

**CARLOW UNIVERSITY'S CATHOLIC, MERCY MISSION AND IDENTITY:
FACULTY, STAFF, AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS**

by

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University of Pittsburgh, 2017

This study explores how current faculty, staff, and students at Carlow University (located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) conceptualize and experience their institution’s Catholic, Mercy mission and identity. Through the use of focus groups, it examines how current stakeholders perceive the University’s mission, define what it means to be a Catholic institution, and experience that unique identity from a “ground-level” perspective. Results suggest that the values and the heritage of Carlow’s founding religious order, the Sisters of Mercy, continue to influence the campus environment in both subtle and profound ways, even as the Sisters themselves occupy increasingly fewer positions in the University, and even as the campus community diversifies, embracing students, faculty, and staff of all religious backgrounds.

The dissertation also provides a broad historical overview of Catholic higher education in the United States, including the modern challenges Catholic universities face as they express their religious identities in an era that is demographically, socially, and legally very different from the one in which they were founded. It explores the conceptual challenges of studying Catholic identity in an institutional context, the difficulties of defining the role of the Catholic university, and the theoretical debates surrounding the goals, standards, and principles of contemporary Catholic higher education.

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DEDICATION

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Catholic higher education in the United States is in a period of transition. From the founding of America's first Catholic college, Georgetown, in 1789 and continuing through the rise of the modern research university, Catholic institutions of higher learning have often struggled to define their collective identity within an American culture dominated by values and standards sometimes at odds with their own. Typically founded to serve the needs of Irish, Italian, and eastern European immigrants at a time when such students could be unwelcome at more mainstream institutions, Catholic colleges and universities sought to preserve a distinctive, Euro-centric sub-culture within a country that was gradually distancing itself from the Old World. For over two centuries, the colleges have attempted a delicate balancing act – defining themselves as alternatives to the dominant Protestant and public institutions that came to define American higher education, while at the same time competing directly with those institutions for students and faculty, and holding themselves accountable to accreditation standards set by that dominant group. Pulled in two directions at once, they sought to preserve the traditions of their faith while simultaneously meeting the economic needs of an emerging Catholic middle class that, more and more, sought to carve its own niche in American capitalism and assimilate into American society. This dichotomy has resulted in a rich, ongoing debate (as old as the colleges themselves) about the nature of Catholic higher education – what it can be, and what it should be, in the context of the American system.

1.1 CHALLENGES FACING CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES TODAY

At the turn of the twentieth century, virtually all Catholic colleges were small, single-sex, undergraduate institutions owned by the Church, populated primarily by Catholic students, and managed on shoestring budgets by staffs composed almost entirely of resident priests and nuns (Gleason, 1995; Power, 1972). By the turn of the twenty-first century, most of those same institutions had become modern universities in every sense – coeducational, with comprehensive graduate and professional programs and religiously diverse student bodies. This dramatic shift was characterized by several key developments.

1.1.1 Ownership and management changes

Empowered by the modernizing reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which called for more lay leadership in Catholic institutions, most colleges legally separated from their founding dioceses or religious orders by the end of the 1970s and incorporated under their own boards of trustees (Gleason, 1995). Although their Catholic affiliations remained in place, their civil relationship to the Church went from one of direct ownership to cooperative co-existence, as most colleges became independent in the eyes of the state and assumed legal control of campuses and buildings that until then had been Church property. This reform was necessary given the complexity of managing a modern university – which required more than part-time attention by Church officials also responsible for overseeing large networks of hospitals, parishes, orphanages, and other charities – but it was nonetheless a significant transition. In many cases, Catholic campuses had been owned and operated by the local diocese or religious order for more than a century, with school buildings constructed seamlessly

alongside monasteries, churches, and convents. While those religious buildings typically remained the property of the Church after the 1970s, they became awkward doughnut holes on campuses that were otherwise financially and administratively separate. Circumstances varied, but college presidents, who until then were usually appointed by local bishops or religious superiors, were now elected by (predominantly lay) boards of trustees. Having maintained direct clerical control much longer than most Protestant institutions (Marsden, 1994), Catholic colleges began to experiment with ways to maintain their mission and identity voluntarily without relying on direct lines of ownership and management from the institutional Church.

1.1.2 Dilution of clerical staff

Post-World War II increases in enrollment rendered the small teaching staffs of most Catholic colleges inadequate overnight, necessitating the hiring of many lay faculty and administrators. This group came to include large numbers of non-Catholics, who now represent a large portion of the faculty at many institutions (Sullins 2004; Whitney & Laboe, 2014). At the same time, a dramatic decrease in religious vocations has significantly reduced the number of priests and nuns serving in higher education, further diluting the presence of the founding religious orders on campus. Between 1965 and 2016, the total number of priests in the United States decreased from 58,632 to 37,192, while the number of nuns fell even more dramatically from 179,954 to 47,170. During that same 60-year period, total enrollment at Catholic colleges and universities increased from 409,471 to 776,473 even as closures and mergers reduced the number of colleges by about a third (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2016).

As dramatic as those numbers are, they actually understate the resource problem, since many of the living priests and nuns included in the statistics above are already beyond retirement

age and are no longer in active ministry. This jarring personnel shortage drastically changed the face of Catholic schools' faculty and staff in a single generation, affecting everything from the classroom to the president's office. Only twelve of the 72 Catholic college presidents who newly took office between 2014 and 2016 were ordained priests or members of a vowed religious order (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2016).

1.1.3 A changing market

While the total number of Catholics in the United States has increased from approximately 45 million to approximately 70 million over the past 60 years (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2016), many of those Catholics have begun to vote with their feet, with second-and third-generation US citizens frequently choosing to attend non-Catholic schools (Levine, 1986). Once unwelcome at some of the nation's elite private institutions, Catholics today have moved more squarely into the American mainstream, abandoning their ethnic ghettos and more fully pursuing the postwar dream of middle-class life (Hendershott, 2009; Rodden, 2012). This demographic change led many Catholics to see less value in Catholic education at all levels, resulting in the closure of many elementary and secondary schools that once fed into Catholic universities (Levine, 1986; Schuttloffel, 2012). Historically dependent on tuition to cover their operating costs (and having been slow to see the need to build their endowments because of their longtime reliance on clerical staff who worked for room and board), many colleges have been forced to expand their reach and actively recruit non-Catholic students (Gleason, 1995; Marsden, 1994). The increasing diversity on campus has been exacerbated by the increasing diversity of American society as a whole, particularly in the urban communities that many Catholic institutions serve.

1.1.4 Accreditation and government regulation

During the twentieth century, many of the curricular distinctions of Catholic universities began to fade. Pressure from accrediting agencies led many Catholic colleges to reduce their standard undergraduate plan of study from six years to four. Institutions that once focused exclusively on teaching suddenly began to pay attention to the research qualifications of their faculty, establish traditional tenure systems, and (given how few Catholic graduate schools existed), hire faculty who had earned PhDs at secular universities (Power, 1972). Attempts to establish alternative, Catholic accrediting bodies generally failed (Gleason, 1995). Meanwhile, the need to seek federal funding in all of its forms, from the Montgomery G.I. Bill to Pell Grants and Stafford Loans, brought additional government oversight. Federal laws prohibiting Church-state sponsorship nudged many Catholic schools to downplay their religious nature, arguing that their missions were primarily educational and fundamentally indistinguishable from those of most secular universities (Hendershott, 2009).

1.1.5 Mission ambiguity

Such arguments must have seemed purely technical at a time when Catholics made up large majorities of the students and faculty, but they took on new meaning in the late twentieth century, as Catholic schools became better established in American academia. Having been successful in their efforts to secure government funding and full accreditation, the schools now had to reflect on what their Catholic identity actually meant amid increasing alignment with secular educational norms. Unfortunately, the precise goals and characteristics of Catholic education, apart from educating Catholics in the context of their culture, were seldom well-

defined. Each religious order tended to emphasize different components of Catholic culture, like the Benedictines (monasticism), Dominicans (preaching), Franciscans (poverty), and Jesuits (evangelization). All of these elements were equally Catholic and equally legitimate, but how they should translate into the classroom was always left to the individual communities. Diversity within the Church led to diverse expressions of Catholic culture and tradition.

Meanwhile, the Vatican hierarchy provided relatively little guidance, often stepping in only to condemn excesses or reforms. Church officials at various times criticized the universities for straying too far from their Catholic roots, attacked trends like coeducation, and attempted to shut down academic programs that were seen as secular American fads. In 1927, Jesuit General Wlodimire Ledochowski, SJ,¹ in Rome ordered all American Jesuit schools to restrict their deans' offices to practicing Catholics; Gleason notes, "With the best will in the world, the American Jesuit superiors could not have followed the most rigorous of these guidelines. There were simply not enough Catholic professors and administrators to fill all the positions" (1995, p. 178). Faced with impossible directives from Rome even as they attempted to preserve and promote Roman values to a generation of American immigrants, and torn between the Church's educational ideals and the pragmatic needs of students from the American working class, Catholic educational leaders were servants of multiple masters in much of the twentieth century and struggled to agree on any long-term theory or pedagogy to unify their practice (Byrne, 2004).

¹ A member of a Catholic religious order customarily writes the order's initials after his or her name. Jesuits use the post-nominal, "SJ," meaning, "Society of Jesus." Other post-nominals that will be used in this document are CSC (Congregation of the Holy Cross or *Congregatio a Sancta Cruce*), and RSM (Religious Sisters of Mercy).

1.1.6 Summary

All of these pressures – the changing economic needs of American Catholics, the shortage of priests and nuns, unclear or unrealistic directives from Rome, the increasing size and complexity of the universities, the newfound diversity on campus, and the need to conform to standards set by the federal government and accrediting bodies – have forced Catholic institutions to reflect seriously about what makes their missions distinctive, and how best to live out their Catholic identity in the context of modern American society. A university's Catholic identity could be taken for granted when campus life consisted of daily Mass and classrooms full of single-sex Catholic students under the watchful eye of a priest, monk, or nun. This scenario exists in living memory for many Catholic school alumni. Today, after several generations of rapid change, many colleges and universities are asking difficult questions about what it means to have a Catholic identity when so much of what once seemed to define Catholic education has evolved so quickly. The purpose of this study is to explore how this complex phenomenon has taken shape, and continues to evolve, in the perceptions of key stakeholders at one particular Catholic university.

1.2 THE CASE STUDY: CARLOW UNIVERSITY

Carlow University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania is, in many respects, a typical Catholic university. Urban, located in an industrial northeastern city, and originally founded to serve the daughters of Catholic immigrants drawn by the city's booming labor market, it is today a modern, coeducational university. At the time of this study, it is home to a diverse student body

of 1,407 undergraduates (across one campus and two satellite centers) and 847 graduate students, along with 97 full-time faculty organized into three distinct colleges. Approximately 34% of its current students self-identify as Catholic (Carlow University, 2016). Affiliated with the Sisters of Mercy, one of the largest and most influential Catholic women's religious orders in the United States, Carlow inaugurated its first lay president (Dr. Mary Hines) in 2005, just one year after achieving university status. The current president, Dr. Suzanne K. Mellon, took office in 2013 as only the second executive in University history who is not a member of the founding religious order (Carlow University, n.d.).

1.2.1 Origins and history

Carlow's history reads like a case study in the development of a typical Catholic women's college. Although many Catholic men's and women's schools existed side-by-side on adjacent campuses throughout the 1800s, only the men's colleges were originally accredited to grant bachelor's degrees, whereas the women's schools would best be described as high schools or finishing schools (Power, 1972). Some of these girls' high schools gradually evolved into colleges, as ambitious groups of nuns sought their own accreditation in an effort to provide greater opportunities for their female students. The first all-female institution to elevate itself to collegiate status was the College of Notre Dame in Baltimore, Maryland in 1895 (Power, 1972). During the next 50 years, dozens of Catholic girls' schools nationwide would follow that precedent and would add two- or four-year degree options to the end of their high school curricula. Comfortably within this timeframe, Carlow University was founded in 1929 as an outgrowth of Our Lady of Mercy Academy, a girls' elementary/high school operated by the

Sisters of Mercy at their motherhouse in Pittsburgh's Oakland neighborhood (Carlow University, n.d.).

In a sense, the institution that became Carlow University is inseparable from the broader history of the Sisters of Mercy in the Diocese of Pittsburgh and the United States. The Sisters first came to the United States from Carlow, Ireland in 1843 at the invitation of Irish-born Bishop Michael O'Connor, who sought their support as he took office as the first bishop of the newly established Diocese of Pittsburgh. Diocesan records show that a school for girls, St. Mary's Academy, was one of the very first Pittsburgh ministries opened by that intrepid, original group of seven Sisters in 1844 (Carlow University, n.d.; Diocese of Pittsburgh, n.d.).

