questions invited the use of interview as a method of data collection in this study. The themes of job satisfaction and commitment are directly related to individuals' interpretation of their everyday world. The interview questions were open-ended, which enhanced the teachers' opportunity to discuss their personal experiences regarding job satisfaction and commitment in the Catholic school system. The interviews enriched

the information obtained through the survey questionnaire and encouraged a better understanding of the meaning of job satisfaction and commitment that these Catholic elementary school teachers carry with them.

The 11 teachers who participated in the interview were selected from a pool of volunteers created from the survey sample. The interviewees were of varying ages from 35 to 69 years of age, and represented urban, suburban, and rural school locations. Both males and females were selected for the interview.

Teachers participating in the interview have spent anywhere from 15 to 39 years teaching in Catholic schools. Of the group of interviewees selected, all but two teachers have made their entire careers teaching in the Catholic school system. Only one teacher of the group of interviewees did not attend Catholic school during his education.

Three of the teachers interviewed were formerly members of a religious order, and five of the teachers spent a period of time in their careers when they did not teach. One teacher of the group of 11 interviewees is a non-Catholic.

Interviews included questions pertaining to a) the concept of job satisfaction as perceived by the interviewee, b) experiences the interviewee encountered in the Catholic school system which were satisfying to him or her, c) the teaching effectiveness of the interviewee in response to job satisfaction, and d) possible changes in job satisfaction over the career cycle of the interviewee.

### **Job Satisfaction**

Predominant characteristics of job satisfaction identified by the interviewees were collegiality, strong administrative leadership, autonomy, Catholic environment, and daily teacher interaction with students.

The one characteristic that was cited unanimously as a job satisfier by the interviewees was autonomy. The Catholic elementary school teachers interviewed stated that they maintain a sense of freedom about their teaching. They indicated that they enjoy the ability to choose for themselves when it comes to how they organize and teach the curriculum. With this in mind, one teacher stated:

Our autonomy, as schools and as teachers, allows us to try new ideas, to see what works, without the fear of failure and reprimand. The autonomy is, by far, the thing I enjoy most about working for the Catholic schools.

There was agreement among the interviewees that a strong administrative leader is recognized as a spiritual leader, an educational leader, and a leader who supports them and keeps them protected from higher levels of leadership. Each Catholic elementary school in the Archdiocese of New York is

canonically independent, and is controlled by the leadership of the local parish (Canon Law Society of America, 1983). That leadership is the parish pastor. In most instances, however, teachers do not recognize the pastor as the educational leader of the school (Drahmann, 1985). Teachers interviewed for this study stated that the role of educational leader in the Catholic elementary school is held by the school principal.

Strong administrative leadership, according to the teachers interviewed, requires that the school principal recognize the qualities and performances of the faculty. This is particularly important for these seasoned teachers. Not only is administrative support and recognition a job satisfier for teachers who have been teaching in the Catholic school system 10 years or more, but the type of support and recognition they receive is also important to them. Teachers stated that they want to be recognized by the school principal particularly for their work. The praise they receive from the school principal is more meaningful to them when it is specific and sincere. The greatest reward these teachers can earn is the trust of their school principal and the principal's expression of that trust is highly valued. Interviewed teachers stated that expression of the principal's trust is exhibited when he or she includes them in the decision-making process.

One of the characteristics of job satisfaction mentioned by interviewees as satisfying, yet not essential, to their job satisfaction is the Catholic environment of the school. All of the teachers interviewed stated that they would not feel a void in their sense of job satisfaction if they were not teaching in a Catholic school. The teachers stated that they would be equally comfortable teaching values in a non-Catholic school. However, each teacher interviewed stated that he or she believed in the importance of teaching Christian values to students.

For all of the teachers interviewed, salary was unrelated to job satisfaction. Each of the teachers stated that salary was once considered important, but over time, and with age, it is viewed now as a characteristic that is less important to overall job satisfaction. After 17 years teaching in the Catholic schools, one teacher stated, "My satisfaction is not from the money because it's not there. I love the children; it's the children that give the satisfaction."

On the other hand, benefits become more important as teachers age. Although each teacher interviewed stated that, like salary, benefits are nonessential to overall job satisfaction, they begin to look at benefits more critically as they age. This is predominantly due to the fact that retirement becomes more of a reality and retirement benefits with the Catholic school system may not provide teachers with sufficient resources to cover their living expenses.

Those teachers who stated that job satisfaction affects their classroom teaching indicated that their performance in the classroom improved as their level of satisfaction increased. The teachers stated that their job satisfaction

encourages them to be more enthusiastic in the classroom. They are more eager to attempt new teaching strategies and are more willing to work harder in order to meet the needs of their students when they are satisfied.

Responses to the question of whether or not job satisfaction improves with age offered diverse viewpoints. A 63-year-old female teacher responded, "Without a doubt, I'm more satisfied now. I liked teaching as much when I was younger, but it wasn't quite the same as it is now in terms of satisfaction."

