



DIRECTED READING #5
COMMUNITY OF WORSHIP:
RITUAL, PRAYER AND SACRAMENT

Introduction

Every Catholic school community is called to integrity. What we say and do must reflect what we believe. Catholicism is a sacramental religion. God is made evident and celebrated through sacrament and ritual. As we look at our pattern of life through the lens of our charism, the *Rule of Life* challenges us to make Christ “our reference point and the center of our motivations.” (*Rule* #112)

In every school community, sacramentality is evident as we celebrate the moments of everyday life. Each is a chance to integrate our faith with our daily experiences. We are called to plan and organize events so that the values we hold are clear, evident and consistent with the lived reality of our school communities. This does not mean, however, that all rituals or sacramental experiences actually achieve that goal. We are called to be critical of the rituals and traditions of our school communities to ensure their coherence with our faith and in particular our charism. Graduation, opening a new building, beginning the school year, and even beginning each day are opportunities to discover God present among us.

Through this reflection, the participant will:

- understand the importance of ritual, ceremony and tradition in his/her school;
- be a critical architect of the culture of his/her school; and
- value all activities as opportunities to integrate faith and life.

Readings:

- *Rule of Life* #112, 113, 128, 129, 130
- *Shaping School Culture*, p. 31-32, 35, 41, 42-45
- *Architects of Catholic Culture*, p. 47-57

Suggestions for Journal Reflection:

1. Describe a tradition, ceremony or ritual in your school that has great meaning. Why does it have meaning for you? Why is it life-giving for you?
2. Rituals can lose their meaning as time and circumstances change. We must ensure that ritual and ceremony speak to the people involved. Describe a school

- event that has undergone change due to a reflective examination. Is there a ceremony or event in your school whose meaning you question? Why?
3. Cook describes each of us as architects of culture, building communities that reflect the values of the Catholic faith and, in our case, our faith and charism. How are you an architect of our charism in your school? Describe a process, ceremony or ritual that you have “built” to embody values found in our charism.
 4. How does the daily routine of your school reflect that it is a place of faith?

Suggestions for Additional Readings:

- *Leading with Soul*, by Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal, (1994) San Francisco, Jossey-Bass. p. 141-142, 145, 146
- *Shaping School Culture*, by Kent Peterson and Terrence Deal, (1999), San Francisco, Jossey-Bass. (text and field book)
- *Architects of Catholic Culture*, by Timothy Cook, (2002), Washington DC, NCEA.

Prayer:

*Lord, God of all things,
Your presence is evident
throughout the pattern of our days:
in people, and events,
in things that touch our hearts, and turn us to prayer,
in times of difficulty and of joy.
No part of our lives is divorced from you.
Yet all too often we cannot find you,
lost, as we can be, in our own preoccupations.*

*Gift us with vision, Lord,
not only that we may see you,
but that we might be able to make you more visible,
by choice, by action,
in the life of our school communities,
in our own lives,
in our interactions with the world around us.*

*Teach us, guide us,
so that our faith in you,
and the charism we share,
find its echo in the actions of our community
and in our actions as leaders.*

*May we discover our role
as builders of the kingdom,
co-creators with you,
and make that kingdom evident all we do. Amen.*

READINGS

Rule of Life

112. Christ in our Life

*Our founders made us heirs of their devotion
to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.
And so Christ, in his mystery of love,
holds first place in our life
as Brothers of the Sacred Heart.
He is our reference point
and the center of our motivations,
just as he is the very principle
of our total self-offering
and of our apostolic action.*

113. An Everlasting Love

*The Heart of Jesus bears and reveals
the everlasting love with which God
traced the whole history of humanity.
His heart also expresses
the intense divine and human affection
which Jesus experienced
through his incarnation
to the point of offering his life
so that we might all become
sons of the Father.
In our everyday lives,
Christ continues to lavish this love on us
by his presence and by the attention, friendship, and affection
we receive from our brothers.*

128. Call of the Father

*God is at the heart of our everyday lives.
In all our actions
we are called to do his will,
to abide in him.
Thanks to the dynamism of our faith,
we meet him in events, in people,
and in a special way in prayer.*

129. Example of Jesus

*Jesus,
living constantly in the presence of his Father,
impresses on us
the necessity of unceasing prayer.
Like him, we pray alone,
we pray with our brothers,
and we pray with the Christian community.
In the midst of apostolic tasks,
as well as at times of recollection,
we live out our sonship with Christ,
under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.*

130. Action of the Spirit

*The life of prayer,
communion with God's will for us,
is an expression of our consecration.
Our whole lives must be lived
in adoration, praise, and thanksgiving.
The Spirit urges us to be trusting
because God is kind and faithful,
and to be persistent in our supplication
because God is master of our lives.
This same Spirit transforms us
and expresses to God
the prayers of our hearts
that are too deep for words.
He teaches us how to discern his gifts
and to find the motives and strength
for our activity.*

* * * * *

Shaping School Culture

Ritual and Ceremony
Culture in Action

Imagine our lives without ritual and ceremony. Do away with morning coffee, the noon lunch break, the evening social hour, the late-night walking of the dog, or whatever the special breaks are that you look forward to each day. It's a chilling thought;

our daily or weekly rituals provide a welcome chance to reflect and connect. We renew ourselves, bond with others, and experience life's deeper meaning in our everyday liturgy. Think of the hollowness we would create if we were to cancel Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Cinco de Mayo, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Easter, Passover, summer picnics, or New Year's Eve. Without ceremony to honor traditions, mark the passage of time, graft reality and dreams onto old roots, or reinforce our cherished values and beliefs, our very existence could become empty, sterile, and devoid of meaning. Without ritual and ceremony, any culture will wither and die. Without periodic expressive events, nothing makes much sense and we lose our way.