From that early foothold in western Pennsylvania, the Sisters of Mercy would establish a presence in dozens of American cities, including a network of 15 women's colleges (most now coeducational) and one college of health sciences that remain under their sponsorship today (Conference for Mercy Higher Education, n.d.). In Pittsburgh, the Sisters continually expanded throughout the nineteenth century, establishing iconic local institutions like Mercy Hospital to minister to the city's growing immigrant populations. In 1894, they purchased the land that would eventually become Carlow's campus in Oakland for the purpose of building a new motherhouse and a new home for their historic St. Mary's Academy (by then renamed Our Lady of Mercy Academy). After opening their college division in 1929 (originally under the name Mount Mercy College), the Sisters continued to sponsor both college and prep divisions on the grounds of their motherhouse until grades 7-12 were moved off-campus in 1963. Our Lady of Mercy Academy would ultimately close in 1979, but the elementary division (now known as the Campus School of Carlow University and enrolling students in grades pre-K-8) shares the

University campus to this day (Diocese of Pittsburgh, n.d.; Sheila Carney, personal communication, January 26, 2017).

Like many Catholic women's colleges, Mount Mercy College was always in close proximity to a men's institution (Duquesne University) with which it would eventually compete for students. Also like many women's colleges, it became technically coeducational in the 1940s, when the Montgomery G.I. Bill opened the door to hundreds of local men returning from war. However, even after changing its name to Carlow College in 1969,² the young institution continued to advertise itself as "women-centered" institution – a term that remained in use in University publications well into this decade, but has since been de-emphasized following the most recent round of strategic planning (Carlow University, 2015). Nonetheless, Carlow has retained much of its original character with a student body that is approximately 86% female (Carlow University, 2016).

It has also, significantly, retained its independence. History shows that the fate of Catholic women's colleges was rarely secure; in many cases, women's colleges found themselves unable to compete for students after neighboring, better-recognized men's colleges became coeducational in the 1960s and 1970s. A number of women's colleges closed, merged, or simply returned to their roots as high schools in the latter half of the 1900s. Carlow's sister institution, Mercy College of Detroit, merged with the Jesuit-affiliated University of Detroit in 1990, with the resulting institution thereafter known as the University of Detroit Mercy. Similar mergers took place in Los Angeles (resulting in Loyola Marymount University), Chicago (where DePaul University and Loyola University, respectively, absorbed Barat College and Mundelein

² The name change helped to distinguish Carlow from another Mount Mercy College located in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and also paid homage to the Irish town from which the seven pioneer Sisters of Mercy came to Pittsburgh in 1843.

College), and Erie, Pennsylvania (where the former Villa Maria College now exists as the Villa Maria School of Nursing within Gannon University), to name but a few.³ Nor was this a uniquely Catholic phenomenon; other mergers like Brown-Pembroke, Harvard-Radcliffe, and Tulane-Newcomb took place in the twentieth century for much the same reason. Carlow's survival as an independent institution for nearly 90 years speaks to the quality of its leadership and the resilience of its campus community.

1.2.2 Modern challenges

Most importantly for the purposes of this study, Carlow has, like all Catholic universities, faced difficult questions about its modern mission and identity. While the motherhouse of the Sisters of Mercy still watches over the campus, only a small handful of the Sisters in residence play an official role on the faculty or staff. As is the case in nearly all modern Catholic universities, much of the day-to-day decision making is in the hands of the current lay leadership, and while Sisters hold five of the 34 seats on Carlow's board of trustees (Carlow University, 2017), their overall presence on campus is less ubiquitous than in the past.

Statistics for the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh tell a valuable story about Carlow's local context. In terms of sheer numbers, the Catholic population of Pittsburgh has dwindled over the past 15 years despite overall growth in the Catholic population of the United States (a statistic that reflects a surge of Hispanic immigrants in the south and west more than it reflects growth in Carlow's region):

³ Sources: DePaul University (2001); Gannon University Alumni Association (n.d.); Loyola Marymount University (n.d.); Loyola University Chicago (n.d.); University of Detroit Mercy (n.d.).

Table 1.1. Number of Catholics and percent change, 2000-2015

	United States	Diocese of Pittsburgh ⁴
Total Catholics, 2015	71,128,395	633,117
% Change, 2000-2015	+14%	-16%

Source: Smith (2015)

The 16% decline in the number of nominal Catholics in Pittsburgh belies an even sharper decline in the number of practicing Catholics who educate their children in Catholic schools and participate in major religious milestones. The table below traces the change, between 2000 and 2015, in the numbers of practicing Catholics who participate in some key elements of their faith, nationally and locally:

Table 1.2. Percent change in US Catholics participating in faith milestones, 2000-2015

	United States	Diocese of Pittsburgh
Infant Baptisms	-31%	-47%
Church Marriages	-43%	-53%
Catholic Elementary School Enrollment	-32%	-46%
Confirmations	-8%	-31%

Source: Smith (2015)

⁴ The Diocese of Pittsburgh includes Allegheny, Beaver, Butler, Greene, Lawrence, and Washington Counties in Pennsylvania. A portion of the Pittsburgh metro area, including Armstrong, Fayette, and Westmoreland Counties, is part of the neighboring Diocese of Greensburg.

As a result, Carlow, like many northeastern and Midwestern Catholic universities, has seen a sharp decline in the local population it was originally founded to serve. Although Carlow has always welcomed students of all faiths, it filled a crucial niche early in its history by providing Catholic, working-class women with access to a college education that was otherwise unavailable to them locally. Today, there is no longer a large pipeline of Catholic students who attend Catholic elementary schools, secondary schools, and colleges in succession – and members of that core audience no longer view schools like Carlow as their only realistic option for a college degree. A mobile student population with increasingly limited exposure to Catholic tradition presents many Catholic institutions with a recruitment challenge that would have been inconceivable at the time of their founding. While northeastern Catholic universities could, in theory, attempt to recruit heavily among the new Catholic immigrants in the south and west, this kind of investment would require resources that small, private institutions often do not have. As such, Carlow is, in a sense, forced to reinvent itself in service to the modern population of the Pittsburgh region while keeping an eye on its traditions, learning how to blend its heritage and its modern imperatives.

1.2.3 Modern initiatives

In recent years, Carlow has taken a step that is increasingly common at Catholic universities, creating an administrative position specifically to manage issues related to mission and identity. Job titles vary by institution, but most are known as “Vice President for Mission” or some equivalent (Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, 2014b). At Carlow, the position is known as Special Assistant to the President for Mercy Heritage and Service, and was endowed by a gift from the Sisters of Mercy in 2007 (Carlow University, 2015). Sheila Carney,

RSM is the first (and so far, only) individual ever to hold this position. As such, she is part of a vanguard of newly appointed administrators at Catholic universities specifically tasked with maintaining an identity that used to be taken for granted, proactively initiating programs that preserve the institution's heritage. In this way, Carlow not only faces typical challenges, but has begun to engage in what is becoming a typical response.

In its 2015 *Mission Accountability Self-study and Peer Review*, Carlow states:

While founded specifically to provide a Catholic education for women, the University's embrace of its Catholic identity has grown less overt over the years. This can be attributed to a number of factors including a period of time when campus ministry emphasized an ecumenical approach over our primary identity. More recently, the approach has been to value and support the spiritual journey of each person while claiming our primary identity as Catholic. The population of the University is no longer predominantly Catholic. Of those students who do indicate a religious preference, 30% identify as Catholic. Surveys of college age students and numerous articles on this topic reveal a generation which articulates an attraction to spirituality which, for them, does not include religious practice (Carlow University, 2015, p. 5).

The ambiguity expressed in the above passage – which captures the challenge of adapting tradition to current campus needs – is at the heart of this study. Sr. Sheila Carney and her fellow administrators must decide how to fully embrace Carlow's historic identity as a Catholic women's college while remaining welcoming to the many non-Catholics (and non-women) who today call it home. As the quote above illustrates, the best way to accomplish this goal has not always been clear. Over the past several decades, like most Catholic schools, Carlow has experimented with various strategies in an attempt to find its proper place in the Church and in

civil society, sometimes choosing what aspects of its Catholic identity ought to be preserved, adapted, or de-emphasized. The lessons we can learn from Catholic universities as they engage in this soul searching, often with no blueprint or precedent to guide their efforts, is a subject worthy of study and can help to shape our overall understanding of university mission and identity. How Carlow has approached these challenges, and how those efforts have been perceived by its major internal stakeholders, will be the focus of the following discussion.

2.0 FRAMING THE INQUIRY

2.1 BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

The broad background questions motivating this study are: What does it mean to be a Catholic university in America today? How can a Catholic university best express its religious mission while remaining welcoming and open to the cultural pluralism that characterizes this country? What can a Catholic university do to distinguish its mission and identity from those of non-Catholic schools, while still competing with those schools for faculty and students and offering quality academic programs that are widely respected – even outside of Catholic circles?

As will be illustrated in Chapters 4 and 5, these broad questions have generated significant scholarly debate. While it is tempting to assume that this debate is new to our generation, it has, in fact, been present in American Catholic education for over two centuries. The rapid changes since the 1960s have certainly reframed the questions and added new dimensions to them, but, as will be shown, the questions themselves have been part of the Catholic experience since the very beginnings of the Church's educational experiment in the United States.

2.2 RESEARCH QUESTION: PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research project is not an attempt to answer these broad questions definitively, or at all. A single dissertation cannot hope to resolve such complex issues. Instead, the purpose of this study is to explore how these issues have manifested themselves in the case of one institution – Carlow University – and how the current stakeholders on the Carlow campus view the University’s efforts to maintain its Catholic mission and identity. In short, this study seeks to understand not simply what Carlow is doing to define itself as a Catholic university, but how the key members of the campus community (faculty, staff, and students) *perceive, conceptualize, and experience* those efforts, along with the overall mission. How do ground-level stakeholders conceptualize Carlow’s contemporary mission, and how are they reacting to what the University administration has done to shape, frame, and define that mission?

The choice of words, “Faculty, Staff, and Student Perceptions,” in the title of this study is deliberate. An argument could be made to replace that title with what might be a more common phrase, “Faculty, Staff, and Student Perspectives,” but “perspectives” are not precisely what this study hopes to explore. It is not simply seeking to understand the points of view of the internal stakeholders; its purpose is not to ask those constituents what they think about Carlow’s mission, or whether they approve of it. Rather, given the complex and multifaceted nature of Catholic identity and the various ways that identity can be defined in the context of higher education, this study seeks to understand how internal stakeholders “perceive” and conceptualize the mission in this particular institutional setting. What about Carlow’s mission do they understand to be distinctive from the missions of non-Catholic institutions? What parts of their experience on campus reflect that mission tangibly? What elements of campus life shape their personal understanding and execution the mission?

In short, this study explores how common, universal questions about the nature of Catholic identity have played themselves out in one particular (if fairly typical) Catholic university, and how the people at the center of that institution actually perceive, conceptualize, and experience those issues from the ground level.

2.3 RESEARCH CHALLENGES: MEASUREMENT

As will be shown in the review of literature in Chapter 5, much has been written from a philosophical and theoretical point of view about what it means to be a Catholic university today. The debates are nuanced and even contentious, often subtle, and occasionally contradictory as scholars offer their own ideas about everything from the ideal Catholic curriculum to residential life (see particularly Briel [2009] and Heft [2009]).

In this environment, any reader who searches the academic literature for a clear, universal checklist of characteristics that define Catholic education will be disappointed. With as many interpretations of Catholic identity as there are institutions, it can be difficult to judge objectively how well a university is living out its Catholic mission. In an American educational culture accustomed to evaluation, accountability, and assessment, this ambiguity can be frustrating to some scholars. Those who have attempted to measure Catholicity on campus inevitably must make controversial value judgments about what to measure and how to define the educational goals of an ideal Catholic university. Sanders (2010) explains why a meaningful evaluation of a Catholic university's mission effectiveness can seem impossible:

While it will be relatively easy to catalog *what* sponsoring bodies and individual colleges and universities have done to promote the preservation and transmission of

(institutional identity), it will be more difficult – if not impossible – to determine whether their efforts have actually had the desired effect. Documenting financial resources spent on efforts and programs to preserve and transmit charisms and counting how many people participated in them would be fairly straightforward. Neither of these is an outcome; rather, both are inputs. Yet, while it is possible to survey people about their attitudes and behaviors, determining whether real attitudinal or behavioral change has actually taken place is more difficult. Thus, attempts to engage in best practices that measure the success of preserving and transmitting (institutional) charisms are fraught with daunting methodological difficulties (p. 16).

Sanders (2010) concludes that, in the absence of any meaningful way to measure the effectiveness of their “inputs,” the best thing that Catholic universities can hope to do, for all practical purposes, is to share ideas and strategies with each other in the hope that some might emerge as “best practices” that translate across campuses. Only “inputs” can be easily learned and shared, while “outcomes” remain elusive and difficult to understand.

2.4 SITUATING THE STUDY

2.4.1 “Best practice” case studies

For all of these reasons, many peer-reviewed articles on Catholic identity tend to be of an anecdotal, case-study nature, in which scholars seek to share experiences from their own campuses without engaging in much rigorous evaluation. Some examples include:

- Flanagan (2010), which described the core curriculum revision process at two Catholic colleges.
- Gleinster Roberts (2008), which explained how one course at Duquesne University successfully incorporated community service as a curriculum requirement.
- Sanders and Clough (2011), which provided tips on inexpensive mission-related activities that St. Xavier University has pursued on a minimal budget.
- Whitney and Laboe (2014), which detailed the authors' personal experiences in coming to understand the Vincentian charism at DePaul University through University-sponsored professional development programs.