On the other hand, a 53-year-old male teacher stated, "[Job satisfaction] was more important when I first started. Now I don't need that as much. I just want the kids to learn."

The majority of teachers interviewed did state that age affected their job satisfaction because of the wisdom they gained over the years through their personal and professional experiences.

### **Motivation**

Teachers were asked to compare specific characteristics of the Catholic school system that motivated them to enter Catholic school teaching as a career with those characteristics that motivate them to remain as teachers in the Catholic school system.

Motivators that encourage these teachers to remain in the Catholic schools are similar to the characteristics which satisfy them. The ability to teach Christian values, the personal and spiritual fulfillment of the Catholic school environment, a positive relationship with colleagues and school administrators, job security, autonomy, and the students all increase these teachers' desire to continue teaching in the Catholic school.

The Catholic tradition that is the very essence of the Catholic school system is an important part of what teachers expressed as their motivation toward their work in the Catholic school. Teaching religion, modeling Christian values, and sharing in the sacramental life of students are important aspects of life in a Catholic school which serve to motivate teachers.

The camaraderie among Catholic school faculty and support from school administrators are other motivators that the Catholic elementary school teachers interviewed in this study indicated were important to their enthusiasm for teaching in the Catholic school.

Regardless of the grade level the teacher taught, the age of the teacher, or the number of years the teacher has been teaching, the students, by far, were the greatest motivator for encouraging these teachers to continue their work in the Catholic school system. Each teacher indicated that the desire for students to succeed is the main motivator that keeps their enthusiasm for teaching at a high level.

In conjunction with student success, support from parents is a significant motivator for the Catholic elementary school teachers interviewed in this

study. The willingness of parents of Catholic elementary school students to play a fundamental role in the education of their children is encouraging and motivating to teachers. Viewing parents as integral to the Catholic school structure, and working with them to effectively influence the children both academically and spiritually provides these Catholic school teachers with a sense of pride and satisfaction that serves to motivate them to continue to do the work they have chosen to do. They see the education of students as a team approach with the parents. They recognize that without the parents as key players of the team, their work as educators and spiritual guides in the faith formation of the children would not be as effective. They expressed that they are, therefore, not only motivated by the work, but they are motivators as well. They see their role as teacher as including the motivation of parents so that Catholic education can be supported in all its dimensions.

### **Commitment**

The interview in this study used as one of its themes the commitment of teachers in the Catholic school system. Interview questions related to commitment asked teachers to define what commitment means to them, and to compare it to their personal definition of job satisfaction. The teachers were also asked to discuss examples of how their behavior in the school organization demonstrates their sense of commitment to the Catholic school system. Finally, teachers were asked whether they are more committed to the Catholic school system now, as seasoned teachers, or if they were more committed during their novice period as Catholic school teachers.

There was agreement among the interviewees that defining commitment is a difficult task. One teacher stated that commitment is more a behavior than an attitude. Other teachers reiterated this idea by providing examples of commitment that were, in reality, descriptions of their behavior. Commitment, for these teachers, is demonstrated by their sense of responsibility and moral action. It is reflected in the activities teachers perform and supervise, in the time they devote to school functions, and in the shared decision-making opportunities in which they participate.

Several teachers who were interviewed stated that commitment for them is not very different from job satisfaction. The characteristics of their work that tend to satisfy them also help them to feel committed, namely: autonomy, collegiality, strong administrative leadership, the Catholic environment, and the students. In addition, the behaviors they demonstrate as a result of their job satisfaction are the same behaviors they identified as those which indicate their commitment: initiative to try new things, determination for the success of their students, and willingness to work collegially for the improvement of the school. What was evident in all the teachers' responses was the fact that their commitment was not to the Catholic school system as much as it was to teaching as a life's work and to the school in which they perform

their life's work. As one teacher stated:

I wouldn't say my commitment is to the Catholic school system so much as it is to teaching and to Jesus. I'm committed to teaching and to teaching Christian values, so I wouldn't say I was committed to the Catholic school system.

The teachers interviewed provided several ways that the Catholic school system encourages and may continue to encourage commitment from its members. One teacher stated that the Catholic school's ability to remain innovative with regard to its policies would continue to encourage her commitment. Providing teachers with opportunities to grow professionally is another way the Catholic school system may affect teachers' willingness to remain committed to Catholic school teaching. One teacher offered, "As far as commitment and job satisfaction, I don't think the whole big system has as much of an effect on the individual as the place where you are working."

Because commitment for teachers is focused on the school as opposed to the system, the teachers interviewed indicated that by continuing to support autonomy at all levels, the Catholic school system would be making a positive effort to encourage teachers to remain working in the Catholic schools. Autonomy, teachers stated, allows them to realize their value in the Catholic schools and promotes their empowerment as significant members of the broader school community.

One teacher stated that the Catholic school system sometimes makes it difficult for teachers to be committed to it. Poor salary and retirement benefits and the increased number of nonteaching duties that infringe on the teachers' ability to prepare for classroom activities combine to signify a lack of respect for the teachers as fundamental to the success of the Catholic schools.