Ritual and ceremony allow us to act out what otherwise is hard to touch and comprehend. In doing so, we touch base with our core values and bond with each other. Ritual and ceremony are to culture what the movie is to the script, the concert is to the score, or the dance is to values difficult to express in any other way (Deal and Kennedy, 1982).

Now shift from our personal lives to life in the organizations where we work. Imagine school without such symbolic interludes. In the world of education with its multiple challenges and complex goals, ritual is probably more important than in a business with a tangible product or service. Schools run largely on faith and hope. Students and teachers don't leave their humanity behind when they come to school. They need special moments in the daily grind to reflect on what's really important, to connect with one another, and to feel the common spirit that makes technical routine more like spiritual communion.

In the past few decades, in the name of educational reform, we have managed to sterilize schools of the symbolic acts that help culture survive and thrive. Some ritual and ceremony has fallen victim to political correctness. Some has been dismissed as fluff in favor of structure and rationality. A lot has just been overlooked and ignored, allowed to wither away. More than ever, we need to revive ritual and ceremony as the spiritual fuel we need to energize and put more life back into our schools. Learning is fostered in large part by strong traditions, frequent ritual, and poignant ceremonies to reinvigorate cultural cohesion and focus.

Rituals

Rituals are procedures or routines that are infused with deeper meaning. They help make common experiences uncommon events. Every school has hundreds of routines, from the taking of attendance in the morning to the exiting procedures used in the afternoon. But when these routine events can be connected to a school's mission and values, they summon spirit and reinforce cultural ties.

Let's look at a couple of examples. In one rural mid-western school, food service workers make toast for staff and students every morning – even though it's not in their official job description. As a routine it feeds people and provides carbohydrates and calories, but as a ritual of “breaking bread” together, it energizes the communal spirit for the coming day. A recent attempt to eliminate the morning ritual failed, as hundreds of

past students, staff, and parents recalled the fond memories and wanted the tradition to continue.

In a large urban school, staff meet for coffee and doughnuts once a week to share stories about their experiences with new curriculum ideas and to renew relationships and recharge batteries with colleagues they see only occasionally.

Rituals become significant traditional events with special history and meaning. The tradition unfolds year in and year out. Traditions provide a vital tie to the past, reinvigorate the present, and offer a welcome promissory note for a robust future. Special events touch the hearts of parents and others in the community who can recall with feeling their own experiences in school. When people honor traditional rituals, it gives them a cultural foundation to weather challenges, difficulties, and change. Rituals are the daily comings and goings that create the mortar that binds people and activities; rituals hold a school together.

Ceremonies

Most schools have some formal ceremonies that mark transitions in the school year. These periodic events bind people to each other and shape unwritten cultural values and rules. The traditions shape and mold new recruits and give seasoned staff a welcome spiritual boost.

Ceremonies are complex, culturally sanctioned ways that a school celebrates successes, communicates its values, and recognizes special contributions of staff and students. Each season of the year can provide time to communicate ceremonially the deeper symbolic glue that binds a school together. In an urban school, before classes start in the fall, staff gather together to share their hopes, ideas, and dreams for the coming year. This shared experience creates connections that last throughout the year, despite the predictable ups and downs of the academic calendar.

In another school the staff hold a special art night; each student has a piece of artwork matted and displayed. Parents and community members are invited to appreciate students' creativity. Special awards are given to parents and others in recognition of their cooperation and help. The contribution of teachers is singled out for special attention in the carefully and artistically designed brochure that outlines the evening's festivities. This ceremony knits a diverse community together in celebration of the collective successes of children. It builds, bonds, and cements organizational esteem.

In another school, staff hold an end-of-the-year ceremony to recognize the individual and group contributions of teachers. In sometimes funny and sometimes serious ways, the school communicates how it values the ways teachers work together.

Types of Ceremonies

Schools with unique cultures convene ceremonies for several purposes during the year:

Opening-day ceremonies rebind staff to the school and its mission. These events reinforce core values, remind people of the hard yet rewarding year ahead, and celebrate their commitment to the growth of young people. In one school, staff and parents represented on the school's council come together for a beginning-of-school potluck.

Each person brings a dish that represents something they did over the summer – Texas chili from a parent who attended a summer conference in Houston or an Irish stew from a teacher whose summer was devoted to developing a new teaching module on immigration. Eating good food and trying to “read” the food’s deeper meaning creates fun times and renews ties for the coming year.

Community renewal ceremonies revive connections and reinforce shared values. These special events can rebuild and recharge the energies of staff and students as well as parents. Beginning a new school year always conjures both anticipation and dread. Educating students is a complex and daunting task. Renewal ceremonies can build trust and faith to face the year’s next 180 days. At one school, for example, the mission statement is reviewed each fall. It is refined or reworded to match current values. Then the statement is redone in a new calligraphy by a local artist and signed by everyone. This makes the mission statement alive, vital, connected to everyday experience, and evolving, rather than one that’s dead, moribund, and gathering dust as it hangs on a wall.

Seasonal ceremonies take advantage of cyclical celebrations outside the school. Reitzug and Reeves (1992) found in one school that the principal, Mr. Sage, has a Thanksgiving tradition in which he cooks and serves a large turkey, using the activity to teach about weights and measures but also to renew teachers in the middle of the first semester.

Management ceremonies ease the hard work of formulating plans and deciding on new programs. Professionals often gather and make improvement plans through brute force of rationality. But infusing these times with a collaborative spirit and shared collegiality fosters even greater accomplishment. A Kentucky high school working to restructure its educational program held its planning retreats at the principal’s rustic cabin. The principal, a strong and insightful leader, knew the importance of shared thinking and planning. But she also recognized the other side of the equation. She cooked incredible food and encouraged play as the core planning council hammered out new directions. They often referred to their gatherings as “an advance” rather than a “retreat.” In a Connecticut school, it was not a rustic cabin but a hotel with a reputation for lavish buffets that made the planning retreat a meaningful group tradition.

