

RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION, AND RETENTION OF CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL RELIGION TEACHERS

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In September 2000, this journal announced an important national study, funded by grants from the Lilly Endowment, the Knights of Columbus McGivney Fund, and the Chief Administrators of Catholic Education, on the impending shortage of religion teachers in Catholic high schools. This article reports on the findings of that study in three important areas: recruitment, preparation, and retention. The study summarizes the results of surveys to nearly 200 Catholic high schools and 1000 religion teachers throughout the United States. Extensive recommendations are offered for each area studied, with a view to securing a stable future pool of highly qualified high school religion teachers.

Teacher shortages are affecting all American schools. Because the media focus on shortages common to most schools, one shortage affecting Catholic schools is easily overlooked: that of qualified high school religion teachers. The precipitous decline of religious and clergy in Catholic high school religion departments since the mid-1980s, from 42% (Yeager, Benson, Guerra, & Manno, 1985) to 24% (Guerra, 1998), has increased the demand for lay religion teachers. Given the pivotal role religion teachers play in the evangelizing mission of Catholic schools, religion teacher shortages cut to the heart of Catholic education's purpose. The Congregation for Catholic Education (1988) underscores the importance of religion teachers and the need for measures to recruit, prepare, and retain qualified religion teacher candidates:

The religion teacher is the key, the vital component, if the educational goals of the school are to be achieved. In this area, especially, an unprepared

teacher can do a great deal of harm (#96). Everything possible must be done to ensure that Catholic schools have adequately trained religion teachers (#97).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the research project, *The Next Generation: A Study of Catholic High School Religion Teachers*, is to assess the situation with regard to current religion teacher demographics, to ascertain the extent to which there is a religion teacher shortage, and to make recommendations relative to the recruitment, preparation, and retention of religion teachers in the future.

METHODOLOGY

At the outset of the research project, a focus group convened to sharpen the research focus and to help shape data collection and analysis. The focus group consisted of 12 people representing the National Catholic Educational Association, university theology programs, diocesan superintendents, high school principals, and high school religion department chairs and teachers. Two years later, once data were collected and analyzed, the focus group reconvened to study the research findings. At that time, representatives from the United States Catholic Conference, Lasallian Schools, and St. Mary's Press also participated.

SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

Using input from the initial focus group and advice from a consultant, two survey instruments were designed. The "Religion Teacher Survey," to be completed by individual religion teachers, consisted of 70 items in the following categories: personal background, preparation and experience, philosophy of religious education, rigor of religion courses, teaching responsibilities, motivations for teaching religion, job satisfaction and future plans, and comments. The "School Information Sheet," to be completed by the religion department chairperson or school administrator, consisted of 19 questions dealing with school characteristics such as location, governance, enrollment, and religion teacher recruitment experiences and strategies. Both survey instruments were field-tested and reviewed before distribution.

DATA COLLECTION

A computer-generated random sample of 300 Catholic high schools was selected. The sample size represents approximately 25% of the 1,221 (McDonald, 2000) Catholic high schools in the United States. Next, letters of invitation accompanied by return postcards were mailed to the principals of

the randomly selected schools. Altogether, 200 schools agreed to participate. A packet including religion teacher surveys, a school information sheet, and a business reply envelope was mailed to each participating school. To ensure anonymity, religion teachers were asked to return their surveys sealed in an envelope to the principal or person designated to administer the survey. A confidentiality statement on the School Information Sheet indicated that school information would not be reported in a way that identifies a particular school, thereby ensuring school privacy.

PARTICIPATION RATE

Two hundred schools sent back postcards agreeing to participate in the survey. One hundred ninety-five schools returned their surveys, yielding a participation rate of 65% for the schools. The participation rate for religion teachers within the 195 schools was 88%, yielding 959 completed surveys (N=959) out of a possible 1089.

DATA ANALYSIS

This report uses several methods of data analysis to identify important results concerning the current demographic patterns for religion teachers, evidence of a religion teacher shortage, and results that identify patterns in recruitment, preparation, and retention. Most of the quantitative data analysis focuses on the percents of religion teachers that fall into particular categories. In some cases, these percents are reported for religion teachers of a specific subgroup, such as for lay teachers or for new teachers. Analysis of the effects of an advanced degree on teachers' preparation satisfaction uses Cramer's V as a measure of the strength of the association and chi square as the measure of statistical significance. Analysis of the effects of job satisfaction on the retention of teachers uses Somer's D as the measure of the strength of association and chi square as the measure of statistical significance. The discussion of these results focuses on statistically significant, relatively strong relationships.

The results also include qualitative data drawn from the focus group discussions and from comments that teachers wrote on the surveys. These qualitative data reinforce the interpretations of the quantitative data, especially as these interpretations relate to the specific steps needed to better recruit and retain qualified religion teachers.

FINDINGS

The research findings reported herein reflect the study's purpose and its key research questions. First, the research findings address the present situation by profiling the current religion teachers as well as assessing the severity of

the religion teacher shortage. Second, the research findings look to the future by centering on the recruitment, preparation, and retention of religion teachers. The research findings provide the basis for recommendations and direction in these three areas to ensure that qualified religion teachers continue to staff Catholic high schools for years to come.

PROFILE OF CURRENT RELIGION TEACHERS

Personal Characteristics

Table 1 displays demographic information about the 959 religion teachers who participated in *The Next Generation* survey. Table 1 indicates that religion teachers are diverse by gender, age, and marital status. In terms of gender, women and men are represented equally. Almost 50% of religion teachers are married. Religion teachers are diverse by age, as 75% are divided equally by decade between the ages of 30 and 60.