Likewise, Catholic colleges have shared best practices outside of the pages of academic journals. James and Estanek (2012) describe a handbook that they developed for student affairs professionals at Jesuit universities. The Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) surveyed member institutions about the role of vice presidents for mission on their campuses, publishing the results for benchmarking purposes (Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, 2014b). Georgetown University hosted an AJCU Human Resources and Benefits Conference over two days in October, 2014, bringing together human resource officers from many Jesuit universities (Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, 2014a). All of these efforts are positive and necessary, but they lack the evaluative rigor often associated with education scholarship.

2.4.2 Empirical/measurement/evaluation studies

In spite of the challenges, some scholars have tried to find ways, if not to measure the Catholicity of a campus, at least to measure some “outcomes” and stakeholder perceptions of it. The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities is in the process of developing a survey instrument known as “Catholic Identity and Mission Assessment,” or CIMA, which, as of this writing, is still in beta-testing and not available to the public (Alexandra Bradley, personal communication, April 4, 2016). Peer-reviewed articles have tended to approach this daunting task on a very limited scale, often focusing on only one or two specific Catholic campuses. Some examples:

- Bolduc (2009) surveyed students at four Catholic colleges on their own religious practices and opinions on Church teaching.
- Ferrari, Bottom, and Matteo (2014) conducted a rigorous survey at two Catholic colleges, exploring whether Catholics felt a stronger sense of community on campus than did non-Catholics.
- Ferrari and Janulis (2009) surveyed faculty and staff at DePaul University in attempt to understand whether their employment status and personal religious identity affected their perceptions of DePaul’s mission-related activities.
- Kender (2000) developed a 52-point “values list” survey designed to measure how well values and priorities of students, faculty, and staff coincided with Catholic teaching at Allentown College of St. Francis DeSales (now DeSales University). The instrument was used in the College’s own self-assessment and strategic planning.

- King (2014) surveyed students at St. Vincent College to explore how they perceived the College’s Catholic identity, and whether that perception was shaped most by their experiences in the residence halls, the classrooms, co-curricular activities, or student conduct policies.

A handful of scholars have been even more ambitious, measuring and analyzing attitudes and “outcomes” across multiple campuses and multiple timeframes. Boylan (2015) compared student perceptions of mission at 59 Catholic and 24 independent private colleges; Sullins (2004) measured the employment and tenure rates of Catholic faculty at Catholic institutions nationwide. Tellingly, both of these studies used secondary data obtained from existing surveys, and did not attempt original data collection on the Herculean scale that would have been necessary to conduct such studies from scratch. Similarly, Gray and Cidade (2010) utilized secondary data from UCLA’s annual College Student Beliefs and Values survey, comparing longitudinal results over four years (2004-2007) to explore whether Catholic colleges change their students’ opinions on key moral issues over time.

All of these studies exist in mild contrast to Sanders’s (2010) statement that evaluating the “outcomes” of Catholic identity and mission is almost impossible – but they also stand as clear witness to her assertion that those “outcome”-based studies will inevitably be challenging, time-consuming, and limited in scope.

2.4.3 Where this study fits and what it contributes

As a contribution to this line of inquiry, this study fits most neatly alongside Ferrari and Janulis (2009), Kender (2000), and King (2014) in that it seeks to understand stakeholder

perceptions of mission within a single university campus setting. Like a majority of articles on this topic, it uses a case study approach in the hope that understanding one university's experience can be illustrative to other universities facing similar challenges, perhaps revealing some best practices in the process. It also attempts to fill some important gaps in the literature.

2.4.3.1 Filling a methodological gap

Sanders (2010) is correct that much of the scholarly work on this topic will inevitably be anecdotal in nature, focusing on “inputs” rather than “outcomes.” However, even within the group of ambitious studies that try to address this problem and fill the “outcome” gap, there is an equally important “methodological” gap. Virtually all of the published articles that focus on the experiences and perceptions of Catholic university students, faculty, and staff use *surveys* as the primary means of data collection. Surveys have obvious benefits in that they can quickly collect large amounts of quantitative data, which can be useful for measuring the range of opinions on large campuses. However, they are also largely impersonal, and require the researcher to make value judgments in advance about what concepts to measure – essentially, about what concepts constitute Catholic identity.

Relatively little has been done so far to study Catholic identity – a multifaceted and nuanced concept – in a way that uses appropriately multifaceted and nuanced data. Focus groups, rather than surveys, are particularly good at capturing such data; they give participants an opportunity to describe university mission in their own words, perhaps identifying concepts and points of emphasis that a researcher might never anticipate when designing a standardized survey. Despite these benefits, focus groups are conspicuously absent as a methodology in much of the existing work. Perhaps this is because, in the words of Sanders and Clough (2011), many Catholic universities are “resource-challenged” (p. 221) and lack the ability to conduct intensive,

time-consuming research projects. With many competing priorities and small staffs, Catholic university administrators might find it more feasible to spend their limited time developing surveys that can be sent to thousands of people electronically, rather than investing many weeks into organizing, conducting, and transcribing focus groups for every important constituency. (Anecdotally, when I approached Carlow University to seek permission to conduct this study, I was told that the University had always hoped to do such a study on its own, if only it could have found the time.)

It is precisely because of the time-consuming nature of focus groups that this method yields such rich and detailed qualitative data. For a study that seeks to understand how stakeholders perceive and conceptualize university mission, focus groups are a very useful data collection method. As Mertens (2005) writes,

The focus group interaction allows the exhibition of a struggle for understanding how others interpret key terms and their agreement or disagreements with the issues raised. They can provide evidence of ways that differences are resolved and consensus built (p. 245).

More will be said about the virtues of focus groups in Chapter 6. For now, the important consideration is that they represent an important methodological gap in the literature that this study attempts to fill.

2.4.3.2 Filling a substantive gap

Substantively, the study also hopes to take advantage of the particular strengths of focus groups by gathering data from those who are “in the trenches” of Catholic education, focusing on the perceptions of faculty, staff, and students rather than on those of high-level administrators. Much of the “best practice” literature (i.e., James and Estanek, 2012; Sanders and Clough, 2011)

emphasizes top-down strategies that can be used by managers to encourage appreciation for a school's Catholic identity. Few case studies explore how members of the campus community actually perceive those "inputs," and virtually none have done so through the richness of focus groups.

As a final point, it should be noted that, while this study hopes to understand the "outcomes" of Catholic identity in a meaningful way, it is not a true "evaluation" of those outcomes. The purpose of this study is not to pass judgment on how "Catholic" Carlow University is, or how successful it has been in achieving its mission-related goals. As Mertens (2005) defines it, "Evaluation refers to the process of determining the merit, worth, or value of something, or the product of that process" (p. 47). While this study has some of the methodological characteristics of an evaluation, it does not attempt to impose a one-size-fits-all definition of Catholic identity on Carlow, or judge how well the University meets a specific standard of Catholicity. Nor does this study attempt to prove a pre-existing hypothesis about Catholic identity at Carlow or elsewhere. Rather, its purpose is purely to understand how that identity is expressed and conceptualized by those who experience it every day, not expecting that there is a "right" or "wrong" way to do so. Given the many diverse ways that Catholic identity can be defined in an institutional setting, this is the most appropriate goal of any "outcomes"-based study.

In sum, by approaching the topic with an open mind, this study hopes to build off of existing empirical studies by contributing a little-used method of data collection, and hopes to follow a long tradition in the literature of using individual case studies to illustrate universal problems and their potential solutions. Chapter 6 will explain the study's research design and methods in detail.

3.0 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL CONSTRUCTS

This study makes use of a number of theoretical constructs that should be defined and identified. Categorizing and labeling those concepts can, however, be challenging. As a field, the serious academic study of Catholic universities and their missions is arguably still in its early stages; although the key questions have been debated for over a century, scholarly articles on the subject do not begin to appear in earnest until the 1970s, shortly after Vatican II. Even then, published work amounts to a trickle until the 1990s, leaving only about 20 years' worth of studies from which to meaningfully draw. The various perspectives on this topic have not yet coalesced into identifiable schools of thought; scholars cannot easily situate their work into a "Chicago School" or a "Berkeley School," as in other fields like monetary economics.

Instead, generally speaking, scholarship on this topic can roughly be categorized as "traditionalist" or "progressive" (my terms). Some "traditionalist" scholars take the view that Catholic universities have "sold out" to the needs of the secular academy, losing their distinctive identity and turning their backs on the Church that nurtured them. These authors tend to advocate a return to the "good old days" when Catholic institutions existed primarily as citadels of Western culture, and when religious practice was incorporated unapologetically into the classroom (Briel, 2012; Hendershott, 2009; Morey and Piderit, 2006; Schuttlofel, 2012). Scholars in the "progressive" camp are not true opposites of the traditionalists, since both groups tend to care deeply about Catholic education, and hardly any scholars have argued publicly that

Catholic colleges should abandon their religious identities. Nor do progressives necessarily see the Catholic culture on campus as doomed to irrelevance; they simply accept that the nature of Catholic education has changed, and they try to identify ways in which it can evolve pragmatically while maintaining its core values, whatever those are defined to be (Currie, 2011; Penzenstadler, 2000; Porth, McCall, and DiAngelo, 2012).

3.1 DISTINGUISHABILITY AND INHERITABILITY

At the heart of both theoretical perspectives is the notion of distinguishability – the idea that Catholic education should be somehow identifiably different from other types of education – and inheritability – the notion that that distinctiveness can be passed on to each new generation of faculty, staff, and students (Sheridan, 2007). Morey and Piderit (2006) first introduce the concepts in this way, describing them as the “minimum conditions necessary” (p. 31) for any organization to maintain its organizational culture (*italics in original*):

Distinguishability, defined as the readily apparent differences between a specific culture and other competing cultures, is a necessary condition for a vibrant culture. So, too, is *inheritability*, or the ways of acting in a specific culture that assure authentic cultural assimilation by new groups that enter the culture. Clearly, distinguishability and inheritability are intimately related. If an organization’s culture cannot be distinguished by new actors joining the institution, there is no hope that these new actors will be formed or socialized by it. In fact, in an indistinguishable culture, it is more likely that the process will work in reverse with the content and symbols of the culture eventually being influenced by these new actors (p. 31).

Both traditionalists and progressives agree that Catholic schools should be distinct, and sustainably so; they simply disagree on the appropriate means to those ends - whether it is best to turn back the clock and submit to strict ecclesial oversight (Sheridan, 2011) or to incorporate broad Catholic values subtly into campus life (Sanders and Clough, 2010). The two camps also occasionally disagree on *what* should distinguish Catholic education, and whether it is most important to teach students *about* Catholic culture (Briel, 2009), or teach students to *live according* to Catholic moral principles (Byrne, 2000; Stark, 2000). These philosophical similarities and differences will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, but it is important to understand that distinguishability and inheritability are basic values beneath the surface of any study that explores how a Catholic university expresses its identity. Virtually all scholars studying this topic seek (at some level) to understand what distinguishes Catholic education from secular education, and how best to transfer those particular characteristics from a generation of priests and nuns to a generation of lay administrators.

3.2 CONCEPTUALIZING CATHOLIC IDENTITY LEGALLY

The question, “What makes a university Catholic?” is deceptively simple. To begin, the Catholic Church has a system of canon law that addresses this. Just as a university or company can be incorporated under United States civil law, giving it a legal persona within the US justice system, so too can an institution be incorporated with juridic personhood under Catholic canon law. The legal status of most Catholic universities under civil law is unambiguous; they are independently incorporated non-profit institutions that maintain a religious character voluntarily. However, as Sheridan (2011) points out, the universities’ status under canon law is not as clear.

Most were never officially incorporated with juridic personhood within the Church, and therefore, by some interpretations, have never been “Catholic” institutions in their own right.

The dioceses and religious orders that sponsor the universities, however, *are* incorporated canonically.⁵ The Sisters of Mercy, for example, are fully incorporated within the institutional Church, and as a result, each of their colleges can be considered Catholic as long as the Sisters identify it as an official ministry of the order. In the past, this was taken for granted when the Sisters owned the entire Carlow campus and operated the College directly as a subsidiary, but now, after the civil connection between the two has evolved, the canonical relationship needs to be sustained more proactively. For a time, the local branch of the Sisters of Mercy served as Carlow’s canonical sponsor; however, in 2002, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas established the Conference for Mercy Higher Education (CMHE), an organization that acts as a nationwide intermediary between the Sisters and their ten universities, five colleges, and one college of health sciences. Each Mercy-affiliated institution has entered into an affiliation agreement with the CMHE – a process that Carney (2010) describes as surprisingly complex, necessitating separate negotiations with each individual college on issues like property ownership and the Conference’s advisory power over school administrators. Today, CMHE’s eleven-member board has become the institutions’ collective canonical sponsor and ensures their continued Catholicity in the eyes of the Church (Conference for Mercy Higher Education, 2017).

