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Catholicism and Organizational Development: A Case Study on the Communication of Catholic Mission and Identity

Kendra Knight, Ph.D., Don Martin, Ph.D., and Scott Kelley, Ph.D.

BIO

KENDRA KNIGHT, Ph.D., is associate professor and assessment coordinator in the College of Communication at DePaul University. She teaches courses in quantitative research methods, work/family communication, conflict management, and interpersonal communication theory. Dr. Knight researches emerging adults' work/life communication across the domains of family, education, career, and romantic partnership. Her published work appears in *Journal of Family Communication*, *Journal of Sex Research*, *Emerging Adulthood*, *Women and Language*, and *Western Journal of Communication*, among others. She is a recipient of the Early Career Fellowship by the Work & Family Researchers Network, and the Excellence in Teaching Award by the College of Communication.

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DON MARTIN, Ph.D., is a professor of communication at DePaul University. Martin has served both as department chair while in LAS, and as associate dean in the College the College of Communication. Martin is the recipient of two teaching awards and teaches courses that include Communication and Organizational Change, and Communication and Corporate Culture. Martin's research explores work-related issues in corporate contexts.

SCOTT KELLEY, Ph.D., HEC-C, is an adjunct assistant professor in the Neiswanger Institute for Bioethics and Healthcare Leadership at Loyola University, Chicago. He is also the director of mission integration at Loyola University Medical Center, a member of Trinity Health. He previously served as assistant vice-President for Vincentian scholarship in the Office of Mission and Ministry at DePaul University and as an assistant professor in the Religious Studies Department. He received a Ph.D. in theological ethics from Loyola University Chicago in 2006. His interest in organizational ethics and discernment led to a number of publications at the intersection of organizational ethics, Catholic social thought, and moral discernment.

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The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities launched the *Catholic Identity Mission Assessment* survey in 2018.¹ The suite of survey instruments carefully outlines institutional principles that warrant significant consideration not only in the communication of organizational mission at Catholic colleges and universities, but also in the reinforcement of that identity across institutions. The survey instruments reflect multiple research trends clearly influenced by the principles and core values of Catholic higher education Pope John Paul II outlined in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.

This pilot investigation examines the extent to which graduating seniors at DePaul University in Chicago are able to comprehend and articulate principles from the Catholic intellectual tradition and Catholic social teaching, among other domains.² Furthermore, the authors consider the specific curricular and cocurricular areas essential to developing this frame of reference in graduating seniors. The authors also identify how the communication of Catholic identity might be strengthened.

The *Catholic Identity Mission Assessment* makes recommendations for communicating Catholic identity and mission both internally and externally.³ Catholic colleges and universities are required to “... set out clearly in their official documentation their Catholic character and to implement in practical terms their commitment to the essential elements of Catholic identity.”⁴ Sandra M. Estanek, Michael J. James, and Daniel A. Norton argue that the public expression of institutional mission emerged as an essential criterion in the assessment process, not only as a means of publicly articulating principles and values of a Catholic education but also as a way of establishing a set of common goals paralleling the essential themes articulated in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.⁵ These themes include the Christian inspiration of both individuals and university communities; the impact of the Catholic faith on research and the pursuit of knowledge; fidelity to the Christian message

1 “Catholic Identity & Mission Assessment,” Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2019, <https://www.accunet.org/CIMA>.

2 Located in Chicago, Illinois, DePaul University was founded in 1898 by the Congregation of the Mission (members of which are known as Vincentians). DePaul is the largest Roman Catholic University in the United States with 21,670 students, a majority of whom do not self-identify as Catholic. See <https://www.depaul.edu/about/Pages/default.aspx>.

3 Alicia Cordoba Tait, ed., *Institutional Principles for Catholic Identity and Mission Assessment: A Best Practices Guide* (Washington, DC: Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2018).

4 Msgr. Dennis M. Schnurr, “The Application for *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* for the United States,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catholic-education/higher-education/the-application-for-ex-corde-ecclesiae-for-the-united-states.cfm>.

5 Sandra M. Estanek, Michael J. James, and Daniel A. Norton, “Assessing Catholic Identity: A Study of Mission Statements of Catholic Colleges and Universities,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 10, no. 2 (December 2006): 199–217, <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol10/iss2/6/>.

coming through the Church; and commitment to the service of the people of God, the family, and life itself.