Table 1
Religion Teacher Diversity

Demographic Characteristics	Percent
Gender	
Female	49.5%
Male	50.5%
Race/Ethnicity	
American Indian or Native American	0.2%
Asian or Pacific Islander	1.1%
African American	3.0%
Caucasian	89.6%
Hispanic	3.2%
Multiracial	1.6%
Other	1.4%
Age	
20-29	14.2%
30-39	23.7%
40-49	28.4%
50-59	25.2%
60-69	7.8%
70 and over	0.7%
Marital Status	
Single	24.4%
Married	46.8%
Widowed	1.1%
Separated/Divorced	4.8%

Religious/Clergy	22.0%
Unknown	0.9%
Vocation	
Catholic lay woman	40.1%
Catholic lay man	35.0%
Non-Catholic woman	1.0%
Non-Catholic man	0.6%
Permanent deacon	1.3%
Brother	3.1%
Sister	8.4%
Priest, diocesan	6.9%
Priest, religious	3.6%

While most religion teachers in the study are lay (78%), a sizable minority (22%) is comprised of sisters, brothers, and priests. The breakdown of this study's sample is similar to the national breakdown of 76% lay and 24% religious reported in *CHS 2000: A First Look* (Guerra, 1998). The percentage of vowed religious and clergy teachers in religion departments is significant considering that they comprise only 8.8% of the overall faculty in Catholic high schools (McDonald, 2000). In other words, the presence and influence of vowed religious and clergy are still considerable in religion departments even though the absolute numbers have decreased overall.

Where ethnicity or race is concerned, religion teachers are not a diverse group. An overwhelming 90% of religion teachers are Caucasian. Interestingly, this percentage compares favorably with the 91.7% of high school faculties overall (McDonald, 2000). However, considering that ethnic and racial minorities comprise approximately 25% of Catholic high school students (McDonald, 2000), religion teachers are still far less racially and ethnically diverse than the Catholic high school students they teach. This statistic becomes important in the upcoming discussion about the recruitment of religion teachers.

Philosophy of Religious Education

Survey items that are of particular interest relative to the profile of current teachers are those items that deal with philosophy of religious education. When the focus group met to launch this project, the first discussion centered on the question, "What are we trying to accomplish in the religion classroom?" Discussion was spirited, to say the least. Because of the lack of agreement that surfaced, the focus group determined that items related to philosophy of religious education should be included in the survey.

The first of two survey items dealing with philosophy of religious education focuses on the educator's view of the religion student: empty vessel versus seeker. The overwhelming majority of respondents (80%) agree with the

notion that the religion student is an active learner as opposed to a passive receptacle.

The second survey item focuses on the educator's view of the religion teacher's primary role: religious instruction versus catechesis. The Congregation for Catholic Education (1988) defines religious instruction as academic study whose emphasis is knowledge of the Catholic faith and the Christian message. By contrast, they define catechesis as religious socialization whose emphasis is personal faith development within a Christian community. Even though the Congregation for Catholic Education calls religious instruction and catechesis "distinct and complementary" (#70), the focus group decided to require religion teachers to choose one as "primary" as a way to uncover their most fundamental beliefs. Unlike the previous question, survey respondents are almost evenly split on whether a religion teacher's primary role is religious instruction (45%) or catechesis (55%). The survey responses reflect the lack of agreement that surfaced in focus group discussions that revolved around the goals of religious education in the Catholic high school.

RELIGION TEACHER SHORTAGE?

When asked on the School Information Sheet how many qualified candidates applied for their most recent religion teacher opening, 50% of the 195 participating schools report only zero to two qualified applicants. In response to the follow-up question that asked administrators their perception of the pool of candidates for their geographical area, a startling 86% respond that there are too few qualified religion teacher candidates in their geographical area. One administrator exclaims, "It is by far my biggest challenge for staffing; six years—six openings." Another adds, "There are no qualified or experienced theology teachers in my geographical area. We need more of these people desperately."

Additional survey data reveal compelling evidence that the shortage will worsen dramatically within a few years. When asked their future plans, 40% of the religion teachers indicate that they plan to cease teaching religion within five years. Stated another way, a diocese with 100 high school religion teachers may need to replace 40 within the next five years; an individual school with 10 religion teachers may need to replace four. For vowed religious and clergy respondents, the statistic is even more pronounced; 75% plan to cease teaching religion within 10 years.

RECRUITMENT

In view of the fact that the pool of religion teacher candidates falls short of filling current and predicted vacancies, recruitment issues become paramount. Data from *The Next Generation* survey project provided useful infor-

mation that helps answer recruitment questions such as "What motivates prospective religion teachers?" "What discourages religion teacher candidates?" "Who encourages prospective religion teachers?" "Where are the potential pools of religion teacher candidates?" and "Where do schools recruit?"

What Motivates Prospective Religion Teachers?

Survey participants were asked to indicate their top three reasons for choosing to teach religion. Table 2 displays the percentages of participants who included each response as one of their top three reasons for choosing to teach religion. Over half of the religion teachers include in their top three responses: "I realize the difference I can make in the faith life of my students" (75%), "I enjoy teaching religion" (74%), and "I consider teaching religion an integral part of my personal faith journey" (60%). One religion teacher writes, "Teaching religion has been a wonderful experience for me. It has forced me to delve much deeper into my own beliefs and commitment to God. I have grown tremendously." Very few participants are motivated by contractual obligations (1%) or lack of teaching options (4%). It appears that current religion teachers choose to teach religion because of intrinsic motivations that center on their own enjoyment and spiritual growth and that of their students, as opposed to extrinsic motivations such as availability of jobs and contractual obligations.

Table 2
Motivations for Teaching Religion

Reason	Percent
Difference I can make	75%
Enjoy teaching religion	74%
Integral to faith journey	60%
Qualified to teach	25%
Excelled in this subject	13%
Need more teachers	10%
Inspired by teacher	10%
Flexible curriculum	8%
No other subjects available	4%
Required by contract	1%

Note: Percents are of teachers who include the reason as one of their top three motivations for teaching religion.

What Discourages Prospective Religion Teachers?

Although the data reveal that the vast majority of current teachers chose to teach religion for intrinsic reasons, extrinsic motivations such as salary and benefits cannot be discounted. For the 195 schools in this sample, the median starting salary for 1999-2000 was \$21,223.50. Because it is currently a job

seeker's market and because student loans weigh heavily on the minds of new graduates whose Catholic college education is costly, potential religion teacher candidates may be very savvy about weighing their career options. As one religion teacher relates, "Many students would pursue (and parents would let them pursue) religion degrees if religion teachers' salaries were higher." Although salary satisfaction is treated more thoroughly later in this article as it relates to retention issues, it is worth noting here that salary is the element of job satisfaction with which the highest percentage of religion teachers, especially new (49%) and young (56%) teachers, express their dissatisfaction.

Who Recruits Prospective Religion Teachers?