The CMHE also maintains some specific powers over its network of colleges and universities – a feature somewhat unique to Mercy-affiliated schools, and not necessarily present at all Catholic universities:

⁵ The correct canonical term for an order of priests, brothers, or nuns is not “religious order” but “religious institute,” or in some cases, “society of apostolic life.” However, I use the term “religious order” in this document because it is all-inclusive, and because “institute” usually has a different meaning in the context of universities and academia.

CMHE approves the appointments of presidents and members of the local institutional boards, as well as all changes to the mission and philosophy of the institution. The Conference also has the responsibility to approve borrowing in excess of \$5.7 million at most of our institutions (Conference for Mercy Higher Education, 2017).

This approach by the Sisters of Mercy – to maintain sponsorship and certain administrative powers through an intermediary organization – represents one of many possible canonical arrangements. Some Catholic universities are sponsored directly by a diocese, but this is relatively rare; Seton Hall in the Archdiocese of Newark is perhaps the most prominent example. Most are sponsored by religious orders – some by more than one. Mergers between formerly all-male and all-female institutions have resulted in some complicated relationships; Loyola Marymount University (the result of a merger of three Catholic colleges in Los Angeles) is canonically sponsored by three different orders: the Jesuits, the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange (Loyola Marymount University, n.d.). In some cases, canonical sponsorship has changed hands over time. The University of Scranton was founded in 1888 by the Diocese of Scranton, then entrusted to the Xaverian Brothers in 1897 when the Diocese ran short of personnel to staff it. A year later, the Xaverian Brothers handed it over to the Christian Brothers, who, after 45 years, passed it on to the Jesuits (University of Scranton, n.d.).

Although the term “sponsorship” is frequently used to describe the relationship between a religious order and its universities, Holland (2011) points out that the exact meaning of “sponsorship” is not defined in either civil or canon law, and the expectations for what it entails on the part of the religious order can be unclear. She prefers not to use that term, pointing out

that most Church documents refer instead to the “relationship” between the Church and the university. She describes her interpretation of the law in this way:

The relationship of a university with the Church...must be adequate to merit use of the name “Catholic.” I believe this suggests that in order to use the title Catholic, a university must either be in the hands of an entity which by its very definition works in “the name of the Church” (a diocese, religious institute, society of apostolic life, or an “apostolic” public juridic person) or it must have the written consent of ecclesiastical authority (paragraph 9).

One important Church document in particular addresses the issue of “written consent” by ecclesiastical authority.

3.2.1 Key document: *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*

In 1990, the Catholic Church published the first major legal document in its 2,000-year history that specifically addresses the role of Catholic universities. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (“From the Heart of the Church”) was authored by Pope John Paul II and is classified as an apostolic constitution – the highest form of legal degree a pope can issue. Among other things, it defined the basic criteria a university must meet in order to describe itself as “Catholic,” requiring all Catholic institutions to maintain regular dialogue with their local dioceses and giving the local bishops final, perpetual discretion on reaffirming the relationships (*Ex Corde*, 1990). Thus, sponsorship by the Sisters of Mercy (through the Conference for Mercy Higher Education) is necessary, but not sufficient for Carlow University to identify itself as Catholic; in addition, the bishop of Pittsburgh must accept the Sisters’ sponsorship and has the power to revoke the University’s religious affiliation if he sees fit. This is essentially the legal standard; it means that

“the university cannot unilaterally proclaim itself Catholic” (Holland, 2011, paragraph 8), and that the final arbiter of its right to claim an affiliation with the Church is the local bishop. Ultimately, no university can claim to be Catholic unless its bishop consents. More will be said about *Ex Corde* in section 3.3.2 below and in Chapter 5.

3.3 CONCEPTUALIZING CATHOLIC IDENTITY THEORETICALLY

“What makes a school Catholic?” is a different question than, “What does it mean to be a Catholic school?” One can ask 50 dedicated Catholic educators the latter question and get 50 different responses. This diversity of opinion is not necessarily a bad thing, and is probably inevitable in a Church with thousands of distinct religious orders and over a billion individual members worldwide. On the other hand, this diversity can cause problems for theory building, since there are, in practice, very few policies and decisions that cannot be justified as part of a university’s Catholic identity. To wit, Georgetown University in 2015 allowed its adjunct faculty to unionize on the grounds that its Catholic identity required it to respect workers’ rights (Georgetown University, 2015). In the same year, Seattle University and Duquesne University argued in court that their Catholic identities exempted them from adjunct unionization and prohibited government interference on the side of the unions (Flaherty, 2015).

“What does it mean to be a Catholic school?” is also the question that generates most attention in the academic literature. One particular American document attempts to address this issue authoritatively.

3.3.1 Key document: “Land O’Lakes Statement”

Shortly after Vatican II, in 1967, the presidents of five leading Catholic research universities (Boston College, Georgetown, Fordham, Notre Dame, and St. Louis), along with a handful of academics and Church officials from Canada and Latin America, met at a retreat house in Wisconsin that gave its name to the document they produced. (A representative from the Catholic University of America also attended and signed the statement, but not the president.) Although the document is officially titled, “The Idea of a Catholic University,” I follow convention in the academic literature by referring to it here by its unofficial name, “The Land O’Lakes Statement.” Envisioned and organized by Theodore Hesburgh, CSC, longtime president of Notre Dame from 1952-1987, the conference was designed to provide some theory and framework to a process its attendees understood would be complex: transforming what used to be small, classical academies into modern universities “in the authentic sense of the word” (“Land O’Lakes,” 1967, preamble), ones that would meet or exceed the standards set by the greatest American research institutions, and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with any player in US higher education. The ten principles enumerated in the statement include (in paraphrase):

1. Respect for academic freedom and faculty members’ right to pursue independent research agendas, the importance of institutional autonomy, and the need to follow the highest standards of excellence in teaching and research.
2. The importance of theology as an academic discipline, and the special mission of a Catholic university to promote theological scholarship.
3. The role of the theology faculty to promote understanding of Christian tradition, Christian humanism, and broad ecumenical dialogue with other cultures and traditions.

4. The importance of inter-disciplinary approaches to learning, in which all disciplines are informed and enriched by each other, but especially by a theological perspective.
5. The principle that Catholic universities should exist in service to the Catholic Church and its needs, as well as to the needs of the Catholic population.
6. Broad excellence in research.
7. The importance of public service and service to those less fortunate.
8. The primacy of undergraduate formation at the heart of any university mission.
9. The need to build a comfortable community in which students think creatively, dialogue with mentors, serve others, experiment with new ideas, and live Catholic values in a modern, contemporary way appropriate to the needs of their generation.
10. The need to maintain an administration fully cognizant of and sensitive to these principles (“Land O’Lakes,” 1967, articles 1-10).

The statement carries no force of law or authority beyond the fact that it was signed by some of the most respected Catholic educators of their generation. It was, however, the only major theoretical framework available to guide Catholic universities for over 20 years until *Ex Corde* was published in 1990. Much of it is relatively uncontroversial, but article 1, which asserts the universities’ “true autonomy and academic freedom in the face of authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical, external to the academic community itself” has generated some debate, especially when paired with the Vatican directives in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.

3.3.2 *Ex Corde* in dialogue with “Land O’Lakes” on academic freedom

The “Land O’Lakes Statement” and *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* fundamentally align on most major issues, including academic freedom, which both documents guarantee in principle. However, *Ex Corde*’s commitment to academic freedom is more nuanced than that of “Land O’Lakes.” On one hand, *Ex Corde* states,

The Church, accepting “the legitimate autonomy of human culture and especially of the sciences”, recognizes the academic freedom of scholars in each discipline in accordance with its own principles and proper methods, and within the confines of the truth and the common good (Part I, paragraph 29).

On the other hand, *Ex Corde* singles out one discipline – theology – for specific scrutiny. It explains that bishops “should encourage the creative work of theologians,” (Part I, paragraph 29) but that,

since theology seeks an understanding of revealed truth whose authentic interpretation is entrusted to the Bishops of the Church, it is intrinsic to the principles and methods of their research and teaching in their academic discipline that theologians respect the authority of the Bishops, and assent to Catholic doctrine (Part I, paragraph 29).

Ex Corde also makes reference to Canon 812, which requires Catholic theologians to obtain a written *mandatum*, or imprimatur, from the local bishop, essentially confirming that they will not misrepresent Catholic doctrine in their teaching or research, and that they will be “faithful to the Magisterium of the Church as the authentic interpreter of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition” (*Ex Corde*, Part II, article 4, paragraph 3). The requirement applies only to self-professed Catholics teaching Catholic theology at Catholic universities (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2001), but has nonetheless been controversial.

American universities fought hard, but unsuccessfully, to remove such provisions for direct Church control from draft versions of *Ex Corde* that circulated in the 1980s. A letter from the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities to the Vatican argued “that the university is a place for an intellectual journey toward the truth and not a place where one receives ‘the truth’ already known and packaged” (“Response of the Board of Directors of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities on ‘Proposed Schema for a Pontifical Document on Catholic Universities,’” 1986, paragraph 10).

Separately, presidents of fourteen American Catholic research universities (all but one of them an ordained priest or brother), also warned that, if the proposals in *Ex Corde* were published,

Secularistic critics of Catholic education would find that their most searing critiques of Catholic universities had been confirmed by the Vatican itself. For if the relationship of these universities to the Church...must necessarily involve control by the Church, then Catholic universities cannot respect academic freedom and cannot enjoy true institutional autonomy...This, at least, would be the view of most of the academic communities in North America and a good part of our general public.

Our critics would charge that such direct ecclesiastical control means that our institutions are not universities at all but places of narrow sectarian indoctrination; hence they have no right to claim public monies to support what would be described as their proselytizing mission. If such a view prevailed in our courts, then decades of sacrifice by generations of faculty, students, and benefactors of Catholic universities in North America would have been squandered (“Statement of Presidents of Leading Catholic Universities

of North America on the Schema for a Proposed Document on the Catholic University,” 1986, paragraphs 5-6).

The Vatican was mostly unconvinced by these arguments. The final version of *Ex Corde* published in 1990 did remove a controversial provision that would have required the president of a Catholic college to be a practicing Catholic, but preserved much of the controversial language regarding theologians and their relationship to the local bishops. The US bishops soon after adopted a framework for applying *Ex Corde* that reaffirmed the importance of the *mandatum* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000) as well as a set of guidelines for applying the *mandatum* in practice (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2001). Among other things, the 2001 document clarifies that responsibility for obtaining the *mandatum* falls on the professor, not the university (article 2, paragraph 2), and that Catholic theology faculty members should seek to obtain the *mandatum* within six months of being hired (article 4, paragraph 4).

The long-term effects of the *mandatum* requirement, however, have been less significant than the university presidents feared. Nearly two decades after *Ex Corde* went into effect, many American theology professors have yet to obtain a *mandatum*, and many bishops have shown little appetite to enforce the rule publicly. Only twelve of the 200 Catholic universities in the United States have adopted official policies requiring their Catholic theology faculty to obtain the *mandatum*, and virtually all of those institutions are small liberal arts colleges with fewer than 2,000 students. No Catholic research university has yet adopted an institution-wide or department-wide policy pushing faculty toward compliance (Drake, n.d.).

Despite the nuances in their views on academic freedom, “Land O’Lakes” and *Ex Corde* agree on most fundamental points. Both promote service to the poor, emphasize the rights of non-Catholics to work and study on Catholic campuses, and see universities as intellectual

centers for the Church that can support Catholic initiatives and preserve Catholic culture. Both stress the importance of theology as a discipline, and both argue that a theological perspective should inform a Catholic university's approach to all fields of study. The two documents disagree, however, as to how to ensure the quality and authenticity of that theological perspective. "Land O'Lakes" asserts that the academic community can police itself and that theology should be subject to the same standards of peer review and internal autonomy as any other discipline. *Ex Corde* acknowledges academic freedom and encourages each discipline to follow its own proper methods; however, it states that the proper method for Catholic theologians necessarily involves dialogue with bishops and deference to established Church doctrine.

Universities have sometimes disagreed as to how to interpret *Ex Corde* with respect to overall academic freedom outside of the discipline of theology. Sanders and Clough (2011) describe the ambiguity in this way:

Specifically, John Paul II cautions that neither the rights of individuals nor the common good should be compromised in the exercise of academic freedom...Some believe this means that there should never be any limitations on the content or style of discourse at a Catholic university because suppressing open and free scholarship subverts the common good. Others conclude that a Catholic college or university cannot be authentically Catholic if it allows speakers, scholars, or teachers to voice positions or ideas that are clearly or even possibly opposed to Catholic teaching (p. 223).

Different Catholic universities have, over the years, struck different balances between these competing views. Their interpretations represent a range of behaviors that will be the subject of section 3.4 below.