Scholars have subsequently examined mission statements, vision statements, and websites to assess evidence of those values that communicate Catholic identity. In their qualitative analysis of mission statements representing fifty-five American colleges and universities, Estanek, James, and Norton identified five emergent categories related to Catholic identity. They include the following: service leadership and responsible citizenship, moral development, intellectual development, social justice and social responsibility, and religious and spiritual development.⁶ Robert B. Young did a content analysis of seventy-three mission statements, building on the research initially conducted by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities in 1996.⁷ Young ranked the frequency with which key values, informed by Catholic teaching, were acknowledged. He paid particular attention to service, spirituality, truth, community, human dignity, equality, tradition, and justice and freedom (listed from most frequently to least frequently referenced). Robert Abelman and Amy Dalessandro noted that more than 80% of all secular institutions have made major revisions in their declarations of institutional vision during the last decade.⁸ Catholic colleges and universities have done the same, embedding historical and cultural understandings of Catholic identity in both mission and vision statements. While Abelman and Dalessandro underscore that such integrations are definitely occurring, they recognize that significant challenges remain in communicating the elements of Catholic identity in ways that resonate with key stakeholders.

John Haughey, S.J., makes some important distinctions between Catholicism, a framework of institutional religious identity, and catholicity, a foundational dimension of the intellectual life of the university. As Haughey states, “There is something engaging about the term catholicity” because “it connotes openness, in contrast to what is incomplete, partial, sectarian, factional, exclusionary, tribal and selective”—common criticisms that he indicates are often used unfairly in criticizing the Church.⁹ Stephen F. Gambescia and Rocco Paolucci measured how US Catholic colleges and universities explicate their Catholic identity by examining the communication of mission across all of their websites.¹⁰ The analysis sought

6 Estanek, James, and Norton, “Assessing Catholic Identity,” 199–217.

7 Robert B. Young, “Colleges on the Cross Roads: A Study of the Mission Statements of Catholic Colleges and Universities,” *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education* 21, no. 2 (2001): 30.

8 Robert Abelman and Amy Dalessandro, “An Assessment of the Institutional Vision of Catholic Colleges and Universities,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 12, no. 2 (December 2008): 221–254, <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol12/iss2/5/>.

9 John Haughey, S.J., *Where is Knowing Going? The Horizons of the Knowing Subject* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 40.

10 Stephen F. Gambescia and Rocco Paolucci, “Nature and Extent of Catholic Identity Communicated through Official Websites of



Celebrating Mass at Saint Vincent de Paul Church, Chicago. The church is located on the campus of DePaul University, the largest Catholic university in the United States.

Courtesy Catholic Campus Ministry, DePaul University

confirmation of Catholic identity through the presence of key markers representing the spirit of the four essential characteristics espoused in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. These markers included the presence of the following: the word “Catholic” on the home page; an affiliation with a sponsoring Catholic entity; and links to a lead academic statement; human resource pages; and pages about Catholic worship, Catholic service, and Catholic heritage. Key results indicated that 90% of the colleges and universities acknowledged their sponsoring religious institution, 76.6% had a link to campus ministry or spiritual life on campus, and 57% displayed symbols of Catholicism. Forty percent expressed their catholicity in academic statements, 40% explicated their catholicity in the goals and objectives of a student’s education, and 28% stated the expectation that faculty and staff should be respectful of the college’s Catholic heritage and mission. When comparing the lens of catholicity that Haughey describes with the public, explicit references to Catholic identity that Gambescia and Paolucci analyze, it is clear that Catholic mission and identity are multidimensional constructs that reach a broad, dynamic cross section of stakeholders across an intellectual community. There is no single formula.

Viewed collectively, these investigations also demonstrate an ongoing interest in communicating Catholic identity through public documents and social media at the institutional level. However, this communication is enmeshed with other priorities. To what extent is public communication constrained by competition with secular colleges and universities for academic rankings, marketing for enrollment growth, and marketing a range

U.S. Catholic Colleges and Universities,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 15, no. 1 (September 2011): 3–27, <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol15/iss1/2/>.

of academic programs to very diverse audiences? For example, Elizabeth Redden notes that in an EAB Enrollment Services survey of 1,800 students and 800 parents, the top three characteristics associated with Roman Catholic colleges were “conservative,” “traditional,” and “expensive.”¹¹ These adjectives may be disconnected from the messaging that Catholic colleges and universities present, and they may reflect the challenges of communicating Catholic identity in the higher education marketplace, especially when compared to other private or public colleges and universities. The challenge of navigating between the religious and the more secular characteristics of the institution becomes clear.