Generally speaking, personal encouragement by others serves as a motivation for people to go into teaching. The survey asked religion teachers to indicate who encouraged them to become a religion teacher, allowing respondents to mark all options that applied. Table 3 displays the percentages of teachers who picked each option. The highest percentage of teachers (33%) respond that no one encouraged them to become a religion teacher. Less than 20% of the teachers respond that natural support systems such as family and friends encouraged them to become religion teachers. Table 3 shows that the Catholic community does very little to recruit religion teachers. Put simply: Who recruits? No one. One religion teacher recalls being discouraged by others in college:

I changed my major from biology to theology because I was fascinated with the subject. People around me asked why I would want to do that. "What are you going to do with a theology degree?" No one in the theology department suggested the possibility of teaching religion.

Table 3
Who Encouraged Religion Teachers

Person(s) Who Encouraged	Percent
No one	33%
Priest or religious (non-teacher)	19%
Friend	18%
Colleague	17%
College professor	13%
Family	12%
Religious superior	11%
H.S. religion teacher	10%
Principal	4%
Non-religion H.S. teacher	3%
Other (God/Holy Spirit)	3%

Note: Teachers were allowed to select as many options as apply.

Are There Potential Pools of Candidates?

To answer this question, data were analyzed to uncover emerging patterns and trends among new recruits. The profiles of new and young religion teachers were especially helpful in this regard. The major current sources of candidates and potential pools that are addressed below include vowed religious and clergy, former vowed religious and clergy, former novices and seminarians, deacons, Catholic school graduates, Catholic volunteer service corps graduates, teachers of other subjects and levels, and second career seekers.

Vowed Religious and Clergy

As reported earlier, since 1985 there has been a dramatic decline in the percentage of full-time religion teachers who are religious or clergy, dropping from 42% (Yeager, et al., 1985) to 24% (Guerra, 1998). Yet, the presence of religious and clergy in religion departments is still considerable, as 24% is nearly three times higher than the 8.8% (McDonald, 2000) they comprise of high school faculties overall. Some observers would suggest that these figures reflect the intentional decision by some religious congregations to earmark their human resources in schools for administration or teaching religion and campus ministry. However, the more recent percentage of 22% vowed religious and clergy represented in *The Next Generation* study, which includes those who teach full-time and part-time, seems to suggest that their numbers continue to drop. Furthermore, and even more important, 75% of vowed religious and clergy who currently teach responded that they plan to retire or leave the religion teaching profession within 10 years. Unless current trends are reversed, vowed religious and clergy will cease to be a source of religion teachers within a few years.

Former Vowed Religious and Clergy

At present, 11% of current religion teachers are former vowed religious and clergy. However, as Table 4 illustrates, former vowed religious and clergy do not seem to be a likely source of religion teacher candidates in the future, as 40% of former vowed religious and clergy teaching religion are in their 50s, and only 5% are in their 20s. With the dramatic decline of people entering vowed religious life or the priesthood comes a corresponding decline in the number of former vowed religious and clergy.

Former Novices and Seminarians

At present, 13% of current religion teachers spent some time in religious formation or the seminary. This percent is about the same as that of former vowed religious and clergy (11%). As Table 5 illustrates, unlike the ages of the former religious in the sample, the ages of the former novices and seminarians are more evenly divided. Because former novices and seminarians are

somewhat greater in number and younger overall, they present a slightly more promising source of religion teacher candidates than do former vowed religious and clergy.

Table 4
Ages of Former Vowed Religious and Clergy

Age	Frequency	Percent
20-29	5	5.0%
30-39	18	17.8%
40-49	25	24.8%
50-59	44	43.6%
60-69	8	7.9%
70 +	1	1.0%
Total	101	100.0%

Table 5
Ages of Former Novices and Seminarians

Age	Frequency	Percent
20-29	16	12.6%
30-39	38	29.9%
40-49	30	23.6%
50-59	34	26.8%
60-69	9	7.1%
70 +	0	0.0%
Total	127	100.0%

Deacons

With the growing number of permanent deacons in the American Church, one might think that the diaconate would serve as a pool for the ministry of teaching religion. While this possibility should not be disregarded, data from *The Next Generation* do not indicate a trend in this regard. Of the 959 religion teachers in the sample, only 12 (1%) are deacons.

Catholic School Graduates

Catholic schools are the major supplier of high school religion teachers at present. Of the 959 teachers in this sample, 65.6% (628) graduated from Catholic high schools and 62.6% (598) graduated from Catholic colleges. According to Table 6, this trend appears to be experiencing a slight upswing relative to age, as a higher percentage of religion teachers in their 20s went to Catholic high school and college than did religion teachers in their 30s and 40s.

Table 6
Catholic High School and College Graduates by Age

Age	Catholic High School Grads	Catholic College Grads
20-29	61.8%	63.2%
30-39	57.3%	55.1%
40-49	60.7%	55.6%
50-59	77.7%	71.9%
60-69	74.3%	75.7%
70+	85.7%	100.0%
Overall	65.6%	62.6%

Catholic Volunteer Service Corps Graduates

Among current religion teachers, 11% have served as full-time volunteers for a Catholic volunteer corps (e.g., Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE), Jesuit Volunteer Corps, Holy Cross Associates, Mercy Corps). Table 7 reveals that this is a growing trend, as 28% of the teachers who have been full-time Catholic service corps volunteers were hired within the last two years. In sum, the newer the teacher, the more likely he or she was to have been a Catholic volunteer.

Table 7
Catholic Volunteer Service Corps Graduates by Teaching Experience

Teaching Experience	Frequency	Percent
0-2	29	28.2%
3-5	25	24.3%
6-10	23	22.3%
11-15	11	10.7%
16-20	6	5.8%
20+	9	8.7%
Total	103	100.0%

Teachers of Other Subjects or Levels

When asked if teaching religion was their first career, only 39.3% of current teachers responded positively. Almost two-thirds of the sample (60.7%) came to the religion teaching profession from another career. Table 8 shows that 18.9% of current teachers taught other high school subjects before becoming religion teachers while 13.1% taught elementary or middle school previously. These two previous school-related careers account for 32% of current teachers, a percentage comparable to that of teachers who began their careers as religion teachers. It appears that experienced teachers of other subjects and levels may be a dependable source of religion teacher candidates.

