Catholic Philosophy, Intellectual Tradition Needed by Lay Principles of Catholic Schools

University of Dayton

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NEWS RELEASE

CATHOLIC PHILOSOPHY, INTELLECTUAL TRADITION NEEDED BY LAY PRINCIPALS OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

DAYTON, Ohio — When the majority of principals of Catholic schools came from vowed religious communities, the ability to infuse the Catholic spirit into education came naturally. Now that few Catholic school principals are vowed religious, the need to actively train principals in Catholic philosophy and intellectual tradition is crucial, says a group of Catholic educators.

About 40 Catholic school leaders, including representatives of the National Catholic Educational Association, Catholic universities, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, dioceses and Catholic schools around the nation, developed specific recommendations during “Developing Educational Leadership: Continuing the Conversation” June 7-10 at the University of Dayton.

“The support systems for developing principals that religious communities used to provide are not there to the extent they were before – paying for higher education and providing the mentoring that occurred as part of a life in a community that ministered together,” said Sister Dale McDonald, P.B.V.M., director of public policy and educational research for the National Catholic Educational Association. “This is a call for the church as a whole to take responsibility, to fill in some of the voids that religious communities have provided in the past.”

Over the past decade, according to NCEA figures, the percentage of lay faculty has risen from 85 to 94.2 percent. The remaining 5.8 percent are vowed religious.

The group recommends lay principals specifically learn the mission and culture of a Catholic school, financial skills such as fund-raising, how to work with boards, strategic planning, Catholic school governance, Catholic and private school law, human resources management and how to provide spiritual formation for themselves and staff members.

Strategies can include case studies, distance learning courses, readings lists, chat rooms, distance mentoring and videos, the group advises. Colleges and universities with religious

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studies and education programs can collaborate with diocesan offices of education, and
dioceses can provide incentives for principals and candidates to take professional and
formational training.

The group also recommends a task force or ad hoc committee be established by the U.S.
Conference of Catholic Bishops and the NCEA to develop specific curriculum materials to
enhance candidates’ spiritual understanding, knowledge of church documents, appreciation of
the church’s intellectual educational heritage and research on best practices in Catholic
education.

Full recommendations from the conference will be distributed to Catholic agencies and
published in Momentum. In addition, supplementary background pieces will appear in Catholic
Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice.

The University of Dayton conference builds on “Catholic Educational Leaders Prepare
for Their Successors,” a conference held at the University of San Francisco last June with many
of the same participants.

“Many of us have been in Catholic education for years, and we wonder where our
successors are coming from,” said Sister Mary Peter Traviss, O.P., associate professor of
education at the University of San Francisco and director of the Institute for Catholic
Educational Leadership. “We want to look to the future and ensure that there will be
competent, well-prepared Catholic school administrators carrying this ministry forward. We
care about it passionately and want them to also.”

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