Changing Student Profiles: Spiritual and Religious Orientation

Researchers have explored demographic trends measuring levels of student interest in religion compared to student spirituality, levels of student connection to Catholicism, and the extent to which Catholic graduates have retained values representing the tenets of the Catholic faith. Vincent Bolduc argues that during the past thirty years, interest in institutional religion has declined while interest in nonreligious spirituality has increased.¹² Dawn Overstreet offers a straightforward delineation of this dichotomy: being spiritual is perceived as good, individualistic, liberating, and mature, but being religious is perceived as institutionalized, constraining, and connected to particular practices.¹³

In Bolduc’s examination of catholicity at four colleges, the majority of the students surveyed did not increase their commitment to the Catholic Church, and at two of the schools, twice as many students decreased their commitment to the Catholic Church and religion than increased it.¹⁴ Overstreet noted that participation in religious activities on campus has dropped between 25% and 50% during the past thirty years and that students are clearly moving away from what they think of as organized religion.¹⁵ Furthermore, Melanie M. Morey and John Piderit, S.J., argue that the Catholic components of Catholic colleges and universities are often understated and overlooked—with lay administrators knowing very little about Catholic traditions.¹⁶ In contrast, Jeffrey Dorman validated the Catholic School Graduate Characteristic Inventory offering empirical support for four conceptual clusters, including religious faith and spiritual development; personal

11 Elizabeth Redden, “Conservative. Traditional. Expensive.,” *Inside Higher Ed*, 11 February 2019, <https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2019/02/11/survey-asks-how-prospective-students-and-their-parents-view-catholic#backtotop>.

12 Vincent Bolduc, “Measuring Catholicity on Campus: A Comparative Example at Four Colleges,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 28, no. 2 (2009): 124–145, <https://jche.journals.villanova.edu/article/view/631/552>.

13 Dawn V. Overstreet, “Spiritual vs. Religious: Perspectives from Today’s Undergraduate Catholics,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 14, no. 2 (December 2010): 238–263, <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol14/iss2/6/>.

14 Bolduc, “Measuring Catholicity on Campus,” 139.

15 Overstreet, “Spiritual vs. Religious,” 245.

16 Melanie M. Morey and John Piderit, S.J., *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).



Students, staff, and faculty gather on the DePaul University Quad for the annual Vinny Fest. The annual event features games and prizes that highlight the life of St. Vincent de Paul and the Vincentian mission while celebrating the school's "name above the door."

Courtesy DePaul University/Jamie Moncrief

integration; social responsibility; and lifelong learning.¹⁷ Mark Gray and Melissa Cidade provide additional clarification, arguing that a decline in religiosity is not the same as a decline in commitment. Senior student survey results demonstrate a strong connection to their religious faith but disagreement with church teachings on abortion, same-sex marriage, and affirmative action.¹⁸ These results also provide insight into the considerable challenges facing educators and administrators at Catholic colleges and universities in the communication and reinforcement of a Catholic identity.

Curricular Consequences: What Must Be Done?

Scholars reflected on the religious studies curriculum and appropriate models for studying religion within cultural contexts. They have also been gauging generational levels of interest in religious studies. Daniel Horan and Melissa Cidade point out that millennials came of age and matriculated through higher education in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on the United States, the emergent abuse scandal in the Catholic Church, and serious economic instability.¹⁹ Horan and Cidade borrow the terms “spiritual tinkerers or spiritual bricoleurs”

17 Jeffrey P. Dorman, “Validation and Use of the Catholic School Graduate Characteristics Inventory,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 7, no. 2 (December 2003): 165–180, <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol7/iss2/3/>.

18 Mark M. Gray and Melissa A. Cidade, “Catholicism on Campus: Stability and Change in Catholic Student Faith by College Type,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 14, no. 2 (December 2010): 212–237, <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol14/iss2/5/>.

19 Daniel P. Horan and Melissa A. Cidade, “‘Major’ Changes Toward Philosophy and Theology: Interpreting a Recent Trend for Millennials in Catholic Higher Education,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 30, no. 1 (2011): 133–150, <https://jche.journals.villanova.edu/issue/view/58>.

to describe how millennials choose the dimensions of religion or spirituality to embrace and how they identify what works for them individually.²⁰ However, Horan and Cidade also found that millennials and members of Generation Z are interested in the formal study of religion and philosophy, and that religion is a pivotal topic for public discourse, especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. A 2008 report of the American Academy of Religion discovered a 22% increase in the number of religious studies majors.²¹

With these generational attributes in mind, it is important to consider the scholarly recommendations about pedagogical approaches in the religious studies curriculum. Kathleen Engebretson argues that “an essential task of education for understanding and appreciation of religions is the development of criteria by which the truth and goodness, rightness and wrongness of religions and religious phenomena may be debated.”²² She finds that Hans Kung’s criteria for the public debate of religion is useful for educators, particularly dialogue that encourages reflection on how a religion portrays the divine reality of God and the transformational nature of the religion in advancing, protecting, and dignifying humanity. Kung also argues that how manifestations of fellowship, human solidarity, and service play a transformational role in a given cultural context are meaningful criteria.²³ Engebretson is particularly sensitive to what students are currently interested in studying and advocates a more critical approach to theological and religious studies. Here, too, one can see the great challenge. As Estanek, James, and Norton argue, teaching and learning about the Catholic tradition must somehow be connected to the teaching and learning that already exist at Catholic institutions.²⁴ The Catholic tradition cannot be separate from the teaching and learning that is woven into the fabric of the academic enterprise.