Integrative ceremonies provide ways to meld the various social, ethnic, and religious groups in a school. As schools become more and more diverse ethnically, socially, and economically, they need to rediscover or invent traditions that knit people together – integrative traditions that help everyone develop understanding and appreciation for others. At Piccolo Elementary School in Chicago, African American students learn Spanish songs to sing during Cinco de Mayo; Hispanic students learn rap to participate during African-American-week festivities. These are more than music lessons, as students develop friendships and learn about different values and ways. In the Tucson, Arizona, school district, opening day brought all its employees together to kick off the new year. At various places in the large arena, student groups were featured playing ethnic music. The music helped unite diverse subgroups into a shared commitment to building a cohesive learning community.

Recognition ceremonies pay tribute to the special accomplishments of individuals and groups, thereby forging pride and respect. Schools, like other organizations, too often avoid recognizing and celebrating important accomplishments. Sometimes it is not part of tradition; quite often, negative members of the culture want to diminish praise to hide their own mediocrity. But successful cultures find ways – both small and elaborate ways – to celebrate, commemorate, and salute the accomplishments of others. For the school, this heightens the feeling of being on a winning team, of being part of something greater than themselves.

In the Beaverton Elementary School mentioned earlier, the daily “high-five” rites are supplemented from time to time by a special recognition event. Teachers, students, and parents gather in the school’s “hall of fame” to recognize those who have shown notable merit in “reaching for excellence.” The principal calls a student forward, reads the accomplishment, and paints the student’s hand. The student slaps the wall with a high-five, leaving an imprint. The principal then writes the student’s name and his or her accomplishment.

There are many other examples of this recognition: student awards ceremonies, volunteer lunches, graduation ceremonies, and honor roll dinners. At Joyce Elementary in Detroit, students who make the honor roll attend a formal ceremony with their parents. This ceremony has been held yearly for over a decade. Students, caregivers, parents, and staff come dressed in their finest clothes, share an elaborate meal, and hear the prideful words of their principal and community leaders. Students receive a medallion of achievement and a t-shirt with every honor student’s name emblazoned on it. Teachers write a personal comment about every child for the banquet book, which is ceremonially presented to each student. Photographs capture the event, thus creating a memory trace of the accomplishments that graces many refrigerators in local homes. In a community facing great challenges, the honor roll dinner is a powerful message of hope, accomplishment, and pride.

Like many schools, Audubon Elementary has a yearly art auction, but the auction is also a time to recognize achievements of other sorts. There is a printed brochure that describes the auction but also lists the accomplishments, awards, and grants received by staff and students for the past year. This brochure is an artifact and symbol of the triumphs and hard work of school members.

Homecomings are for alumni, who gather to tell stories of hard work and success. Returning graduates show a connection to the past and proof that their hard work has paid off. In a high school located in a low-income area, adults who have regular jobs return to remind students of the possibility of economic success. In another school, returning graduates offer to mentor struggling students and return to the school some of what the school gave them.

Special ceremonies mark the beginning or end of unique events. Transitions are important times in the lives of people and of schools. They mark the beginnings and endings of unique temporal and social events. Transitions need to be marked. They cannot go unnoticed or their importance and meaning are lost. Successful cultures find ways to highlight transitions to reinforce and build cultural values. One school celebrates the end of a planning year with a brief talk about accomplishments and challenges,

followed by the awarding of pens and coffee cups to the members of the planning committee. Increasingly, schools are holding reading “challenges” to encourage summer reading. Principals mark reaching the goals in many bizarre but symbolic ways. Some have been known to eat fried worms, kiss hairy pigs, or spend the day on the roof to celebrate the school reaching its reading goals. Adding an exclamation mark to the end of special events or activities can buoy spirits and bolster values.

Memorial ceremonies are times to remember the contributions and trials of others. Most strong cultures remember those who went before. It is a way to recognize the contributions of others and connect to the history of one’s school. Some schools bring back retired teachers who developed core curricular approaches or developed the special approach taken in the school. Other schools remember those who faced tragedy. At East High School in Madison, Wisconsin, students and staff place flowers on a fence where several students were killed by a reckless driver. Other schools have named scholarships or awards for student leaders who died tragically in war or in the line of duty in their professions. In a Wisconsin school, a scholarship is given each year in honor of an Irish teacher who died of cancer at a young age. The award certificate is wrapped in green and khaki – just like the green and khaki that appeared in some item of clothing the teacher wore almost every day of his career.

Elements of Successful Ceremonies

Each ceremony, tradition, or ritual works effectively if it communicates deeper values and purposes, is well organized and run, and has a touch of grandeur and specialness. Successful ceremonies often combine a meaningful set of elements (Trice and Beyer, 1985; Deal and Peterson, 1994; Deal and Key, 1998).

Special elements in ceremonies can include the following:

A special and value-linked purpose

Symbolic clothing and adornments

Symbols, signs, banners, or flags

Stories of history, accomplishment, unusual effort

A distinctive manner of speaking or presentation

An invocation of deeper purpose and values

Attention to who is invited and where they sit

Recognition of those who have shown exemplary commitment

Appropriately chosen and varied music

A carefully selected, attractive setting

Quality food or drink

Value-filled language and commentary

Meaningful symbols and artifacts

Ritual acts and ongoing traditions

The recounting of myths, legends, or stories about the school

Successful ceremonies are carefully designed and arranged to communicate values, celebrate core accomplishments, and build a tight sense of community.