Table 8
Previous Careers of Religion Teachers

Career	Percent
High school teacher of another subject	18.9%
Elementary/middle school teacher	13.1%
Youth minister	4.7%
Director of religious education	3.1%
Other	20.9%
Religion teaching is first career	39.3%
Total	100.0%

Second Career Seekers

In addition to the religion teachers who had previous careers in education, 20.9% of current religion teachers came to religion teaching from a career other than pre-collegiate teaching. There is no clear pattern among the 200 respondents who fall into this category. Previous careers listed by respondents include banking, business, college teaching, school administration, insurance, parish ministry, real estate, retail management, and sales.

Table 9, which displays the ages of the 223 teachers who have been hired to teach religion within the past two years, underscores the importance of second-career seekers as a pool of religion teacher candidates. As the table reveals, two-thirds (63.2%) of new teachers are 30 years of age or older.

Table 9
Ages of New (0-2) Teachers

Age	Frequency	Percent
20-29	82	36.8%
30-39	66	29.6%
40-49	39	17.5%
50-59	30	13.5%
60-69	5	2.2%
70+	1	0.4%
Total	223	100.0%

Where Do Schools Recruit?

The School Information Sheet asked the school administrator where the school recruited or advertised the last time there was a religion teacher opening. The administrator could check all that applied. Table 10 reports the results. Informal word of mouth (66%) is the most common recruitment practice, followed by contacting the diocesan central office (57%). Some current practices are not consistent with the current and potential pools previously described. Although the data indicate that Catholic school graduates, teachers of other subjects, and Catholic volunteer program graduates show promise

as sources of religion teacher candidates, only 50% of schools target Catholic universities. Fewer schools target current teachers of other subjects (14%), alumni (13%), and Catholic volunteer programs (5%).

Table 10
School Recruitment Practices

Practices	Percent of Schools
Word of mouth	66%
Catholic schools office	57%
Catholic universities	51%
Local newspaper(s)	47%
Diocesan newspaper	40%
Religious communities	31%
Diocesan clergy	23%
DREs or youth ministers	17%
Current teacher of another subject	14%
Alumni	13%
National Catholic newspapers/magazines	11%
Elementary school teachers	10%
NCEA	7%
Deacons	5%
Catholic volunteer programs	5%

Note: School administrators were allowed to select as many options as apply.

Recruitment Recommendations

Upon reconvening after data were collected, the focus group discussed future directions relative to religion teacher recruitment. The following recommendations are based on focus group interpretations of the research findings.

1. Promote religion teaching as a vocation and as a career option.

Catholic educational leaders should raise awareness within the Catholic community about religion teaching being a ministry option within the Church as well as a viable career within the field of education.

2. Provide scholarships that encourage and enable potential candidates to pursue the proper educational training for this vocation.

Educational scholarships would make it more attractive for traditional undergraduates and those considering a second career to pursue the formal coursework needed to become effective religion teachers (Cook & Fraynd, 1999).

3. Improve salaries and financial benefits.

The Catholic community must pay a just wage if it hopes to attract prospective religion teachers. As reported earlier, approximately half of new and young teachers express dissatisfaction with salary. In addition to a just wage, the Catholic community must offer other attractive benefits. These might include retirement, health insurance, tuition assistance for faculty and their children, day care, and school loan forgiveness.

4. Highlight faith community as a fringe benefit. Two of the reasons the vast majority of current teachers are attracted to their job center on participating in the faith life of students (75%) and nurturing their own faith life (60%). In light of this finding, school leaders should do everything possible to build faith community within their schools and to market the school's faith community as a fringe benefit to prospective religion teachers.

5. Increase active and targeted recruitment efforts. The religion teacher shortage, evidenced by 86% of school administrators reporting a dearth of qualified candidates, signals the need to step up active recruitment efforts immediately. The lack of personal encouragement, evidenced by 33% of religion teachers responding that no one encouraged them to become religion teachers, shows clearly that the Catholic community must do more to give people a personal "tap on the shoulder." Data that center on current or prospective pools of candidates suggest that recruitment efforts should target the promising sources of candidates listed below.

a. Catholic high school and college students. Catholic schools are the chief supplier of religion teachers at present, with almost two-thirds being graduates. In view of the facts that 33% of current teachers responded that they were not encouraged by anyone to become a religion teacher and only 10% report being encouraged by their own religion teachers, it would seem that this is a field of potential candidates that can be mined further. Much more should be done to plant seeds early on about the vocation of teaching religion being a respected ministry option. Among their suggestions in this regard, religion teachers list the following: create a recruitment video, participate in high school and college career and vocation awareness days, compile lists of potential candidates, sponsor a retreat for potential candidates, and create apprentice programs or internships. In essence, religion teachers must share their stories and their enthusiasm for what they do.

b. Current teachers. Conventional wisdom supports the idea of giving teachers of other subjects who have already proven themselves effective teachers a "tap on the shoulder" for the opportunity of becoming religion teachers. The fact that one-fifth of current religion teachers began as teachers of other subjects might indicate that some schools have already met with success with this strategy of "growing your own." To make this strategy feasible and attractive, the Catholic community must provide resources for the preparation and retooling of these teachers.

c. Second career seekers. The data reveal that there are many people in other education-related and non-education-related careers that are potential religion teacher candidates. At present, one-fifth of current teachers fit into this category. Again, the Catholic community must provide for the preparation and retraining of these people.

d. Catholic volunteer program graduates. In recognition of the growing trend of religion teachers having some full-time experience in Catholic

volunteer programs, schools should network with these programs more formally.

e. Minorities. There is an imbalance between minority representation among students (25%) and that of religion faculty (10.4%). More effort needs to be put into recruiting religion teachers who are members of racial and ethnic minorities.

PREPARATION AND EXPERIENCE

In addition to collecting data relative to recruitment, *The Next Generation* survey was designed to collect data related to preparation and experience. On this topic, survey questions centered on Catholic school background, degrees, certification, teaching experience, and preparation satisfaction. These questions were designed to elicit information that would facilitate analysis of the present status of religion teacher preparation and experience and that would lead to recommendations for the future.