Scholars have examined the communication of Catholic identity at the institutional level as well as the daunting challenge of communicating that identity through curricular channels. Furthermore, researchers have gauged the relationship between unique demographic trends and students’ levels of interest in Catholicism as an area of academic study. Yet more research should be done to assess the extent to which students view the Catholic intellectual tradition as a means to answer questions of meaning, purpose, and values. What are the correlating elements in their lives as undergraduates at a Catholic institution that inform comprehension or articulation of the Catholic intellectual tradition or

20 Ibid., 138.

21 Timothy Renick, et al., “The Religion Major and Liberal Education – A White Paper,” *Religious Studies News* 23 (October 2008): 21, as quoted in Horan and Cidade, “Major Changes,” 144.

22 Kathleen Engebretson, “Foundational Issues in Educating Young People for Understanding and Appreciation of the Religions in Their Communities,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 16, no. 1 (September 2012): 61, <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol16/iss1/4/>.

23 Hans Kung, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View* (New York: Doubleday, 1988) as cited in Engebretson, “Foundational Issues,” 61.

24 Estanek, James, and Norton, “Assessing Catholic Identity,” 199—217.

Catholic social thought as a means for self-understanding? What must be done to reinforce and strengthen the communication of these elements to students?

Method

The Mission Identity Graduating Senior Survey was sent to 2,673 graduating seniors at DePaul University during the spring quarter of 2018 and was available from 18 April 2018 to 18 May 2018. The survey included questions to assess student experience across ten domains commonly expressed in mission statements: Catholic mission and identity; mission integration; leadership and governance; curriculum and courses; faculty and scholarship; cocurricular student learning and engagement; student access, support and success; service to the Catholic Church and the world; the role and importance of staff; and institutional practices in management and finance. There were 271 students who responded for a 10.1% response rate. Relevant demographic characteristics include the following:

- 217 (80.1%) were between the ages of 21 and 23
- 184 (67.9%) attended a public (non-charter) high school
- 169 (62.4%) enrolled at DePaul in the first quarter of their first year (as traditional freshmen)

The majority of the respondents did not answer the gender, race and ethnicity, and citizenship questions.

Results

The chart below (fig. 1) illustrates students' confidence in their ability to comprehend and articulate principles of Catholic higher education and elements of the Vincentian mission. Relevant findings include the following:

- 76% of respondents were confident they could articulate the Vincentian mission
- 44% of respondents were confident they could articulate the Catholic moral tradition
- 42% of respondents were confident they could articulate Catholic social teaching
- 31% of respondents were confident they could articulate the Catholic intellectual tradition