3.4 A TYPOLOGY / EVOLUTION MODEL

The tension between the American document (“Land O’Lakes”) and the Vatican document (*Ex Corde*) underscores a fundamental tension at the heart of any institution that seeks to be both authentically Catholic and authentically American. U.S. academic culture, with its emphasis on free inquiry, questioning authority, and intellectual diversity, can sometimes be seen as in friction with Catholic tradition, in which the Church is seen as a universal, top-down teaching authority. As Morey and Piderit (2006) describe it, institutions can respond to this tension in a variety of ways, and those responses can be conceptualized in terms of a “range” or continuum, bounded by two extremes: “If the institution becomes too overwhelmingly Catholic, it will no longer be a university. If, on the other hand, it becomes too academically secular, it will cease to be Catholic in any meaningful sense” (p. 35). While Morey and Piderit (2006) do not provide such a diagram in their own work, their continuum could be visualized in this way:

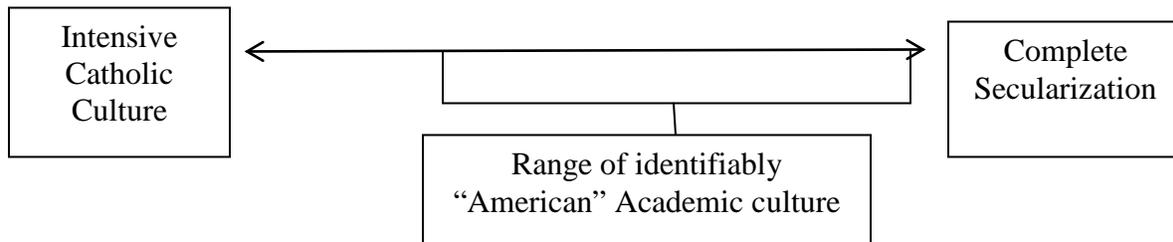


Figure 3.1. Morey and Piderit’s (2006) model visualized

This model shows that there is a range of intensity for an institution’s Catholic culture, and most points within that range would be still leave the institution recognizable as an American college or university. At one extreme, however, there is a point at which the Catholic identity becomes so overwhelming that it interferes with the standard work of a university –

perhaps causing the institution to censor faculty or speakers who disagree with Catholic dogma, limit academic freedom, or reject intellectual diversity in favor of enrolling only students who conform to its narrow set of religious principles. Morey and Piderit (2006) describe this as a point of

rigid cultural intensity. At this point, the Catholic culture is so dominant that the institution is no longer a college or university. In other words, the level of Catholic culture is so dominant, fundamental, exogenous, holistic, and homogeneous in these institutions that it effectively overwhelms the cultural realities of American higher education (p. 35).

If most Catholic universities were originally founded, in part, to preserve the Catholic culture of their first-generation American students, then it might be said that they began life fairly far on the left side of this diagram. Over time, various historical pressures – including the need to earn the respect of the American academy, attract students, and qualify for federal funding – have pushed them to the right of the diagram, bringing them closer to a standard American identity. (See Chapter 4 for more detail on the history of Catholic universities, including reforms that brought the universities more in line with their secular counterparts academically and administratively.)

Morey and Piderit's (2006) model is helpful to understand this evolution, but it is, unfortunately, unidimensional. It shows that Catholic institutions can have a range of organizational cultures, but it does not show that they are also evolving in the context of a different variable: the diversity of their student bodies. While it is inarguably true that the typical Catholic college has become more compliant with secular American standards over time (see Chapter 4), that "typical" college has also become more diverse, enrolling more non-Catholic

students and employing more non-Catholic faculty. These two changes are to some degree related, but they are not necessarily taking place at the same pace in each institution. There are some institutions like Walsh University near Canton, Ohio, that publicly advertise a very traditional Catholic culture but enroll primarily non-Catholic students (Cardinal Newman Society, 2016; Walsh University, n.d.). Others like Notre Dame have research programs to rival those of any American university, but still overwhelmingly educate Catholics.

Thus, while many Catholic colleges and universities began life as very similar institutions, they have each evolved somewhat differently over time, and not always in a linear fashion. A more complete model that attempts to represent this divergent evolution would include both Morey and Piderit’s idea of a “secularization” continuum, but also incorporate the variable of campus diversity. The following 2x2 matrix represents a theoretical typology of (present-day) Catholic colleges and universities based on these two variables, with some illustrative (but by no means exhaustive) examples included in each cell:

	Emphasis on Teaching/Traditional Catholic College Environment	Emphasis on Research/Secular Standards of Excellence
Diverse Student Body	Carlow University Holy Family University Trinity Washington University St. Francis College (Brooklyn) Walsh University Xavier University of Louisiana	DePaul University Fordham University Georgetown University Marquette University Seattle University St. John’s University University of San Francisco
Predominantly Catholic Students	Aquinas College (Tennessee) Ave Maria University Christendom College Franciscan Univ. of Steubenville St. Vincent College University of Dallas University of Mary	Boston College Duquesne University Providence College Seton Hall University St. Joseph’s University University of Notre Dame Villanova University

Figure 3.2. Two-dimensional Catholic university typology

The bottom-left cell represents what might be called the “prototypical” Catholic college in the early twentieth century. For theoretical purposes, let us define this “traditional” college in this way: it is a residential, undergraduate-focused institution with a small, predominantly Catholic student body – most from the immediate region. If both sexes are present, they are strictly segregated. Catholic faith rituals like daily Mass are a regular part of the student experience, and cultural/religious perspectives are incorporated into the pedagogy by predominantly Catholic faculty. Philosophy and the classics have an important place in the curriculum.

Virtually all Catholic colleges at least resembled this prototype when they began their lives. A small handful of institutions have deliberately retained many of the characteristics of this “traditional” Catholic college, even today educating an overwhelmingly Catholic student body in a pervasively traditional context. Some examples of these institutions are listed in the bottom-right of the matrix. Ironically, many of these institutions are relatively young, and did not even exist at the turn of the twentieth century: Aquinas College in Tennessee (founded 1961), Christendom College (1977), Franciscan University of Steubenville (1946), and the University of Dallas (1956). As such, it might be said that they are attempting to “recreate” rather than “preserve” a traditional, turn-of-the-century Catholic college environment.

A conservative Catholic watchdog organization, the Cardinal Newman Society, publishes an annual list of colleges that arguably fit this “traditional” label (Cardinal Newman Society, 2016). In recent decades, there has been a small boom in the establishment of such colleges, some of which are not yet fully accredited: Ave Maria University in Florida (1998), John Paul the Great Catholic University in California (2003), and Wyoming Catholic College (2007), to name a few. The institutions themselves are not old, but are trying to fill a niche in the above

matrix by offering an education that, in their view, the older Catholic universities have largely abandoned. The Cardinal Newman Society represents this conservative perspective on its website: “Put bluntly, the majority of Catholic colleges have lost sight of what it means to be Catholic. You can visit many Catholic campuses with little or no indication of their religious mission” (Wilson, 2016).

Why do some conservative Catholics prefer to start new universities from scratch? What has happened to the existing schools that leads some Catholics to conclude that they are not just broken, but beyond repair? In short, those schools have evolved, and this evolution is shown in the other cells of the matrix.

3.4.1 Catholic university evolution – type one

Some Catholic institutions (in the upper-left) continue to offer an educational environment very similar to the one they have always offered, but they have started to enroll (deliberately or by necessity) large numbers of non-Catholics. These schools may still segregate the sexes in separate dorms, may still employ significant numbers of Catholic faculty and staff, and may still have a curriculum designed to prepare students for service professions like education, ministry, health care, and other fields traditionally associated with the Church. However, the diversity of their small student bodies is much greater today than at any time in their history, and as a result, they may have adopted accordingly liberal policies on student/faculty conduct and may have become more ecumenical in their on-campus religious expression. Trinity University in Washington, DC, has redefined its mission explicitly to focus on serving the inner-city poor and underprivileged students from all faiths and cultures (Hayes, 1991). Also in this category is Xavier University of Louisiana, notable as the country’s only

historically black Catholic university. From an outsider’s perspective, Carlow University would, at first glance, appear to fit into this cell.

	Emphasis on Traditional Catholic College Environment	Emphasis on Research
Diverse Student Body		
Predominantly Catholic Students		

Figure 3.3. Evolution model – type one

3.4.2 Catholic university evolution – type two

There are also those universities (in the right-hand column of the matrix) that have made the strategic decision to look beyond their regional audiences and compete on a national level with the most respected secular research universities in the United States. For better or worse, university reputation in the United States tends to be determined more by an institution’s research focus than by its teaching focus, so these schools have often invested in the research qualifications of their faculty – sometimes at the expense of their traditional character as teaching-oriented institutions. They have spent decades recruiting top faculty from Ivy League and land-grant doctoral programs, and their national academic reputations have improved accordingly. Macintyre (2001) presents this strategic move as a dichotomous choice, arguing that Catholic universities can move

either toward a retrieval of a kind of Catholic identity that will...inform every aspect of the university’s life... *or* toward increasing assimilation to the conditions of the currently

most prestigious American research universities and a consequent replication of their fragmented condition (p. 20).

Even in the context of this transition, some of these institutions (in the lower-right, like Notre Dame and Villanova), still enroll a student body that looks very much like the one they enrolled six decades ago (albeit larger and coeducational). Serving predominantly Catholic students, many of these schools might be described as “culturally” Catholic, while the education they offer is comparable to that offered at most top secular institutions. A common contemporary criticism of Notre Dame is that it resembles “a public school in a Catholic neighborhood” (Freddoso, 2010, title) – distinguishable from nearby Purdue or Michigan State only by its more culturally homogenous student body.

	Emphasis on Traditional Catholic College Environment	Emphasis on Research
Diverse Student Body		
Predominantly Catholic Students		

Figure 3.4. Evolution model – type two

3.4.3 Catholic university evolution – type three

Finally, there are those colleges that have both invested in secular standards of excellence and diversified their student bodies (the upper-right). Some, like Georgetown, are selective enough to be deliberate about their diversity, while others, like DePaul in Chicago or St. John’s

in Queens, simply reflect the inherent diversity of the cities in which they are located. These institutions have put clear emphasis on meeting the standards of the secular academy, and while they may still enroll more Catholic students than would a typical private university, they are more fully embracing the diversity of American society than are schools in the bottom-right. As such, they represent the final stage (so far) of Catholic university evolution, and also face some of the most complex questions about how to incorporate elements of their tradition into their modern reality. As American society continues to diversify, it seems inevitable that more universities will move from the bottom row to the top row, simply because the nature of the students available to them will change.

I argue that the lower-left represents the “original state” or “state of nature” for most Catholic colleges, and that the upper-right represents the fullest extent of their evolution (at least as it has taken shape to date). While there will always be individual colleges that find a niche in every cell, pressures to compete for enrollment (both the pressure to compete *with* secular institutions and compete *for* increasingly diverse students), will inevitably push most colleges toward the upper-right as an end point. Once there, it will be theoretically very difficult for a university to move in the opposite direction (down and/or left) – as this would entail limiting its student applicant pool and removing tenured faculty. Thus, the history of Catholic education in the twentieth century has involved a constant set of pressures that pushed universities (for the most part irreversibly) up and right from their starting point. This helps to explain why conservative Catholics, nostalgic for the days when most universities fit the “prototypical” mold, would prefer to start new institutions from scratch in the lower-left quadrant rather than futilely attempt to prod existing universities back to that point of origin.

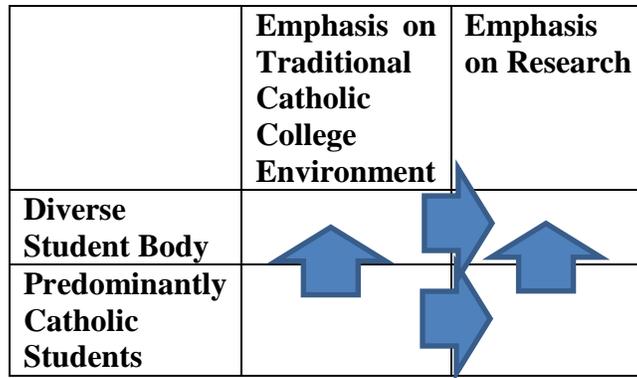


Figure 3.5. Evolution model – type three

3.4.4 A continuum, not a box

Of course, this is an imperfect classification, and classifying Catholic universities into four categories implies more rigidity than actually exists. There are some institutions like the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts (a traditional liberal arts college with a strong secular reputation) that arguably fit into more than one cell, or fit imperfectly. Grouping institutions in the same quadrant does not imply that they are identical, but suggests that they are clustered near each other even as they vary by degree.