Catholic School Background

Although Table 6 indicates that two-thirds of the sample's religion teachers graduated from Catholic high schools, survey results reveal that a sizable minority (28.5%) never attended a Catholic high school. The proportion of those having never attended a Catholic high school is higher for younger religion teachers in their 20s (33.1%) and 30s (35.7%). Furthermore, over one-fifth (22%) of current religion teachers have had no Catholic schooling at all. These statistics raise concern insofar as they fly in the face of the old adage that says: "We teach as we were taught." That is to say, new teachers who have not attended Catholic high schools lack the formative personal experiences upon which graduates of Catholic high schools can quickly draw. It seems that Catholic school leaders would need to be even more intentional about providing these teachers the onsite induction and mentoring they will require to become acculturated to the Catholic school way of life (Cook, 2001).

Initial and Advanced Degrees

Of the 959 religion teachers in *The Next Generation* sample, 26.2% report having an undergraduate major or double major in theology, religious studies, or religious education. An additional 16.1% report having a minor in one of these three subjects. By comparison, the percentage of religion teachers with a major or minor in their teaching field is lower than the percentages provided by Ingersoll (as cited in O'Keefe, 2000) for secular subject teachers in public or private high schools who teach in the broad disciplines of English, math, science, and social studies. In other words, fewer religion teachers have undergraduate credentials in their field than do teachers in the secular disciplines.

With regard to advanced degrees, 41% of *The Next Generation* sample report having a master's degree or doctorate in theology, religious studies, or religious education. By historical comparison, further analysis using full-time religion teachers reveal that the percentage with advanced degrees in religion or theology has dropped from 57% in 1985 to 41% today (Yeager, et al., 1985). In other words, Catholic schools have lost considerable ground in the last 15 years relative to the percentage of full-time religion teachers who hold advanced degrees in their field. This drop may be significant in its potential to impact student learning and the profession's credibility.

Survey questions were constructed to ascertain what motivates teachers to earn an advanced degree and what holds them back. Table 11 displays how the 41% of the sample with advanced degrees in theology, religious education, or religious studies responded to the question dealing with motivation for earning the degree. Respondents were asked to rank their top three motivations. The top two motivations for earning an advanced degree listed by respondents—to "grow personally" (54%) and to "grow professionally" (53%)—would be considered intrinsic in nature. In other words, teachers who earn an advanced degree do so for their own enrichment as persons of faith and as teachers. The top extrinsic motivation listed by those who have earned a master's or doctorate is to "improve salary" (19%).

Table 11
Motivations for Earning an Advanced Degree

Motivation	Percent
Grow personally	54%
Grow professionally	53%
Improve salary	19%
Gain job security	12%
Meet requirements for ordination	12%
Other	10%
Achieve diocesan certification	8%
Qualify for promotion	5%

Note: Percentages are percent of teachers who include the reason as one of their top three motivations for earning a master's or doctoral degree.

In like fashion, the 59% of current teachers who do not hold an advanced degree in theology, religious studies, or religious education were asked their top three reasons in rank order for not pursuing an advanced degree. As Table 12 illustrates, the top two impediments listed by teachers are "lack of time" (24%) and "lack of funds" (20%). Regarding financial considerations, one religion teacher sums it up this way:

It is discouraging to realize that to earn a master's degree in my field, I have no choice but to attend an expensive Catholic university. Teachers at

Catholic schools cannot afford full graduate tuition at Catholic colleges. The expense of the education is not worth the pay provided by Catholic schools. It would help if graduate school were more affordable. Support for continuing education needs to be there. I love what I do and I'm not in it for the money; however, I am less motivated to continue my education if I can't afford it.

Table 12
Reasons for Not Earning an Advanced Degree

Reason	Percent
Lack of time	24%
Lack of funds	20%
Already have an advanced degree in another subject	13%
Other	10%
No foreseeable financial reward for investment	9%
Not required by my high school	9%
Do not think an advanced degree is necessary	7%
Do not want to commit myself to the time and effort involved	6%
No programs available in my geographical area	5%
Not required by diocese	5%
Do not have a bachelor's degree	2%

Note: Percentages are percent of teachers who marked the option as one of their top three motivations for not earning a master's or doctoral degree.

Data collected from the School Information Sheet (i.e., starting salary and tuition assistance) offer insight as to why one-fifth of respondents cited lack of money. Where salary is concerned, the median starting salary for the 195 schools in the sample for 1999-2000 was \$21,223.50. In terms of tuition assistance offered by schools to teachers wishing to earn an advanced degree in theology, religious studies, or religious education, almost one-half of the schools (45%) offer no tuition assistance. Only 15 schools out of the 195 schools in the sample offered full tuition assistance. The most common characteristic shared by the schools offering full tuition assistance is that 5 of the 15 are Jesuit schools.

Certification

State teacher certification is one measure that gauges formal pedagogical training. For *The Next Generation* sample, less than half (47%) hold a state teaching certificate in any subject. This figure falls well below the statistic reported by Youniss and Convey (2000) for all Catholic high school teachers holding certification in any field (67%).

Using state teacher certification as a gauge for religion teachers is problematic because only two states—Nebraska and Wisconsin—offer a program for the state certification of religion teachers. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this study, the statistic is still illuminating in two ways. First, if formal

teacher preparation makes a difference, which most professional educators and state governments think it does, then the structural absence of state certification in the religion teaching profession influences how the profession and its members are perceived by others, especially other educators and parents. Many dioceses have created their own certification programs for catechists. According to school administrators, approximately 73% of schools in this sample report that their dioceses have a policy regarding certification of religion teachers by the diocese. Sixty-four percent of the teachers in this sample report being certified by their diocese.

Teaching Experience

Table 13 shows that 41.5% of *The Next Generation* sample have taught religion five years or less.

Table 13
Teaching Experience

Years of Teaching Religion	Frequency	Percent
0-2	223	23.6%
3-5	169	17.9%
6-10	193	20.4%
11-15	121	12.8%
16-20	92	9.7%
20+	148	15.6%
Total	946	100.0%

Preparation Satisfaction

To ascertain what areas of preparation might need strengthening given the reality of everyday teaching, participants were asked to indicate for several areas whether they received formal training, and if so, to rate the adequacy of the training. As Table 14 illustrates, the majority of all religion teachers indicate that they are satisfied or very satisfied with their preparation in the following areas: scripture, Church doctrine, moral theology, Christian spirituality, sacraments, Catholic social teaching, Church history, and history of theological thought.