Traditions

Traditions are significant events that have a special history and meaning and that occur year in and year out. Traditions are part of the history; they reinvigorate the culture and symbolize it to insiders and outsiders alike. They take on the mantle of history, carrying meaning on their shoulders. When people have traditions that they value and appreciate, it gives them a foundation to weather challenges, difficulties, and change.

There are numerous types of traditions in schools, including;

Traditions that build professionalism. It is important to nourish professionalism and effort for one's students. This can happen in many ways, for example by holding retreats where energetic, collaborative planning occurs, by holding professional conferences at the school that spotlight innovative reaching by existing staff, or by acknowledging professional accomplishments in words or displays.

Celebratory gatherings where the community recognizes in story, songs, or awards the special and significant contributions of others. At one school, staff hold a storytelling contest; staff members recount stories of success or humor that occurred that year. Awards for the best story are highly sought after. When Fran Vandiver was principal of Coral Springs Middle School in Florida, many faculty meetings began with the presentation of coffee mugs to staff who had made some special attempt to serve students. Strong cultures hold a variety of ceremonies to mark special occasions, continue meaningful traditions to reinforce values, and perpetuate rituals that provide connection.

Rituals, Traditions, and Ceremonies: Two Cases

School leaders develop rituals, traditions, and ceremonies that fit with their staff and communities. The following examples show how a group of principals working with staff reinforced culture. (The first is adapted from Deal and Peterson, 1990.)

Case 1: Hank Cotton. Cherry Creek High School

Hank Cotton was principal of Cherry Creek High School in the 1970s and 1980s. The school was a large, public, secondary school located in an affluent Denver suburb. The students came from well-educated and advantaged backgrounds and were generally high-achievers; over 80 percent went on to college.

Cotton made extensive use of ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and symbols to reinforce some new priorities when he became principal. One was the behavior at graduation. At Cotton's first graduation at Cherry Creek, students threw cans, tossed paper airplanes, and were generally inattentive. Cotton told the seniors the next year that the graduation ceremony was a problem and that it needed to be revamped. He involved them in reshaping graduation to elevate its importance. Students and staff met extensively to redesign the graduation ceremony to make it meaningful and serious.

Students started wearing caps and gowns in a more formal atmosphere. The ceremony became a valued occasion for students and parents.

Cotton gradually increased the number of ceremonies that celebrated academic and extracurricular success. These ceremonies were made more formal and structured and were carefully orchestrated to denote the importance of the event. Although he routinely dressed in a coat and tie, Cotton deliberately changed his “uniform” for these ceremonies. He brought a dark suit to school to change into for honors assemblies or evening award ceremonies.

As the school achieved new successes, Cotton related each to the belief in Cherry Creek’s “tradition of excellence.” Bumper stickers were printed stating simply, “Let the tradition continue!” and “The Legend Lives On!” He referred to success as part of a “tradition,” stating, “We traditionally send many seniors East” or “Our football team is traditionally one of the best in the state.” Speaking of routine behavior as “traditional” signaled to others that these were part of a valued pattern-desirable and even inevitable.

The principal used overt school symbols with commitment and pride. An avid jogger, he would not run without the school’s “bruin” on his exercise shoes. He had a set of lapel pins depicting the bruin logo of the school and wore one regularly on his sport coat. In the school, the Cherry Creek bruin is still displayed all around the buildings, on the athletic fields, and in administrative offices. Bumper stickers “advertising” the school or individual activities (the state championship tennis team, for example) are on cars throughout the district.

When the district developed a poster, “Onward to Excellence,” Cotton made a mock poster for the school that read, “Beyond Excellence to Greatness,” which he displayed in his office. The prevalence of these symbols and the pride with which they are worn cement the bonds among school members and communicate school spirit.

Case 2: Integrated, Yearlong Traditions

Bob Herring is principal of the Nativity School in Cincinnati, Ohio. The school is urban and serves a diverse clientele from kindergarten through eighth grade. The principal, along with his staff and the community, keep the seventy-five-year history alive and well by filling the year with ritual and tradition. The beginning and the end of the year have significant, linked ceremonies filled with history and meaning. Interspersed throughout the year, the school connects through smaller, focused traditions.

The beginning of this religiously based school starts before the first day of school. Herring gathers the new eighth graders before school to plan the opening ceremony – one that is deeply tied to the mission of the school. A procession with banners heralding the values of the school starts it. Students deliver readings and reflections on the coming year. All new staff are introduced, from administrators through custodians; they are given a bouquet of flowers and introduced to the community. A band made up of students, alumni, and friends of the school plays music and provides background to the festivities. All new students are asked to come forward – from thirty-five-inch kindergartners to upper-level students – to receive from one of the eighth graders a ceremonial carnation and school button recognizing their membership in the school. The

principal recounts some of the school’s seventy-five-year history, tells about leaders and graduates who have been exemplars, and invites everyone present to become partners with the school in its quest for learning and the right life. The ceremony ends with an environmentally safe balloon launch representing, as the principal says, “We’re here, we’re open, and we’re ready to go!”

The school ends the year with a matching, reinforcing ceremony. Again, the band of students, alumni, and friends plays for the assembled standing-room-only group. Tall, colorful, festive banners signal the core purpose and values of the school. Staff who are leaving are called forward individually for flowers, thanks, and applause. Their contributions are noted and cheered. Prayers of thanks are given to all those who have touched the lives of the students. Staff and parents are thanked for their support and love. The principal and staff look back on the year, recounting stories of caring, of challenges overcome, and of accomplishments achieved. A gospel story is read, reminding students not to hide their talents under a bushel basket. Graduates then talk of what it means to them and how they will use their talents for good and let their light shine in the world. A call to the new eighth graders is given; they are to be leaders and keep the values alive. A procession outside takes participants to a final balloon launch – a symbolic freeing of the hopes, possibilities, and spirit of the new graduates.