It might therefore be best to think of this model as a fluid continuum rather than a set of four rigid categories. The institutions are evolving along two axes simultaneously. If we were to quantify the diagram, the y-axis would be defined as the percentage of non-Catholic students enrolled, while the x-axis would represent the school’s academic ranking/reputation (understanding that many of the best-known ranking systems emphasize research over teaching). Any generally recognized ranking system would do (i.e., *US News and World Report* or *Newsweek*), as long as it measured university reputation and perceived quality from a purely secular perspective. Higher-ranked institutions would appear farther to the right. (To accomplish

this mathematically, their rankings would need to be converted into reciprocals; for example, the #20-ranked school would be scored $1/20$, and so would be plotted farther to the right than the #60-ranked school, scored $1/60$.) Schools with a high percentage of non-Catholic students would appear closer to the top. This example shows approximately what such a model might look like with respect to three institutions:

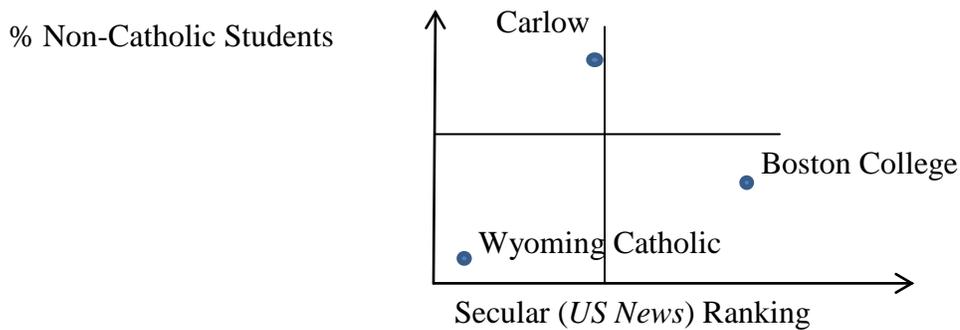


Figure 3.6. Approximate “quantified” model

Boston College would score high on secular reputation (currently ranked 31st among national research universities by *US News*), but mid-to-low on diversity, with only 30% non-Catholic students (Boston College, 2015; *US News and World Report*, 2016). This places it fairly solidly in the lower-right quadrant. In the event that its student body diversifies in the future, it would move further up. The newly-established Wyoming Catholic College is almost exclusively a teaching institution and would presumably have a very low ranking score at present; that, combined with its 98% Catholic student body, would place it in the lower-left quadrant (Cardinal Newman Society, 2016). Carlow University, which has excellent research programs but still largely maintains its traditional, student-centered focus, currently has a *US News* ranking of #118

among northern universities and a 66% non-Catholic student body. (Carlow University, 2016; *US News and World Report*, 2016). This would place it in the upper-left.

This model is perhaps more grandiose than necessary for the purposes of this study, but I present it to illustrate that Catholic colleges and universities are not a homogenous bloc, and that they are evolving differently even as they face similar pressures. In a case study focusing on just one institution, it is important to understand where Carlow fits into the grand scheme of Catholic higher education, and to keep in mind that its particular expression of its identity may not be generalizable or applicable to Catholic institutions of all types and sizes. It has many similarities to other Catholic universities, but its experience is fundamentally its own, and it is exploring how to define its Catholic identity given its own unique circumstances and positioning within this model. Whether or not this experience is illustrative for some other institutions, it is an interesting topic worthy of study in its own right.

3.4.5 Final note

As a final note, I wish to make clear that I am not arguing that any particular point on this matrix represents a “true” or “authentic” Catholic university. The different cells are simply different expressions of Catholic identity, none more or less legitimate than the others, in the same way that a Texas rodeo and a New England clam bake are both equally authentic expressions of American identity. This model merely attempts to show how Catholic universities are evolving, and to help explain the great diversity among the institutions themselves (part of the reason why a universal definition of Catholic identity is so difficult to find). Advocacy groups like the Cardinal Newman Society have their own agendas and opinions on what constitutes a “true” Catholic university, but most of the serious scholarly work on this topic is

more nuanced. Catholic enrollment, while an important variable in the matrix above, is not definitive; a school can live out an authentic Catholic mission regardless of whether or not it teaches Catholic students. Indeed, some schools in the bottom row may be tempted to assume, complacently, that their Catholic identity is strong simply because they enroll a high percentage of Catholic students. That would be a mistake. One cannot assume that Catholic faculty and students understand or support the university mission simply because they are Catholic (Porth, McCall, and DiAngelo, 2009). The deeper, less superficial issues associated with Catholic identity are represented by the horizontal axis above. They are the focus of the literature review in Chapters 4-5 and of the study as a whole, as I attempt to understand how they are conceptualized at Carlow University.

3.5 CHARISM

A final conceptual construct that must be defined is “charism.” Often unfamiliar outside of Catholic circles, the term comes from the same Greek root as “charisma” or “charismatic,” and most often refers to the particular spirit of a religious order – the specific elements of Catholicism that each order chooses to emphasize in its practice. Drawing partly from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Sanders (2010) defines charism in this way:

In the context of religious life, a charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to congregations of women and men religious. In general, charisms play the important roles of stabilizing and renewing the Church and the religious congregations of those who serve within the Church. In particular, charisms ground religious congregations, provide them with distinctive “flavors” or cultures, and act as reference points and as guiding

forces for their ministries. Since the inception of Catholic higher education in the US with the founding of Georgetown University in 1789, religious congregations have drawn upon their respective charisms to ground and to guide their higher education ministries (p. 4).

Many religious orders are particularly devoted to the philosophies and spiritualities of their founders, such as the Jesuits (St. Ignatius of Loyola), Franciscans (St. Francis of Assisi), or Benedictines (St. Benedict of Nursia). These charisms can have profound influence on the colleges and universities affiliated with each order, in both tangible and intangible ways. Monastic orders like the Benedictines often emphasize asceticism and the act of removing oneself from a corrupt world; the 13 Benedictine colleges in this country are, as a result, virtually all located in isolated rural communities (Association of Benedictine Colleges and Universities, n.d.). By contrast, the 28 Jesuit colleges are mostly urban, reflecting the Jesuit philosophy of engaging, rather than shunning, the outside world (Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, n.d.). Compounding this diversity is the fact that certain religious orders are associated with particular ethnic groups, like the Sisters of Mercy (Irish) and Benedictines (German), adding a cultural subtext to the charism that, at times, can generate a sense of affinity that transcends loyalty to the Church as a whole. Flanagan (2010) reports that faculty at one university were much more comfortable using the term “Franciscan” than the term “Catholic” to describe their institution, viewing the charism of the Franciscan order as more palatable and universally relatable than the Catholic faith overall.

Of course, these are subtle semantic differences. All Franciscans are Catholic; the two terms are not quite synonyms, but they are not divisible, either. However, it is common for universities to define their religious identity first in terms of the charism of their sponsoring

religious order, sometimes even emphasizing that charism over the broader Catholic set of beliefs. As Sanders (2010) observes, “Charisms...while sometimes misconstrued as being ‘different’ or apart from Catholicism, are generally more accessible and more proximate than Catholic theology or the Catholic Intellectual Tradition” (p. 14). Given that the large majority of Catholic universities are affiliated with religious orders, understanding this emphasis on charism is important for theory building.

3.5.1 Carlow’s charism

In a study focusing on Carlow University, it is therefore essential to understand the charism of the Sisters of Mercy and how that particular spirit has shaped (and continues to shape) the institution as a whole. Among women’s religious orders, the Sisters of Mercy are unique in an important respect: in addition to the usual vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience common to most orders, prospective Sisters of Mercy take a fourth vow of service to the poor, the ill, and the uneducated (Sheridan, 2007). This orientation toward service stems from the vision of Mother Catherine McAuley, RSM, who founded the order in Dublin, Ireland in 1831 (just twelve years before the first pioneering members left for Pittsburgh and the United States). Unlike cloistered nuns who spent most of their day in conventual prayer, Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy actively engaged the needy wherever they settled, functioning visibly in society as social workers, clinicians, and teachers, among other roles. As Sanders (2010) writes,

(T)he charism of the Sisters of Mercy impels its members toward the compassionate service of the poor, sick, and uneducated. When institutionalized, the Mercy charism is expressed in ministries such as health care, education, social service, and pastoral care (p. 6).

This particular mission was not more or less “Catholic” than the missions of cloistered nuns who separated themselves from society, but it was certainly more appealing to young women with a passion for service and social justice, dozens of whom embraced Catherine McAuley’s vision and joined her order before her death in 1841. Inevitably, those Irish women and their successors across the globe would seek to instill a similar spirit into the institutions they founded, including Carlow.

How does the charism of the Sisters of Mercy translate into a higher education setting? There are numerous publications on this topic, not all of which reach identical conclusions, but one example is cited by Sheridan (2007). Quoting Sullivan, he identifies these six “values” based on Catherine McAuley’s philosophies of education, as revealed through her writings and inferred from her behaviors (punctuation and capitalization as they appear in the original):

1. “the dignity to be accorded each student and educational co-worker.”
2. “the fundamental necessity of Christian learning and spiritual development.”
3. “a special concern, in learning and practice, for those who suffer material poverty.”
4. “a persistent effort to diminish all sorts of debilitating ignorance.”
5. “the primacy to be always given to mercifulness and spiritual consolation.”
6. “the demanding effort to ‘practice what we teach/preach,’ i.e., to be ourselves, as teachers and administrators, insofar as humanly possible, examples of the Mercy heritage we wish to share with others” (p. 79).

This conceptual framework, while not incontrovertible, would at least be familiar to any Sister of Mercy and will be used to inform the analysis of Carlow University in this study. While the Sisters themselves have a smaller presence on campus today than in the past, they have taken pains to ensure that their charism continues to influence campus life, and that current University

administrators are familiar with these Mercy values. The Sisters meet at least twice yearly with Carlow's president, participate in orientation for new members of the board of trustees, provide annual in-service opportunities to the board, and make themselves available for consultation on issues related to Catholic identity (Carlow University, 2015).

4.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE – HISTORICAL

A detailed history of Catholic higher education is beyond the scope of this project. However, some historical context is necessary to understand the broad social forces that shaped the origins of Carlow University, and the legacies with which it has grappled as it has come of age.

4.1 EUROPEAN ORIGINS AND CLASSIC TEXTS

Education has been a key area of focus for the Catholic Church for millennia. Indeed, the very first universities that developed in the Middle Ages – Bologna, Oxford, Salamanca – could have been considered “Catholic universities” in the sense that they were staffed and sponsored by Church or monastic authorities. As such, Catholic philosophy on education and university mission can be traced back for centuries; Pope Alexander IV wrote to the University of Paris in 1255, charging it to be “dedicated to research, to teaching, and to the education of students who freely associate with their teachers in a common love of knowledge” (*Ex Corde*, preamble). St. Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican theologian of the thirteenth century, became one of the most influential Catholic philosophers of all time due, in part, to his writings on epistemology and his academic methodologies. His beliefs strongly influenced the traditional Catholic notion that education should expand the life of the mind from all angles, fusing diverse subject areas and

schools of thought into a single, inter-disciplinary understanding of the world (Byrne, 2004; Gleason, 1995). Such early Catholic writings focused primarily on what we, today, might call the scientific method; they were less preoccupied with the finer points of managing a university than with the nature of inquiry and the means by which humanity could uncover truths about the natural and spiritual worlds.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits in the sixteenth century, became interested in university education late in life and pushed the members of his order to establish universities organized into three main faculty divisions: humanities, natural sciences, and theology (Buckley, 1998). In 1599, shortly after Loyola's death, the Jesuits published the *Ratio Studiorum* – essentially a curriculum plan for ideal university education. The *Ratio* followed a six-year plan of study, emphasizing Latin, the classics, and the work of important Catholic thinkers like St. Augustine of Hippo. While modern audiences might see this curriculum as old-fashioned, during the late Renaissance it was eminently practical, giving students the skills they needed to advance socially and professionally in European elite society (Gleason, 1995). Because the Jesuits soon emerged as the largest and most influential religious order associated with Catholic education, their *Ratio* became the basis for Catholic university curriculum for centuries, and remained the standard for Catholic education in the United States long after its practicality had faded in an industrialized economy (Power, 1972).

Perhaps the most influential classic piece of literature on Catholic higher education is *The Idea of a University* by John Henry Newman, an English cardinal and convert to Catholicism who spent his early career as a powerful Anglican prelate at Oxford. Published in 1852 just as the modern model of a research university was beginning to take shape, Newman's book decried the trend toward compartmentalization of knowledge, urging universities to do away with

specialized academic departments and develop true “renaissance men” who could integrate elements of natural philosophy and theology into a meaningful whole (Newman, 2001a). Newman also viewed the university as an agent of social mobility, observing in his own country that Irish Catholics ended their education at age 17, whereas the more upwardly mobile Protestants ended theirs at 22 (Bergman, 2011).

The over-arching theme uniting these classic works of philosophy is a dedication to the whole mind – a belief that universality is preferable to specialization, and that educated, enlightened individuals should achieve mastery of a variety of subject areas. In today’s language, we would call this inter-disciplinary learning, but at the time, it was seen as the end goal of all university education, designed to bring the learner closer to an understanding of the ultimate spiritual and intellectual truth. If there is a distinctively “Catholic” approach to learning, it is this (Brady, 2013). Such education was long seen as necessary for human happiness and decidedly superior to education for trades or professions (Gleason, 1995). However, the history of Catholic higher education in America will show that this emphasis on long, intense intellectual formation in search of divine truth often found itself at odds with the pragmatic imperatives associated with economic mobility in American society.