Table 14 also amplifies the finding that 96% of religion teachers with advanced degrees believe their coursework has made them more effective teachers. There is a statistically significant difference in preparation satisfaction between teachers with advanced degrees and those without. As Table 14 reveals, teachers with advanced degrees are more satisfied with their preparation at the strictest level of significance (.01) for the first 8 of 11 topics. The shaded areas—those with Cramer's V values of .3 or greater—represent those topics for which there exists the strongest relationship between an advanced

degree and satisfaction. The advanced degree makes the biggest difference in how prepared religion teachers believe themselves to be in the areas of scripture and history of theology.

Table 14
Preparation Satisfaction

Preparation Topic	Percent Satisfied		Cramer's V	
	Advanced Degree in	All		
	Religion/Theology	Teachers		
	No	Yes		
Scripture	82.1%	94.4%	87.3%	.309***
Church doctrine	79.1%	93.1%	84.9%	.267***
Moral theology	83.6%	87.6%	85.3%	.154***
Christian spirituality/prayer	80.2%	87.9%	83.4%	.168***
Sacraments	75.6%	86.7%	80.2%	.245***
Catholic social teaching	78.5%	82.2%	80.1%	.145***
Church history	69.2%	81.3%	74.3%	.215***
History of theological thought	52.0%	82.0%	64.7%	.352***
Adolescent faith development	63.3%	62.8%	63.2%	.107**
Teaching techniques	56.7%	52.6%	55.0%	.117**
World religions	49.3%	49.0%	49.1%	.103**

Note: ** $p \leq .05$

*** $p \leq .01$

As prepared as the majority of all religion teachers feel in most areas, a majority or sizable minority of all religion teachers either have received no formal preparation or express dissatisfaction with their preparation in three areas: world religions (51%), teaching techniques (45%), and adolescent faith development (37%). Interestingly, a close inspection of Table 14 reveals that there is a higher percentage of dissatisfaction with their preparation in these three areas among teachers with advanced degrees in theology, religious studies, or religious education.

Preparation Recommendations

The research findings and subsequent focus group discussions provide the basis for the following recommendations for the preparation of future religion teachers.

1. Enhance the professionalization of religion teaching. In the broadest sense, religion teaching has not achieved the professionalization that other teaching fields have achieved. Less than half of the religion teachers in this sample possess an undergraduate or a graduate degree in theology, religious studies, or religious education. Moreover, fewer than half are state certified to teach any subject. It is hard to imagine school leaders hiring teachers of secular subjects with so little content background and formal pedagogical train-

ing. To strengthen religion teaching as a profession, more emphasis must be placed on initial and ongoing teacher preparation and formation; and it should include teaching practica or internships, mentoring, ongoing professional development, credentialing, advanced degrees, and evaluation. Higher standards for the profession will maximize student learning and improve the status of religion teachers among other professional educators.

2. Create partnerships between dioceses, Catholic higher education, and religious congregations in this professionalization effort. Colleges and universities offer the most sophisticated and respected approach to teacher education in terms of subject knowledge and pedagogy. Therefore, dioceses and religious congregations should partner with Catholic colleges and universities in a collaborative venture. One partnership is described by Cook and Fraynd (1999). A collaborative model will ensure the highest standards of religion teacher preparation and formation because it will marshal the creative forces and resources of all the participating parties. Due to the fact that substantial resources of time, energy, personnel, and money will be involved in an initiative of this type, conversation and commitment must occur at the executive level of leadership. Decision makers involved in this compact might include the bishop, vicar of education, superintendent, religious congregation president, and college or university president. Where colleges and universities are concerned, the success of this initiative will depend on the extent to which the president can be convinced that this initiative should be an institutional priority in terms of mission and resources.

3. Offer incentives and rewards for religion teachers to attain an advanced degree in theology, religious education, or religious studies. Because 96% of current teachers with advanced degrees agree or strongly agree that their advanced degree increases their teaching effectiveness, everything possible should be done to encourage religion teachers to attain a master's degree in their field. At present, only 41% of religion teachers hold a master's degree in theology, religious education, or religious studies. Some incentives and rewards that Catholic schools and dioceses could offer include: a) contract requirement to earn an advanced degree within five years of being hired; b) ample financial assistance for tuition and other costs (e.g., travel and housing) associated with advanced degree programs; c) release time; and d) substantial salary increase and avenues for professional advancement to reward the earning of advanced degrees. Some incentives that Catholic colleges and universities could offer include: a) increased access to graduate programs through summer study and distance education; b) increased scope of coursework to include pedagogy, adolescent faith development, world religions, religious diversity, ecumenism, and personal spirituality to accommodate specific needs of teachers; and c) substantial scholarship assistance (Cook & Fraynd, 1999). Religious congregations could also earmark financial and other available resources for this purpose.

4. Provide for the ongoing formation of religion teachers. Even though a teacher may have a master's degree and state teaching credential, this does not mean that his or her formation is complete. Teachers are "works in progress" in that they never cease updating themselves in their subject, honing their teaching skills, and deepening their faith life. Therefore, schools, dioceses, religious congregations, and colleges and universities must provide ample opportunities for continued enrichment of teachers in the areas of scholarship, pedagogy, and spirituality. Opportunities for growth include retreats, workshops, inservices, conferences, reading groups, faith sharing, spiritual direction, prayer and worship, teacher exchanges, and "circles of learning" faculty groups. These opportunities should be provided to teachers free or for a minimal charge.

RETENTION

As this project evolved through discussion and preliminary research, it became clear that recruiting new teachers represents only half of the solution to the religion teacher shortage. Retaining teachers already in classrooms represents the other half. It would be foolhardy to concentrate on one and not the other. *The Next Generation* survey findings indicate that a startling 40% of all teachers plan to cease teaching religion within five years. Looking through a 10-year window, 60% of lay teachers plan to leave the profession within that time and 75% of the vowed religious plan to leave. Clearly, the statistics point to a retention crisis. What is most alarming are the statistics about new and young teachers. Over 50% of new teachers (0-2 years) and over 50% of young teachers (20-29) plan to cease teaching religion within five years.

Job Satisfaction: What Are the Sources of Teacher Dissatisfaction?