Throughout the year rituals and traditions fortify the core values of the school. On Founders’ Day the histories of the early principals and teachers are retold in stories and song. Alumni return to narrate their own memories of Nativity. The school song, written in the 1930s by a student, is sung and pondered. Every monthly faculty meeting is ended by a “Good News Report” – a ritual sharing of positive accomplishments. School assemblies become times for fun and consideration of what everyone is doing to serve each other and the values they uphold. The final faculty meeting is filled with awards for staff: for perseverance through difficult times, for implementing a new tradition, for serving an especially needy student. Each staff member has a story told of his or her contributions that year. These events throughout the year are concluded by a major ceremony in the spring.

The Nativity School leaders make rituals and traditions an important feature of their community. They build commitment and reinforce core values throughout the year while buttressing the culture by powerful ceremonies at the beginning and end of the school term.

Rituals, traditions, and ceremonies make the routines of schools symbolize what is important, valued, and significant. They provide everyone a chance to reflect on what is important, to connect as a community. These are renewing and enriching parts of a school's life. But key cultural values are also reinforced and extended by the school’s history and stories.

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*Architects of Catholic Culture,
Designing & Building Catholic Culture in Catholic Schools*

NCEA Catholic Educational Leadership Monograph Series

Chapter 6

Ritual tradition...

Traditions, ceremonies, customs, and rituals provide meaning to human existence. Some authors distinguish between rituals and ceremonies, treating each separately. They classify rituals as everyday occurrences and ceremonies as special events. In the ensuing discussion, the word “ritual” will serve as an umbrella term dichotomized into “routine” rituals and “ceremonial” rituals.

routine rituals

Because human beings tend to be creatures of habit, “routine rituals” refer to common and repetitive occurrences that people take for granted, oftentimes unconsciously. Despite the routine nature of some rituals – tantamount to “the way we do things around here” (Bower, 1966) – routine rituals perform a valuable cultural function. They serve as token reminders of cultural values and reinforce those values through ordinary human behavior, providing “structure and meaning” (Bolman & Deal, 1997, p. 222).

Catholic culture...

For many people of faith, morning and bedtime prayer as well as prayer before a meal is a routine ritual. For Catholics, the Mass can be a routine ritual in the sense that it is normative for Catholics to attend Mass on Sundays. Other routine rituals include praying the rosary and participating in the Stations of the Cross.

school culture...

Teachers commonly follow routines upon arriving at school. Even though students might not admit it, they engage in routines that provide a sense of security and stability.

School routines can reflect core values. For example, schools that value the individuality of students announce student birthdays. Schools that value student responsibility and participation have students read announcements over the intercom. Schools that have a strict uniform code have routine uniform checks and free dress days to reinforce the uniform’s importance. Schools that place a premium on community begin each day with a morning assembly. Schools that value patriotism begin the day with a school-wide salute to the flag.

Catholic school culture...

Ritual routines in Catholic schools can speak volumes about Gospel values and religious mission. For example, in a Catholic school, the inspiration and rationale for a morning assembly, as well as its content and procedure, can take on a religious

dimension. The goal should not only be to build community but, more so, to build a “faith community.”

If routine rituals can serve to remind people of their culture and its values, then it makes sense that a Catholic school would make prayer as routine as taking attendance. For Catholic schools, St. Paul’s exhortation to the people of Ephesus, “Pray always” (Ephesians. 6:18), is still sound advice. What better way to focus students upon the culture animating the Catholic school than through communal prayer? What better way is there to remind students of God’s presence in their lives than by providing students with a “constant reference to the Gospel and a frequent encounter with Christ” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, #55) through routine rituals of communal prayer? Hopefully, the ritual of praying throughout the school day, connecting daily life and spirituality with ease, will become so routine that graduates will continue to “pray always” long after graduation.

CULTURAL BUILDING PLAN: NURTURE PRAYER AND WORSHIP THROUGH ROUTINE RITUALS

As with any human relationship, one’s relationship with God must be nurtured. With so many concerns competing for attention, however, young people do not always connect their daily life with their spiritual life. The LaSallian tradition of beginning prayers with “Let us remind ourselves that we are in the presence of God” exemplifies a routine ritual through which students center themselves upon God through prayer.

Like St. Paul, who pleaded with early Christian communities to pray, so too, Catholic educational leaders must see to it that every member of the school community, especially students, experience prayer as an integral part of school life.

Praying daily as a school community

Every school day begins at St. Michael School (Greenville, PA) with prayer over the PA system introduced by the principal and led by the students. A prayer list is available for students and teachers to list petitions they would like the community to pray for on that day.

An all-school morning assembly begins each day at St. Mary’s High School (Rutherford, NJ). The principal calls this morning ritual “a wonderful community building time” (M. Lanni, personal communication, January, 1997). During this 20-minute ritual, the school community experiences prayer in a variety of ways: music, dance, drama, and traditional spoken prayer. The cycle of the Church year is presented with appropriate ceremonies and various cultures are celebrated with native prayers and music. All members of the school community participate at different times. Following the ritual, the community recognizes individual birthdays and group successes.

At St. Patrick School (Missouri Valley, IA), the entire school community meets in the main hall each morning and afternoon to pray. During morning prayer, the teachers and students engage in activities including “mini” plays, music, lighting of candles, and

offering food for the food pantry. Morning prayer is so popular that many parents attend. Before students leave school each day, the school community gathers again to pray. The principal writes “We ask that they remember in their prayers that night anyone in our community who needs prayers. Each Friday we send the students home after saying the ‘Guardian Angel Prayer,’ asking them to look over our students throughout the weekend” (M. Anderson, personal communication, January, 1997).