It is apparent from teacher responses to questions based on the theme of commitment that, over time, teachers become more committed to the Catholic schools partly because they gain a greater sense of their own faith. Unless the Catholic school system sustains these teachers in their committed efforts to help deepen the understanding of faith for all students, they risk losing the dedication of such teachers who are so integral to the continuation of the work of the Church.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Literature related to the characteristics of job satisfaction, theories of motivation, and theories of adult development may be applied to the findings of this study. Specific characteristics of job satisfaction enumerated by the Catholic elementary school lay teachers in this study were administrative



support and recognition, positive relationships with students and colleagues, autonomy, good working conditions, and important and challenging work. These characteristics are consistent with those cited in studies performed by Rosenholtz (1989) and Perie and Baker (1997).

The response from both survey participants and interviewees supported claims made by Johnson (1990) that state that teachers' job satisfaction is based upon six dimensions of the workplace, namely, physical characteristics of the workplace, organizational structure, sociological perspective, political atmosphere, economic conditions, and psychological dimensions.

One characteristic of job satisfaction supported by the data of this study as being a significant component of teacher job satisfaction is positive recognition by the school principal. For these teachers, recognition regarding their professional ability is what they considered to be most satisfying. Although teacher recognition outside the scope of professional ability is appreciated by the teachers, this type of recognition generally does not sufficiently reflect the teachers' competence in the work they perform, and is therefore not as essential to their job satisfaction.

The study participants consistently referred to autonomy as a strong motivator of job satisfaction. The freedom to make curricular and classroom decisions was considered by a large number of the study's participants to be a factor that adds to their job satisfaction in the Catholic schools. The ability of the Catholic schools to afford their members autonomy is reflected in a statement made by one of the study's interviewees: "We are not a school system. We are a system of schools." This concept brings autonomy to the local or school level. In doing so, the Catholic school teacher is empowered by the school principal to make decisions based upon the needs of the students who attend that school.

Teachers interviewed in this study reported that professional communication with their peers and principals encourages them to remain enthusiastic about their work. Fostering a collegial atmosphere was viewed by the teachers interviewed as a function of the school principal. They stated that the principal's role is a vital one in building opportunities for collaboration to take place, and for collegiality to develop.

Teachers in this study also stated that they were motivated to remain teaching in the Catholic schools by a) the Catholic-Christian environment, b) the importance of the work, c) administrative recognition and support, d) student motivation to learn, and e) positive relationships with colleagues. Interview data also indicate that the participants find their need for security, affiliation, self-esteem, and autonomy met by their association with the Catholic schools.

All of the teachers interviewed in this study indicated that age influenced their personal and professional needs with regard to teaching. Changes in personal and professional needs associated with the aging process were influen-

tial to teachers' increased job satisfaction. In turn, increased job satisfaction led to increased motivation for teachers to continue with their work as Catholic school educators.

An analysis of the data indicates that the characteristics identified by participants in this study as job satisfiers are also factors that they state are characteristics that define their commitment. Because of the personal nature of commitment, it may be related to what Hansen (1995) identifies as vocation. As defined by Hansen, a vocation is "a form of...service that yields enduring personal fulfillment to those who provide it" (p. xiii). Teaching means leading others to know what they did not know before, to know how to do things they could not do before, to take on attitudes they did not embody before, and to believe things they did not believe before. The teachers interviewed in this study reflected this attitude toward teaching by indicating that their major focus as teachers is the student. As a result, the commitment they described is a commitment to the act of teaching rather than to the organization in which they teach.

Similar to the theory of commitment purported by Meyer and Allen (1997), the teachers in this study stated that their commitment is encouraged by the opportunity to remain autonomous, to grow professionally, and to perform work that is meaningful to them. They find this encouragement in the Catholic schools.

According to the participants in this study, commitment and job satisfaction are positively affected by the teachers' age. Interviewees stated that as their age increased, so did their commitment and job satisfaction. This is due primarily to the influence of age-related experiences they encountered, as well as to personal and spiritual growth.

Catholic elementary schools provide teachers with a satisfying work environment that meets their social and psychological needs and enables them to grow personally and professionally. As evidenced by this study, Catholic elementary schools have the potential to attract and retain teachers who have a strong vocation to teach. Vocation describes work that is fulfilling and meaningful to individuals, providing them with a sense of self and personal identity. Career teachers who have given 10 or more years of dedicated service to Catholic education enjoy the independence of the Catholic school. They also enjoy the interpersonal relationships they develop with administrators and colleagues. As a result of these interpersonal relationships, teachers receive the support, recognition, and sense of belonging that strengthen their job satisfaction. Finally, Catholic elementary school lay teachers enjoy an alliance between their own values and beliefs and the values and beliefs evident in the Catholic schools.

These positive characteristics of the Catholic school system must be maintained in order to continue the viability of Catholic education for the future. Without an awareness of the characteristics that satisfy Catholic ele-

mentary school lay teachers in their work and cause them to remain committed to Catholic school teaching, the types of individuals necessary to sustain Catholic schools may one day be unavailable.

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