Table 15 summarizes participant responses from a dissatisfaction point of view. The shaded areas represent levels of dissatisfaction that are 40% or higher. The highest level of dissatisfaction on any indicator is a 56% figure for young teachers with regard to salaries.

Where salary is concerned, nearly half (45%) of the sample indicates dissatisfaction, with the highest levels coming from young (56%) and new (49%) teachers. Representing the views of many, one teacher writes:

In order to retain teachers, Catholic schools must offer salaries and benefits that allow teachers to stay as their family responsibilities increase. Many young teachers are forced to leave because of this situation. Many older lay teachers that I know have practically no retirement benefits. This is a disgrace in a Church that teaches social justice! The only reason I am able to continue teaching in a Catholic school is because I am married to a spouse whose salary helps to make up for the inadequate salary that I am given.

Table 15
Percents of Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied Teachers
on Job Satisfaction Indicators

	New (0-2)	Young (20-29)	All
	Percent	Percent	Percent
Salary	49%	56%	45%
Benefits	22%	26%	31%
Tuition Assistance	42%	46%	43%
Enjoyment	6%	6%	4%
Make Difference	11%	10%	10%
Accomplishment	11%	9%	9%
Student Achievement	16%	15%	13%
Opportunities for Continuing Education	29%	27%	27%
Opportunities for Spiritual Growth	16%	21%	18%
Faith Community (Students)	43%	44%	36%
Faith Community (Faculty)	46%	50%	46%
Mentoring	41%	42%	36%
Administrative Support	20%	21%	19%
Non-religion Teacher Support	32%	40%	35%
Non-teaching Duties	16%	21%	19%
Religion Requirements	13%	10%	11%
Professional Advancement	28%	36%	29%
Faculty Retreats	46%	46%	48%
Opportunity for Eucharist	15%	17%	16%
Opportunity for Prayer	45%	47%	44%
Opportunity for Reconciliation	32%	34%	29%

Other areas for which more than 40% of the sample express dissatisfaction include tuition assistance (43%), faith community among faculty (46%), faculty retreats (48%), and opportunity for prayer (44%). In reference to faith community, a religion teacher notes:

The school needs to be a faith community. The entire staff needs to model what it means to live a faith-filled life. The religion department cannot do this alone and should not be expected to take on the entire faith life of the school community as their mission.

Compared to the overall sample, new teachers express higher levels of dissatisfaction on 12 of the 21 measures. New teachers are more dissatisfied by four or more percentage points than the overall sample in the areas of salary (49% versus 45%) and mentoring (41% versus 36%). The variances in dissatisfaction are even more noticeable when comparing the overall sample with young teachers.

Compared to the overall sample, young teachers express higher levels of dissatisfaction on 15 of the 21 measures. Young teachers are more dissatisfied by four or more percentage points than the overall sample in the areas of salary (56% versus 45%), faith community among students (44% versus 36%), faith community among faculty (50% versus 46%), mentoring (42% versus 36%), non-religion teacher support (40% versus 35%), professional advancement (36% versus 29%), and opportunity for reconciliation (34% versus 29%).

Comparing the subsets of young and new teachers, young teachers are more dissatisfied by four or more percentage points than new teachers in the areas of salary (56% versus 49%), benefits (26% versus 22%), tuition assistance (46% versus 44%), faith community among faculty (50% versus 46%), non-religion teacher support (40% versus 32%), non-teaching duties (21% versus 16%), and professional advancement (36% versus 28%).

In sum, almost half of all religion teachers are dissatisfied with aspects of compensation, especially salary and tuition assistance, as well as aspects of faculty faith community, especially in terms of faculty retreats and opportunities for prayer. A look within the sample of religion teachers reveals that the highest levels of dissatisfaction on most measures are found among new and young teachers. In addition to the items listed already, new teachers and young teachers share a concern for the issues of mentoring, faith community among students, non-religion teacher support, professional advancement, and opportunity for reconciliation. Of the three groups, young teachers are the most dissatisfied. Their dissatisfaction centers on compensation and career issues such as salary, tuition assistance, and professional advancement as well as faculty and student faith community issues.

Job Satisfaction: What Kinds of Job Satisfaction Are Related to Teaching Longer?

Another way to look at retention through the lens of job satisfaction is to ascertain whether there is a relationship between job satisfaction measures and how long teachers plan to continue teaching religion. Table 16 summarizes the statistically significant relationships between job satisfaction and how long teachers expect to continue teaching religion. The shaded areas in Table 16—those with Somer's D Values of .2 or greater—represent the types of satisfaction that make the strongest difference in how long a person plans to continue teaching religion.

For religion teachers as a whole, there is a statistical relationship at the .01 level between job satisfaction and expected tenure on 11 of the 21 measures that the survey queried. That is to say, there is 99% confidence that how long teachers plan to teach religion is related to satisfaction with the following aspects of their job: enjoyment, making a difference, sense of accomplishment, student achievement, faith community among students and among faculty, mentoring, administrative support, non-teaching duties, religion require-

ments, and professional advancement. As the shaded areas reflect, the area of satisfaction that seems to exert the strongest influence on how long teachers plan to continue teaching religion is the degree to which they enjoy their job.

Table 16
Job Satisfaction by Expected Tenure

Type of Satisfaction	New (0-2) Somers's D Value	Young (20-29) Somers's D Value	All Somers's D Value
Salary	.149**	.229***	.077**
Benefits	.128	.144	.043
Tuition assistance	.013	.127	.043
Enjoyment	.349***	.329***	.303***
Make difference	.067	.016	.129***
Accomplishment	.175**	.098	.176***
Student achievement	.183**	.216**	.184***
Continuing education opportunities	.013	.204**	.057*
Spiritual growth	.063	.070	.079**
Faith community (students)	.077	.135*	.104***
Faith community (faculty)	.159***	.154**	.083***
Mentoring	.115	.182**	.101***
Administrative support	.148**	.191**	.084***
Non-religion teacher support	.103	.108	.031
Non-teaching duties	.155*	.080	.120***
Religion requirements	.157**	.157	.119***
Professional advancement	.260***	.147	.163***
Faculty retreats	-.040	-.013	.001
Eucharist opportunities	.112	.025	.054
Prayer opportunities	-.027	.032	.049
Reconciliation opportunities	.063	-.020	.045

Note: * $p \leq .10$

** $p \leq .05$

*** $p \leq .01$

In the "comments" section, many religion teachers expressed concern for the lack of status, respect, support, and appreciation that they perceive exists for the religion program in their schools. One religion teacher observes, "In many high schools, religion is less valued than athletics and other academic areas; it becomes expendable. It should not become the class from where students are automatically pulled as the need arises." Another teacher adds, "The religion program must be taken seriously. Religion teachers should not have to defend demanding assignments or fight for funding in a Catholic school. Religion should be central, not a peripheral course that shouldn't interfere with students' 'real' studies." Yet another teacher writes simply, "I do not get the impression that I'm valued." In relation to retention, a teacher stresses,

"Religion teachers who feel that they and their subject are valued will be more likely to remain committed to their ministry in education. Give them the respect and recognition they deserve. Let them know they are appreciated."