Students at St. Ignatius School (Mobile, AL) recite a daily pledge to remind them of their responsibilities to others: “I believe that Jesus is present in each of my classmates and in my teachers and, therefore, all my actions will show my respect for Jesus.”

Catholic educational leaders should ensure that, at a minimum, each school day begins with prayer.

Classroom prayer

Many Catholic schools begin each class with a prayer, a classroom practice as routine as taking attendance.

Classroom prayer can be as diverse as the classroom community. A prayer can be read by an individual or recited as a group. Some teachers have students stand for prayer; other teachers have students remain seated. As for the prayers, teachers and students can select readings from scripture, traditional prayers like “The Lord’s Prayer,” and “Hail Mary,” religious music, or inspirational religious reading. One Catholic school alumna spoke about a teacher who began each class informally, having students shout “Yeah God!” This alumna added that no matter where she was in the building, she could hear students shout this prayer seven times each day.

At St. Cyril School (Tucson, AZ), teachers use classroom prayer to connect the school with the parish. The principal reports. “Prayer is a very important and an integral part of St. Cyril School. In the classroom, the teachers have a different group of children every hour and they begin each class with a prayer. Each month, the faculty selects a value and a scripture reading that emphasizes the value for use in daily prayer. Each classroom has volunteered to be prayer partners for the parish’s catechumens” (J. Sayre, personal communication, January 1997).

It is important for Catholic educational leaders to recognize that if they are going to require teachers to lead prayer, this requires providing teachers and students tools for prayer. Some principals create a teacher’s notebook of prayers, including prayers for all occasions, the seasons of the Church year, prayers before exams, prayers for Advent, Lent, and Thanksgiving as well as theme prayers for various occasions

Regarding the importance of providing teachers with resources, the principal of St. Cyril School (Tucson, AZ), offers this testimonial:

To help teachers develop prayer time with the children and to guide their own prayer life, I have purchased a book entitled, *Children’s Daily Prayer*, for the school year. Teachers use the book at least once a week to establish prayer as a ritual that the class values and for which the class sets aside a special time. Teachers have told me they feel more confident and

encouraged in their faith and the prayer time together is becoming a very natural part of their class. This time together has raised the awareness of everyone of their need for prayers and that each of them can offer prayer to help one another. (J. Sayre, personal communication, January, 1997)

The more routine and natural Catholic educators can make classroom prayer, the more Catholic educators build Catholic culture. Placing students at such ease with prayer is perhaps the most wonderful gift that Catholic educators can offer students.

School-specific prayers

Some schools invoke their school patron or another special saint at the close of every prayer.

At LaSalle Academy (Providence, RI), most prayers end with “St. John Baptiste de LaSalle, pray for us.” At Cathedral Prep (Erie, PA), prayers commonly end with, “Mary, Queen of Prep, pray for us.” Some schools recite a specific prayer having particular meaning for that school. At St. Ignatius College Prep (San Francisco, CA), students recite St. Ignatius’ “Prayer for Generosity.” This is the first prayer students learn at freshman orientation and it is the last prayer they say at graduation. Similarly, at Mercy High School (Omaha, NE), Venerable Catherine McAuley’s “Suscipe” holds special meaning.

At St. Mary’s School (Waterbury, CT), the principal leads the school community in prayer each morning by praying the Novena to Saint Theresa. According to the principal, “The power of the Novena to Saint Theresa is known throughout the greater Waterbury area as is evidenced by the demand for our Saint Theresa prayer cards and the number of requests for special intentions. Our students and their families are aware that miracles happen every day from saying this Novena. We ask our student body not only to pray for miracles and expect miracles but also to identify miracles. Saint Mary’s has truly witnessed the power of the Novena to the Little Flower over the years” (M. Josephs, personal communication, January, 1997).

For schools not associated with a religious congregation nor with a saint associated with a popular prayer, Catholic educational leaders should engage the school community in identifying a school-specific prayer (Figure II, p. 51).

Figure II
Creating a school prayer

Junipero Serra High School (San Mateo, CA):

Named in honor of Padre Junipero Serra, the Apostle of the Californias (Baja and Alta), Junipero Serra High School was established in 1944 as the Catholic high school for boys in San Mateo County, California. From its beginnings, the school has been staffed by diocesan priests and the laity. In the early 1980s, the school's leaders took two years to formulate a prayer that would solidify the school's Catholic ethos and provide a focus for prayer at Junipero Serra High School. The School's motto, *Etiam si in via moriar; non revertar* ("Even if I die on the way, I'll never go back"), is based on Junipero Serra's personal motto, *Siempre adelante* ("Always forward") and serves as the foundation for the school's prayer.

The Junipero Serra School Prayer

Lord God, from You comes all that is good, all our talents and abilities. Help us develop these gifts, even when it means hard work. Help us face the reality of working together as a community. When necessary, help us deal with pain and disappointment. Be with us in our endeavors. In the spirit of Junipero Serra, let us never give up. Let this dedication in our lives today help us grow in faith, maturity and life for tomorrow. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessed Junipero Serra, Apostle of the California. Pray for us.

Multi-cultural prayer

In view of the fact that universality and inclusivity are considered core Catholic convictions and that Catholicism is not tied to any single culture, every Catholic school should strive to acquaint students with prayer and worship representing more than one culture. For example, St. Mary's Mission School (Red Lake, MN) incorporates Native American traditions into its prayer life. The weekly prayer circle begins with the cleansing ceremony of smudging with sage ritually enacted by the school secretary who is an enrolled member of the Ojibwe tribe. On special occasions, the liturgies include tobacco offered with the petitions and the proclamation of the faith offered in the four directions.

ceremonial rituals

Ceremonial rituals are special events that display and celebrate core values. Ceremonies mark milestones and possess a "sacred quality" whose effect can be potent (Trice & Beyer, 1993, p. 110), especially when replete with pageantry and drama. For their part, Deal and Peterson note that "without expressive events, any culture will die" (1982, p. 63). Furthermore, concerning the importance of ceremony, they assert: "These special

events tie past, present, and future together. They intensify one's commitment to the organization and revitalize for challenges that lie ahead" (1999, pp. 94-95).