4.2 BRIEF HISTORY OF CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION IN AMERICA

4.2.1 Early years

Catholic higher education was illegal in the thirteen colonies prior to the American Revolution – even in Maryland, which, despite being the “Catholic colony” was still subject to

Oliver Cromwell-era English laws that banned Catholic education and forced Catholic grammar schools to operate underground (Power, 1972). Shortly after independence, the first three Catholic institutions were officially established, all in Maryland: Georgetown College (1789), St. Mary's Seminary (1791) in Baltimore, and Mount St. Mary's College (1808) in Emmitsburg. All three bore the fingerprints of John Carroll, the first Catholic archbishop of the new United States, who was based in Baltimore and had been educated in Europe, leading him to organize his schools on the European model.

Carroll set a number of precedents that continued to characterize Catholic education in America for generations. By separating undergraduate education (at Georgetown) from seminary education (at St. Mary's), he established the principle that the education of priests and lay Catholics would take place on separate campuses (Power, 1972). This also meant that the study of theology was confined to the seminaries and generally ignored in the colleges, which followed the curriculum of the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum* and focused on classical languages and philosophy. It was ironic that colleges intended to serve Catholics and preserve Catholic culture, for decades, viewed religious instruction as something that should be limited to the pulpit and seminary, but kept out of traditional college classrooms (Power, 1972). For their part, the colleges admitted boys as young as 14 and granted a bachelor's degree after six years of study, following the German model. As such, Catholic "colleges" during the 1800s offered an education roughly parallel to what modern Americans would define as the final two years of high school combined with a four-year undergraduate degree. College faculty and staff (often with little distinction between the roles) consisted overwhelmingly of resident priests who served at the discretion of the local religious superiors (Gleason, 1995; Power, 1972).

4.2.2 The nineteenth century

During the 1800s, Catholic colleges struggled with enrollment and about 40% eventually shut their doors (Power, 1972). Wherever Catholics settled, they built colleges, although the nature of Catholic culture and education varied from region to region.

4.2.2.1 Regional differences – the core territory

The large majority of Catholic colleges founded between 1800 and 1950 were located in or near major cities of the northeast or Midwest. Lured by the Industrial Revolution, millions of Austrians, Bavarians, Croatians, Irish, Italians, Poles, Slovaks, and other immigrant groups settled in large cities and carved out ethnic neighborhoods that were anchored economically by factories and socially by churches. In doing so, they proceeded to build a parallel society within society that included a (literal) cradle-to-grave network of Catholic orphanages, elementary schools, hospitals, nursing homes, and cemeteries. Shunning the American public school system because their children were seen as unwelcome and because of a desire to retain their own languages and cultures, Catholics put particular emphasis on developing their own Church-based education system (Monzell, 1969). Such schools helped first-generation Catholic immigrants to avoid total assimilation into the American mainstream, often emphasizing bilingual instruction, European cultural traditions, and especially religious catechism (Monzell, 1969).

In 1884, meeting in the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, the US bishops effectively decreed that (under normal circumstances) every Catholic parish had to sponsor a school, and that every Catholic child had to enroll (Power, 1972). The proliferation of ethnic neighborhoods resulted in an over-supply of institutions that northeastern and Midwestern dioceses have struggled to maintain over the years. Small industrial towns sometimes had multiple Catholic

parishes within walking distance of each other, each associated with a different ethnic group and each with its own grammar and/or high school.

Catholic colleges were conceptually different from elementary and secondary schools in that they often sought to train students for professional careers, promoting economic assimilation even as they discouraged cultural assimilation. However, they suffered from the same phenomenon of over-supply. Far more Catholic colleges were founded in the nineteenth century than could be sustained in the twentieth; closures and mergers would reduce their number from 305 in 1965 to about 200 today (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2016). Particularly in the northeast and Midwest, well-meaning religious orders and ethnic groups often duplicated each other's efforts, building new institutions in places where Catholic education was already available under some other banner. The Buffalo, New York area alone has nine surviving colleges founded by Catholic religious orders (along with one Catholic seminary) – more than the entire state of Florida:

- Canisius College (1870) - Jesuits (www.canisius.edu)
- Christ the King Seminary (1974) – Diocese of Buffalo (www.cks.edu)
- Daemen College (1947) - Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity (www.daemen.edu)
- D'Youville College (1908) - Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart (www.dyc.edu)
- Hilbert College (1957) - Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph (www.hilbert.edu)
- Medaille College (1875) - Sisters of St. Joseph (www.medaille.edu)
- Niagara University (1856) - Vincentians (www.niagara.edu)
- St. Bonaventure University (1858) - Franciscans (www.sbu.edu)
- Trocaire College (1958) - Sisters of Mercy (www.trocaire.edu)

- Villa Maria College (1961) - Felician Sisters (www.villa.edu)

Perhaps tellingly, two of these institutions (Daemen and Medaille) no longer identify themselves as Catholic on their websites. Other cities, particularly New York and Philadelphia, were similarly saturated with Catholic colleges (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, n.d.).

4.2.2.2 Regional differences - the south

The situation was different in the American south, where Catholics never became a major demographic group outside of Louisiana and the Kentucky frontier. Even in those two places, attempts to establish Catholic colleges were often unsuccessful, since the agrarian nature of the economy meant that there was little demand for higher education. In New Orleans, the largest majority-Catholic city in the United States for much of the nineteenth century, short-lived Louisiana College and other institutions failed; it was not until 1904 that a permanent men's college (Loyola University) established a foothold in the city (Power, 1972). The Diocese of Bardstown, Kentucky (the first diocese west of the Appalachians) was unable to sustain St. Joseph's College despite a lack of regional competition. Only the Jesuit-affiliated Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama, founded in 1830, proved to have staying power in the region (Power, 1972).

With so few southern schools, Catholic colleges and universities were generally not major battlegrounds for racial segregation, although it is well-documented that both Georgetown and Spring Hill College were connected to slavery. (It would be wrong to say that the colleges themselves owned slaves; rather, the Jesuit order owned both the slaves and the colleges, and used the slaves for the colleges' benefit [Georgetown University, 2016]). Nonetheless, racial

justice was on the minds of Catholic educators, and in 1925 a nun from Philadelphia who would eventually be known as St. Katherine Drexel went to New Orleans to establish America's only Catholic, historically black university: Xavier University of Louisiana (Xavier University of Louisiana, n.d.).

Recent Hispanic immigration has swelled the Catholic population in southern states, but this demographic change has not yet resulted in increased Church attention to higher education. At present, there are no Catholic colleges or universities in Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, or South Carolina, and only four in all of Florida. Nor are there any in Arizona, Nevada, or New Mexico, despite the large and growing Hispanic population in the southwest (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, n.d.).

4.2.2.3 Regional differences - the west

Santa Clara University is the oldest operating college in California, founded by Jesuits during the San Francisco Gold Rush in 1851. It was followed soon thereafter by two other Bay Area schools: the Jesuit-affiliated University of San Francisco (chartered in 1859 as St. Ignatius College), and St. Mary's College (established by the Archdiocese of San Francisco in 1863, but today affiliated with the Christian Brothers and located near Oakland). The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, who had by that time already established mission schools among the Native Americans in the Oregon Territory, brought women's education to the Bay Area in 1851, founding the school that would eventually grow into Notre Dame de Namur University near San Jose.⁶

⁶ Sources: Notre Dame de Namur University (n.d.); Santa Clara University (n.d.); Saint Mary's College of California (n.d.); University of San Francisco (n.d.).

Similarly, the oldest college (of any kind) in southern California was St. Vincent College, established by the Vincentians in the then-frontier town of Los Angeles in 1865. Burdened by debt, the College would shut its doors in 1911, but Loyola Marymount University, founded by Jesuits in Los Angeles that same year, claims St. Vincent's legacy as part of its own history and heritage (Berman, 2007; Loyola Marymount University, n.d.).

Although these Catholic institutions represent some of the earliest colleges in the west, Catholic education has even deeper roots in the region. Franciscan pioneer St. Junipero Serra and his companions founded a network of Spanish missions along the California coast in the 1700s, nearly all of which represent the first European settlements in the area, and most of which included schools for the local indigenous groups. Santa Clara University itself sits on the original site of one such mission (Santa Clara University, n.d.). As in the northeast and Midwest, though, western Catholic colleges did not truly begin to flourish until industrialization brought large numbers of immigrants to major urban centers, necessitating institutions like Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington (1887), Regis University in Denver (1887), Seattle University (1898), and the University of Portland (1901).

Unlike the situation in cities further east, comparatively small Catholic immigrant groups in the west meant that a smaller, more sustainable number of colleges took root in each large urban area. Closures were nonetheless still an issue, even in modern times. The oldest college in New Mexico was the Christian Brothers-affiliated College of Santa Fe (1859), which folded in 2009 and whose accreditation lives on only in the form of the for-profit, nonsectarian Santa Fe University of Art and Design (Santa Fe University of Art and Design, 2015).

4.2.2.4 Graduate and professional education

Catholic universities had an awkward relationship with professional education during the 1800s. On one hand, professions like law, business, and medicine were important paths to financial success in American society, and some top professional schools at the time deliberately excluded Catholics (Mahoney 2003). To help first-generation Americans establish themselves economically, it was imperative for Catholic universities to offer alternative law schools and business programs. Moreover, as Power (1972) notes, “commercial” (i.e., business) education could often draw tuition-paying students to help struggling schools stay afloat; many schools were embarrassed to admit that enrollment in commercial courses far exceeded enrollment in the *Ratio Studiorum* track.

During this time, Vatican involvement was significant, with European Church authorities often expressing contempt for American liberalism and pressuring the colleges to adhere strictly to a classical educational model (Gleason, 1995; Mahoney, 2003). The Church hierarchy attempted to maintain a clear division of labor among religious orders, even directing certain orders to focus their teaching on particular subjects (Power, 1972). Jesuits were told to focus on the classics, Latin, and Greek, while the Christian Brothers were told to focus on trades; in practice, however, schools frequently intruded onto each other’s territory (Gleason, 1995; Thelin, 2004).

The first Catholic college to advertise a master’s degree program was St. Louis University in 1838 (Power, 1972). By the late 1800s, after the Johns Hopkins University had brought the modern research university to America’s shores, the Church hierarchy began efforts to develop a Catholic institution that would focus exclusively on master’s and doctoral degrees. The result was the Catholic University of America, founded in 1887 by the US Conference of

Catholic Bishops just eleven years after Johns Hopkins. The original goal was to develop a single Catholic graduate school into which all existing Catholic colleges would feed their alumni, and as such, the Church attempted to suppress existing graduate programs elsewhere (Gleason, 1995). In one instance, the Vatican envoy to the United States ordered Georgetown to transfer control of its law school and medical school to Catholic University; it was only after the (mostly lay and non-Catholic) faculty at Georgetown's professional schools threatened to resign that the order was rescinded (Power, 1972). Over time, institutional imperatives like this kept graduate programs in place at other Catholic schools, and eventually led Catholic University to establish an undergraduate program of its own – becoming one of many similar Catholic institutions rather than the singular institution it was originally envisioned to be.

4.2.3 Women's education

As noted in Chapter 1, most Catholic women's colleges (including Carlow) began as outgrowths of girls' high schools after those high schools achieved accreditation to offer associate's or bachelor's degrees. There were, however, two other paths to women's education. Some women's institutions were originally established as "sisters' colleges" – founded by a religious order of nuns to educate its own members – that later opened their doors to lay women. La Roche College in suburban Pittsburgh, established in 1963 by the Sisters of Divine Providence, is one such example (La Roche College, n.d.). Only one sisters' college still exists in its original form, principally educating nuns: Assumption College for Sisters in Denville, New Jersey (Assumption College for Sisters, n.d.).

The other path to women's education was gradual coeducation at men's colleges. The first Catholic men's college to enroll female students was Marquette University in Milwaukee,

which opened its classrooms to nuns for weekend instruction in 1909 (Power, 1972). Some Catholic men's colleges (like Georgetown and Duquesne) sponsored schools of nursing and thus enrolled female undergraduates in the early 1900s, albeit in separate buildings. Full coeducation came gradually, starting with graduate and professional schools and reaching the all-male undergraduate programs by the 1970s.

Today, there are no longer any all-male Catholic colleges in the United States. Seminaries are obviously in a different category, although even there, several institutions allow nuns and lay women to enroll and pursue a master of divinity or equivalent graduate degree. Catholic women's colleges maintained their single-sex character slightly longer, though many became explicitly coeducational by the 1990s or early 2000s. As of this writing, only a small handful of Catholic colleges define themselves publicly as "women's" institutions, although most in this group do enroll men in their graduate programs and, in much smaller numbers, in their undergraduate programs. Until very recently, Carlow would have been included on this list:

- Alverno College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (www.alverno.edu)
- College of St. Mary, Omaha, Nebraska (www.csm.edu)
- Mount Mary University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (www.mtmary.edu)
- Mount St. Mary's University, Los Angeles, California (www.msmu.edu)
- Notre Dame of Maryland University, Baltimore, Maryland (www.ndm.edu)
- St. Catherine University, St. Paul, Minnesota (www.stkate.edu)
- St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana (www.saintmarys.edu)
- Trinity Washington University, Washington, DC (www.trinitydc.edu)
- University of St. Joseph, West Hartford, Connecticut (www.usj.edu)
- Ursuline College, Pepper Pike, Ohio (www.ursuline.edu)

4.2.4 Accreditation, standardization, and quality

The period stretching from the 1880s to the 1920s was pivotal in the universities' development. Accrediting agencies began to standardize a four-year undergraduate plan of study, forcing many colleges to abandon their six-year curricula and separate legally from their prep divisions. The remnants of these lower divisions sometimes evolved into loosely-affiliated high schools like Fordham Prep in New York, LaSalle College High School near Philadelphia, and Marquette University High School in Milwaukee (Levine, 1986).