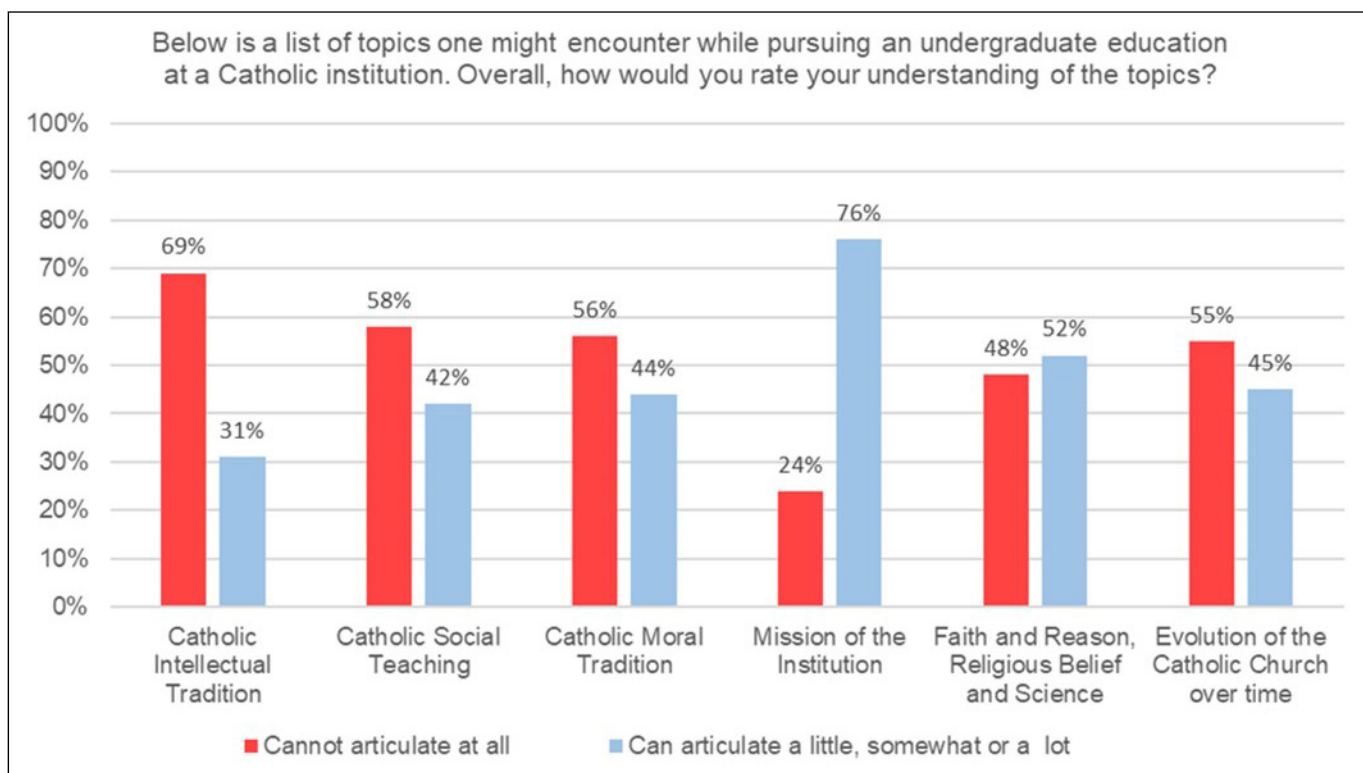


Figure 1. Student capacity to understand and articulate dimensions of Catholic higher education and the mission of DePaul University.

Given the differences in student ability to articulate the mission of the institution compared to dimensions of Catholic higher education, potential sources of student knowledge in these domains must be examined.

To explore this question, the authors examined correlations between student confidence in professing various intellectual traditions (for example, the Vincentian mission) and their reported exposure to elements of Catholic social thought (for example, the preferential option for the poor) within specific dimensions of university life. The table below (fig. 2) reports significant bivariate correlations between students' estimation of the extent to which six domains of university life (for example, major coursework) promoted their thinking about values of Catholic social thought, and their ability to articulate four intellectual traditions (for example, the Catholic intellectual tradition). Exposure to Catholic social thought through extracurricular experiences led to greater reported ability to articulate the Vincentian mission. Modest correlations were also observed between exposure through extracurricular experiences and Catholic social teaching, as well as the exposure in the general institutional environment and ability to articulate the Vincentian mission. Only three small correlations were observed between exposure to Catholic social thought in various domains of university life and confidence in professing the Catholic intellectual tradition.

<i>Bivariate correlations between domains of university life and ability to articulate traditions of Catholic teaching</i>				
<i>Domains of university life</i>	<i>Traditions of Catholic teaching</i>			
	Catholic intellectual tradition	Catholic social teaching	Catholic moral teaching	Vincentian mission
Theology/Religious Studies courses	.21**	.30**	.28**	.29**
Philosophy courses			.27**	.25**
General education courses		.22**	.23**	.25**
Major coursework	.15*		.19*	
Other coursework		.19*	.20*	.27**
Extracurricular experiences	.20**	.37**	.28**	.42**
Institutional environment		.22**	.19*	.37**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Figure 2.

In Conclusion

The results of this investigation suggest a need for organizational development. Students' confidence in their ability to articulate dimensions of the Vincentian mission is greater than their confidence in their ability to communicate dimensions of the Catholic intellectual tradition. Even with sources of influence identified for each domain, this gap challenges those working on the communication of Catholic identity at DePaul University as well as those pursuing a comparable goal at other Catholic colleges and universities.

At DePaul, the next step will be to determine the most effective communication strategies that will reinforce and strengthen catholicity as a dimension of organizational climate and help students understand the intersections between Vincentian values, Catholic social teaching, and the Catholic intellectual tradition. Future research should include conducting focus groups that include students, faculty, staff, and administrators in defining those communication strategies mentioned earlier. It is our hope that we will see students gradually acquire greater confidence in their ability to communicate dimensions of the Catholic intellectual tradition, along with a heightened degree of confidence in their understanding and capacity to articulate the Vincentian mission.