Catholic culture...

Celebrations and commemorations characterize the Catholic imagination. Ceremonies punctuate the seasons of the Church year. Most notably, the season of Advent culminates with the celebration of Christmas and the season of Lent culminates with the celebration of the Easter Triduum. The annual May Crowning of the Blessed Virgin Mary is another example of a seasonal Catholic ritual.

Just as ceremony punctuates the seasons of the Church year, so too ceremony punctuates significant milestones in a Catholic's life. Through music, processions, costumes, symbols, drama, and pageantry, the celebration of the seven sacraments communicates the significance of human life by linking the individual with the Church community at the deeper level of meaning, purpose, and shared values.

school culture...

School ceremonies are special events that display and celebrate core values. These ceremonies take the form of pep rallies, science fairs, Christmas pageants, ring ceremonies, sports banquets, academic awards convocations, talent shows, and school plays. What is important in terms of building culture is how school ceremonies reflect cherished ideals.

Without doubt, the school's graduation ceremony is the premier public event at which everything the school treasures occupies center stage. Rich in symbolism and pageantry, a well-orchestrated graduation satisfies the human need for drama and builds commitment and loyalty to the institution and its values.

Catholic school culture...

Since ceremonies indicate what is cherished, it is essential for Catholic schools to connect their ceremonies directly to their religious mission. In other words, religious mission should be communicated loud and clear by means of the witness these ceremonies provide. The degree to which their ceremonies are tied to religious culture speaks volumes about what a Catholic school does or does not value.

CULTURAL BUILDING PLAN: USE CEREMONIAL RITUALS TO SHOWCASE GOSPEL VALUES AND RELIGIOUS MISSION

It is essential that Catholic schools reflect "Gospel culture" and "faith community" that springs from a sacramental view of life. As architects of culture, Catholic educational leaders should incorporate Catholic observances and other religious commemorations into the Catholic school "way of life."

Religious Feasts, Holy Days, and Other Commemorative Ceremonies

The Catholic school year should be punctuated with religious ceremonies and observances that mark special occasions and that align with the liturgical year. In addition to popular feast days such as the Feast of St. Nicholas, principals should consider commemorating feast days of saints who hold special significance for their schools.

Catholic educational leaders should not overlook the May crowning, a traditional Catholic ceremony regaining popularity.

At Villa Maria Academy (Erie, PA), the seniors' final day is called "Mary's Day" and is one of the most revered and anticipated days of the school year. For this day, seniors elect the May Queen, Escort, and members of the May Court.

Not only is Mary's Day a way to honor the patroness of Villa Maria through rituals, Mary's Day honors Mary through loving acts. It is customary on Mary's Day, with students dressed in their best, to send letters of warmth and affirmation to friends, classmates, and teachers. Mary's Day morning begins with a flurry as students deliver their mail to homeroom mailboxes. Next, students attend the Mary's Day all-school assembly.

At the assembly, the senior class bids farewell, presenting a special program. Some seniors share performance pieces. A video highlights the past four years. The assembly concludes with a special song and blessing for the freshmen, sophomores, and juniors along with their leaders. It is an emotional and moving time for the entire student body. Following the assembly, students enjoy a breakfast of home-baked cinnamon rolls and juice, while everyone reads their letters and notes.

The highlight of the day, the May Crowning, follows breakfast. A grotto of flowers adorns Mary's statue on the auditorium stage as the parents and alumni guests fill the auditorium. In the hallways, the entire student body silently forms an honor guard to honor the graduating seniors who process through the darkened halls to the auditorium, silently and reverently carrying lighted candles.

Once all are seated, the members of the May Court – with girls in long white dresses and their escorts in suits and ties – process to the stage for readings from scripture, reflections delivered by the May Queen and Escort, and finally, the crowning ceremony while all sing *Ave Maria*. The ritual concludes as the May Court processes from the auditorium to the gymnasium for a reception.

Multicultural Considerations

Vatican II's emphasis on the cross-cultural nature of the Catholic Church and the duty of Catholics to work toward cultural harmony (Vatican Council II, 1965d/1996, #42) suggests that Catholic educational leaders should make every effort to increase cultural awareness. To that end, principals should take a multicultural approach to commemorating religious feasts and holy days.

Hispanics now represent 37% of the enrollment at St. Patrick School (Wichita, KS). The principal notes: "Each day the community promotes its diversity as a gift and

special opportunity for growth” (D. Wilson, personal communication, January, 1997). The community celebrates at least two Spanish all-school Masses, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadeloupe and *Cinco de Mayo*. To heighten the significance of the Guadeloupe event, Spanish dancers and speakers perform at an assembly. Also, Mariachis provide music at Masses and lunch during the year.

At Christmas time, the St. Cyril School community (Tucson, AZ) celebrates *Las Pasadas*. The entire school community walks to three different houses in the neighborhood, knocking on the doors. Lastly, after knocking on the church door, everyone enters a live nativity scene where the classes sing songs in Spanish, and students present readings in Spanish and English. A Mariachi Band then leads the gathering from the church to the courtyard for a fiesta – featuring dancing, the breaking of piñatas, and a meal.

Prayer for wakes and anniversaries of deaths are central in the life of the Tohono O'odham tribe, the Native American community served by San Xavier Mission School (Tucson, AZ). At wakes and anniversaries of parents and relatives, the principal invites students to be part of the choir. The songs always include Native American melodies using the drum and rattle. Likewise, when the uncle of a student at St. Cyril School (Tucson, AZ) was murdered, the students in grades 5-8 planned a special liturgy for the family. They also purchased a tree that was planted near the church entrance as a symbol of new life.