In relation to support, several religion teachers suggest that they come together as a group and otherwise network with religion teachers from other schools. Overall, teachers who commented shared the opinion that creating opportunities for religion teachers to meet and network would most likely reduce feelings of isolation, minimize burnout, and ultimately increase retention.

Data presented in Table 16 support previous evidence and sharpen the focus on the job satisfaction needs of those newest to the profession. Like veteran religion teachers, new and young religion teachers value the ministry aspects of their job as reflected in the importance they place on measures such as faith community. However, as you might expect of their contemporaries in other teaching fields, new and young religion teachers place as much or more value on career aspects of teaching religion such as salary, professional advancement, continuing education opportunities, and mentoring. It would seem that both ministry and career aspects of teaching religion must be addressed to increase retention among religion teachers, especially new and young ones.

Retention Recommendations

The following recommendations respond not only to the general question, "What steps do we need to take to encourage teachers to stay?" but to specific retention concerns expressed by respondents. Collectively, these recommendations will most likely enhance job enjoyment, which is the single most statistically significant job satisfaction measure that influences retention.

1. Improve salary and benefits. One-half of the religion teachers in the sample expressed dissatisfaction with salary. Statistics also reveal that new and young teachers pinpoint salary as a major factor in determining how long they plan to stay in the profession. In justice, the Catholic community must do what it takes to improve teacher salaries. Moreover, benefits must be improved (e.g., retirement, health coverage) and broadened (e.g., daycare, tuition assistance for teachers' children, school loan payoff) to make religion teaching more attractive as a long-term ministry and career. Considering that many religion teachers at present earn degrees in their field after being hired, subsidizing these degrees is imperative to enhance the professionalization of religion teaching as well as to serve as an incentive to continue in the profession. Over 40% of all current teachers are dissatisfied with the present level of tuition assistance and only 15 of the 195 schools in the sample provide full tuition assistance.

2. Strengthen support for the religion program as central to the school's overall mission. Catholic educational leaders must ensure that the

religion program is given pride of place within the school's total mission and that the religion department enjoys the status of other academic departments. This requires that leaders reaffirm their commitment to the religion program's centrality to the school's mission and broaden the support for this ideal among faculty and other members of the school community.

3. Nurture school faith community. As one might expect, religion teachers, as a group, place a premium on school faith community. A school's faith community among faculty is a factor for new, young, and all religion teachers in determining how long they plan to stay in the profession. Religion teachers as a whole feel the same about faith community among the student body. At present, over 40% of new, young, and all teachers are dissatisfied with faith community among faculty, with the same percentage of new and young teachers expressing dissatisfaction with the faith community among students. Over 40% of new, young, and all teachers pinpoint two aspects of faith community with which they are dissatisfied: faculty retreats and opportunities for prayer. Catholic educational leaders, as architects of Catholic culture, must redouble their efforts to build faith community in their schools (Cook, 2001).

4. Provide for professional and spiritual growth. Continuing education opportunities characterize professions as well as energize professionals. Schools, dioceses, and religious congregations must provide opportunities and commit resources for the initial and ongoing development and formation of religion teachers. A religion teacher stridently declares, "In order to retain veteran teachers, more opportunities for personal, spiritual, and professional development must be provided. The investment of time and money in this endeavor is crucial!" Opportunities may include formal coursework, workshops, reading circles, conferences, individual and group retreats, and spiritual direction. Young teachers in the sample cited opportunities for continuing education as one of four major factors that influences how long they plan to stay in the profession. On a related note, a natural extension of professional development is professional advancement. New teachers in the sample listed opportunities for professional advancement as one of two factors that make the biggest difference in their plans to stay in the profession.

5. Create mentoring programs and increase other support for new teachers. In light of the reality that almost 42% of current teachers have been teaching five years or less, Catholic educational leaders must pay special attention to the specific needs of the large segment of their religion faculty who are novices. Catholic leaders must provide resources for neophyte teachers by creating mentoring programs and deliberately limiting course preparations and extracurricular expectations. At present, over 40% of new and young teachers report that they are dissatisfied with the amount of mentoring they have received.

6. Create diocesan, regional, and national associations for religion teachers. Most teaching fields have a professional organization. These asso-

ciations of teachers reduce teacher isolation and provide a forum where goals can be discussed, strategies shared, and concerns aired. Associations for religion teachers would both strengthen the profession as well as broaden the web of support for teachers in the field.

CONCLUSION

The words of a survey respondent capture the singular importance of the person of the religion teacher: "From the beginning of time, humanity has attached itself to a person, not a belief system. Religion is not a subject; it is life. It's not the menu; it's the meal." In essence, the religious education program at Catholic high schools will be only as effective as its teachers. Therefore, the Catholic community must do everything in its power to ensure that qualified teachers continue to staff Catholic high school religion classrooms for decades to come. Given the increasing shortage of qualified religion teachers evidenced by the survey data, it is clear that the Catholic community has only a brief window of time to remedy the growing crisis.

Where do we go from here? As the focus group adjourned after reviewing the research findings, several participants suggested that similar groups be convened on a regional basis. In the spirit of collaboration, these meetings would bring together various stakeholders in each region including representatives from the diocesan office, high schools, religious congregations, and Catholic colleges and universities. In the spirit of subsidiarity, these regional focus groups would marshal their geographical resources and design initiatives concerning the recruitment, preparation, and retention of Catholic high school religion teachers that would best suit each region.

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