True to Catholic tradition of marking life's milestones, students at St. Cyril (Tucson, AZ) commemorate wedding anniversaries. At one school liturgy, the grandparents of two students celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary and renewed their marriage vows. The grandchildren were readers and gift bearers and presented their grandparents with flowers. “This was a wonderful sign of the meaning of commitment for all of the children” (I. Sayre, personal communication, January, 1997).

Emphasizing Religious Mission at Graduation and Other School Events

Ceremonies marking milestones in the school year or the lives of students and faculty provide opportunities for Catholic schools to re-connect with their religious mission. This is done intentionally to nurture in students and the school community, too, the integration of faith and life. For instance, it is common for Catholic schools to usher in each new school year with a “Mass of the Holy Spirit,” whereby the school community invokes the Holy Spirit to breathe life into and guide it during the coming school year. In the same vein, some Catholic schools close the school year with a prayer service or Mass of Thanksgiving. Religious themes can also be incorporated into other annual events, like a Ring Ceremony.

At Roncalli High School (Indianapolis, IN), the school community holds prayer services in the fall, winter and spring to commission the student leaders, including captains of the academic teams and athletic teams as well as elected or appointed officers of student organizations. Without a religious emphasis, a school's, secular ceremonies will remain just that – missed opportunities to connect faith and life.

The school community of St. Gabriel School (San Francisco, CA) participates in a cycle of student-planned and student-led liturgies celebrating significant events in the

school year. These include: the opening school Mass with installation of Student Council Officers; Mercy Day, a celebration of St. Gabriel's heritage as a school of the Sisters of Mercy; Grandparents' Day with Thanksgiving Liturgy; the Christmas Story Liturgy on the day of dismissal for the Christmas holidays; the Liturgy of the Stations of the Cross during Holy Week; the Graduation Mass for the student body and families of 8th graders; and, the "Moving Up" ceremony on the last day of school when students give thanks for the blessings of the past year and are greeted by the teachers of the next grade as the class moves to its new place in the church.

Like other school communities, students and faculty at The Prout School (Wakefield, RI) celebrate Spirit Week each year. Punctuated with costumes and special events, Spirit Week gives students and teachers the opportunity to pause and celebrate who they are academically, spiritually, athletically, and creatively. Moreover, the enthusiasm and friendly class competition keeps spirits high as the final quarter of the year begins. The Spirit Week theme bespeaks the school's Catholic heritage and religious mission. For example, one year the theme was "community." The question posed during Spirit Week that year was: "What do *I* do to build up the Prout Community?"

Graduation – A Litmus Test for Religious Culture

Graduation is the capstone ceremonial ritual displaying and celebrating school culture.

In many Catholic schools, graduation ceremonies are aligned with their religious mission. Although some Catholic schools incorporate the graduation ceremony within the context of the Mass, the majority of schools sponsor a religious service, the Baccalaureate Mass, and a separate graduation ceremony. If the latter is the case, it is the duty of the Catholic educational leader – as an architect of Catholic culture – to ensure that the school's Catholic identity is communicated clearly in the graduation ceremony, which most consider the focal event.

Catholic educational leaders can use different aspects of graduation ceremonies to promote the school's religious identity. Take, for example, the procession. It could include a color guard, including a crossbearer, accompanied by U.S., papal, and state flag bearers. Awards can draw attention to the school's religious mission, especially its values (see Chapter 4).

Perhaps no one can better articulate the school's mission than a graduating senior. At Cathedral Prep (Erie, PA), student speakers are chosen based on their ability to describe the school's mission as their graduating class has experienced it. As Adam Trambley stated in his 1989 baccalaureate address:

Yes, we do have immense problems. The task for us graduates is not to get mired in old problems, but to find new solutions. And where will we, the future community, business, political, and moral leaders of our city and country, look for solutions I think the place we need to look for the answers is in the Good News of Jesus Christ. There, Christ tells us that the meek, the merciful, the single-minded, and the peacemakers shall

be blest. There, Jesus tells us to stand up for what is right, whether it means becoming unpopular with the Pharisees or even being crucified. There . . . we are told to be light for the world and salt for the earth, helping to give the message of Christ to the world and thereby helping to transform it.

We should follow the instructions of Pope John Paul II when he tells us to “Love life, respect life in yourself and in others. Give yourself to the service of life, not the work of death.” We must also remember Jesus’ commandment to “Love one another as I have loved you.” If we can do these things, then the American bishops are correct in their optimism when, in *The Challenge of Peace*, they write, “Let us have the courage to believe in a bright future and in a God who wills it for us – not a perfect world, but a better one. Human hands and hearts and minds can create this better world.” (1989, p. 33)

Lastly, the principal could present each graduate with a religious symbol, for example, a Bible, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a statue or picture of Christ or the school’s namesake or patron, or another religious symbol or landmark associated with the school. Likewise, the class advisor could read the background profile of each graduate as the diploma is presented, personalizing the ceremony by celebrating the ways each student exemplified the school’s religious mission.

Through these and many other expressions, Catholic educational leaders – as architects of Catholic culture give prominence to the school’s religious identity in the public drama of graduation.

Chapter Summary

If routine rituals serve as reminders of cultural values and if Catholic school culture is considered a way of life, then it is imperative for Catholic educational leaders – as architects of Catholic culture – to nurture prayer and worship through routine rituals and make them integral to the school’s way of life.

Ceremonial rituals are special episodic events that display and celebrate core values, marking milestones with pageantry and drama. As architects of Catholic culture, Catholic educational leaders should use ceremonial rituals to showcase Gospel values and the school’s religious mission.