In the perceptions of the academic establishment, and of Catholics themselves, Catholic schools during this time offered an inferior education. A Catholic university degree was seen as a poor-man's alternative to a traditional bachelor's degree, one that a talented, well-connected student would want to avoid. As early as the 1890s, the president of Holy Ghost College (later Duquesne University) argued that

Catholic colleges could not enforce meaningful entrance requirements because they were too dependent on tuition. Their financial weakness, and the clerical make-up of the teaching staff, meant that little could be offered but the traditional classical course (Gleason, 1995, p. 22).

A high-profile controversy during this time took place from 1893-1903, when Harvard's longest-serving president, Charles W. Eliot, published a list of approved colleges whose graduates would be permitted to enroll at Harvard Law School without taking required entrance exams. Only three Catholic colleges (Georgetown, Boston College, and Holy Cross) appeared on the original 1893 list. Notre Dame was added in 1894, while Boston College and Holy Cross were dropped in 1897 (Mahoney, 2003). The result was a war of words in the Boston press between Eliot and Boston College's president, Timothy Brosnahan, SJ, in which Eliot articulated

the biases of the American elite and their belief that most Catholic higher education was insufficient to prepare students for the rigors of Harvard (Mahoney, 2003). It was an attitude shared by many Catholics. As the old immigrant identity began to die out with each generation, this attitude led a majority of Catholics to seek their college educations at non-Catholic schools (Gleason, 1995; Hendershott, 2009; Mahoney, 200; Thelin, 2004).

4.2.4.1 Twentieth-century reforms

By the inter-war years, many Catholic universities had developed into loose umbrella organizations overseeing large schools of law and business, and occasionally schools of medicine and engineering, along with small, classically-oriented undergraduate colleges. During this time, the *Ratio Studiorum* began to lose its status as the curriculum of choice, and was replaced by a surge in what was called neo-Thomism – a philosophical approach based on the work of St. Thomas Aquinas (Byrne, 2004). Catholic leaders latched onto neo-Thomism and its emphasis on philosophy and inter-disciplinarity as the defining feature of Catholic education, and in that context, introduced theology courses to the undergraduate program of study for the first time (Gleason, 1995). This approach generally did not impress accrediting bodies, which began to insist that university faculty be trained in traditional academic disciplines, with the PhD as a minimal entry point to teaching. The Jesuits argued unsuccessfully that ordination to the priesthood should be considered equivalent to a doctoral degree and that the community of priests on a Catholic college campus should be valued as a “living endowment” to offset accrediting bodies’ financial requirements (Gleason, 1995; Power, 1972). Organizations like the National Catholic Education Association tried unsuccessfully to define themselves as alternatives to traditional accrediting bodies like the Middle States Association and North Central Association before Catholic universities finally gave in to the pressure and began to align their

educational offerings and administrative structures with those of their secular counterparts (Gleason, 1995).

As they began to adopt professional standards for faculty and implement modern tenure systems after the 1950s, Catholic universities also faced a series of challenging new developments from the outside world. As state governments invested in public higher education, new community colleges began to usurp the Catholic schools' traditional role by providing the poor and the underprivileged with access to education (Morey and Piderit, 2006). First-generation, working-class students now had cheaper alternatives for their degrees, forcing some Catholic schools to rethink their core audiences. Meanwhile, from Rome, Catholic universities found themselves empowered as never before by the Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965, which elevated the role of the laity in Catholic institutions and called for less centralized involvement by Church authorities. Now emerging as complex institutions in their own right, most Catholic universities legally separated from the Church in the late 1960s and early 1970s, incorporating as independent non-profit institutions under predominantly lay boards of trustees (Gleason, 1995). No longer controlled directly by Church authorities, the schools nonetheless continued to face the pressures they had always faced – to maintain or grow enrollment, to compete with secular institutions for faculty and staff, and to offer a high-quality education comparable to what a student would receive elsewhere. Gleason (1995) titled his book about this struggle *Contending with Modernity*, while Hendershott (2009) titled hers *Status Envy* – two perspectives on the push to transform Catholic universities into places academically comparable to any other schools in the American system.

It is ironic that, after over a century of arguing that Catholic education was just as good as secular education, after trying to conform their schools to secular standards of quality, and after

downplaying their religious nature to make themselves eligible for federal funding, Catholic universities today should be facing questions about what makes them truly Catholic. This latest iteration of the balancing act between their Catholic and American identities, since the late 1960s, has produced the richest scholarly debate and exchange of ideas, as scholars who care about the future of Catholic higher education discuss what must be preserved, what must change, and what is fundamental to a Catholic college mission. Now mostly under lay control, the schools have had to think seriously about the principles and characteristics that they should emphasize in their classrooms, administrative decisions, marketing materials, and student learning outcomes as they decide what it means to be a Catholic institution in the twenty-first century. These debates are the subject of Chapter 5.

4.3 LESSONS FROM PROTESTANT HIGHER EDUCATION

It is important to acknowledge that Catholic universities were not the only religiously-affiliated institutions to face these challenges in American history. While no single religious denomination matched the Catholic Church in terms of its sheer number of institutions, many of the private colleges founded in the nineteenth century had formal or informal religious ties. Of the major Protestant denominations, Methodists were among the most prolific university-builders, responsible for such notable institutions as American University, Boston University, Duke, Emory, Northwestern, Syracuse, the University of Southern California, Vanderbilt, and Wesleyan, to name just a few prominent examples.

What, if anything, can the experience of Protestant universities teach us about the fate of Catholic higher education? Methodists seem to be the most reasonable parallel. Not only did the

Methodists build a vast national network of institutions,⁷ but the two churches, each in their own eras, also share some developmental similarities as US minorities. John Wesley brought his Methodist Church to the American colonies in 1735, seeking a toehold in a society already dominated by better-established denominations like Anglicanism and Presbyterianism. As Marsden (1994) points out in his book, *The Soul of the American University*, Methodism was originally on the fringes of American Protestant culture, but became more socially acceptable over the course of the nineteenth century. Rodden (2012) argues that John F. Kennedy's victory in the 1960 presidential election represents the point at which Catholics can be said to have moved into the American mainstream; similarly, almost one-hundred years earlier, the election of the Methodist Rutherford B. Hayes (1876) signaled the growing acceptance of that denomination (Aldrich, 2011).

Methodist university development in the first half of the twentieth century has some parallels to Catholic university development in the second half. Although government investment in higher education was more-or-less limited to the land-grant institutions at the time, there were still strong financial and regulatory pressures that pushed Methodist schools to downplay their ties to their Church. Marsden (1994) notes that philanthropist Andrew Carnegie established his Carnegie Pension Fund (forerunner of today's TIAA-CREF) in 1906 to support retiring university faculty on the condition that the funds be available only to non-denominational institutions. "Within the first four years of the Carnegie pension programs twenty additional schools had severed their vestigial denominational ties and so qualified for the funding" (p. 283). Marsden (1994) also explains that Syracuse University, in an attempt to attract New York state

⁷ There are currently 119 members of the National Association of Schools and Colleges of the United Methodist Church, compared to 195 members of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. Sources: Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (2015); General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (2017).

investment, deliberately amended its charter to reduce Methodist representation on its board in 1919.

It might be said that the pressures Methodist universities faced 100 years ago gave them a decades-long head start over Catholic institutions in their effort to assimilate into the academic mainstream. The actions that Methodist institutions took to distance themselves from their Church at that time would have been both unthinkable and legally impossible for Catholic institutions, since Catholic Church ownership of the universities was more direct, and because Catholic Church officials served not just on the boards, but in virtually every important administrative role on campus. Today, however, the modern administrative structure of Catholic universities – with institutional autonomy, lay control, and fewer formal ties to the Church – more closely resembles the structure at Methodist institutions in early 1900s.

A century after the Methodist universities started to experiment with their relationship to their founding Church, the results are diverse. Vanderbilt shed its religious affiliation at the turn of the twentieth century and now identifies as independent; in an interesting parallel to modern-day Catholicism, conservative Methodists responded to Vanderbilt's increasing secularization by starting new universities, including Southern Methodist University in Dallas (1911) and Emory, essentially re-founded in 1915 when it relocated to Atlanta (Marsden, 1994). Wesleyan formally severed ties with the Church in 1937, despite the obvious historical relationship implied by its name (Wesleyan University, n.d.). Boston University as a whole is non-sectarian, but its School of Theology is still recognized as an official United Methodist seminary (Boston University, n.d.; Hill, 2013). Duke is officially non-sectarian but still relatively vocal about its religious heritage, with "historic and symbolic ties" to Methodism including the large chapel that dominates the campus (Duke University, n.d.). American University maintains a formal religious affiliation and

is still in close physical proximity to Wesley Theological Seminary, even though the two institutions are legally separate. It notes on its website,

Today, many are surprised to hear that American University is still affiliated with the Church. However, while the connection might not be as outwardly visible as it used to be—mandatory monthly chapel attendance ended in the mid-1950s for example—the Methodist heritage of the university can be found deep within the university's strong and lasting commitment to openness, compassion, social justice, and public service (American University, n.d.).

While a number of Methodist institutions maintain some form of connection to the Church today, the relationship is most often a formality with little tangible effect on modern campus life, especially in the case of large research universities. Marsden (1994) sums up the Methodist experience in this way:

The simple fact was that once a college expanded its vision to become a university and to serve a broad middle-class constituency, the days were numbered when any substantive denominational tradition could survive. In the cases of Vanderbilt and Syracuse, the less the student body and then the alumni were predominantly Methodist, the less they would stand for Methodist traditions. Perhaps even more important, if the financial support for the university was to come from largely non-Methodist sources...it was virtually inevitable that the religious stance of the school would be determined by a broader consensus of middle-class polite opinion (p. 287).

Does the Methodist experience in the early twentieth century provide a prelude to the Catholic experience in the early twenty-first? Put differently, can Boston College learn from Boston University? There are some similar patterns of development, including the gradual

loosening of church control over the universities, the two groups' gradual assimilation into mainstream American society, and the tendency of modern universities to define their religious identities in universally relatable terms, as shown by American University's website above. Much of what American University says about its commitment to service and social justice could apply verbatim to modern Catholic universities.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that Catholic institutions are destined for an identical fate. There are reasons to think that the parallels between the upstart Protestant denomination of the 1800s and the immigrant Church of the 1900s have limits. For one, the approximately 70 million Catholics in the United States today outnumber United Methodists by nearly 10:1 (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2016; United Methodist Church, 2014). Moreover, many Methodist universities have direct control of the chapels and theological schools on their campuses (Byassee, 2015), thereby reducing their need to cooperate with external Church authorities in the long term. By contrast, the large churches, convents, monasteries, and rectories on Catholic campuses typically remain the property of the local diocese or religious order. Even in the unlikely event that a Catholic university wanted to remove visible symbols of its identity by bulldozing churches or forcing nuns out of their convent, it would be powerless to control property that it does not technically own. Although the Catholic Church no longer controls the universities directly, it has established itself as a permanent neighbor on the campuses, and neighborly relationships are usually better when they are respectful, engaged, and cooperative.

Perhaps most important, Catholic universities are thinking proactively about this topic, and have a growing body of scholarly work reflecting on their identity. While there are ambiguities and disagreements within that body of work, the issues are at least being addressed

in the modern academic literature, as universities and their faculty reflect on what a Catholic affiliation means to students, teachers, researchers, and administrators today. This dialogue is the subject of Chapter 5 below.

5.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE – THEMATIC

Chapter 3 has already cited some academic literature of particular relevance to Carlow University and the theoretical constructs in this study. This chapter will continue to explore the broad scholarly themes associated with Catholic identity and how to conceptualize it in a university setting.

As a theoretical construct, Catholic identity is shaped by more than just authoritative documents like *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. Scholars frequently theorize about what lies at the heart of Catholic educational identity, combing through centuries of theological tradition to pinpoint the core concepts, pedagogies, and world views that can be identified as distinctively Catholic (Byrne, 2004; Roche, 2003). Even as they struggle to agree on what those core values are, scholars have also debated the degree to which universities should emphasize distinctively Catholic values – and which values matter most – in their institutional missions. Many offer divergent viewpoints as to what aspects of university life – academics, research, student affairs, etc. – should be most influenced by an institution’s Catholic identity, and how.

Although this scholarship is not clearly organized as such in any deliberate way, a close reading of the literature reveals general theoretical themes that appear again and again across articles and across individual cases. Table 5.1 below identifies common themes with respect to four broad headings: Academics and Teaching, Research and Scholarship, Student Life, and Administration. These categories are my own and are subject to criticism, but they attempt to

organize the views of various authors who define Catholic identity differently and study it using varied, but recurring ideas and concepts. The discussion that follows the table will address each category/characteristic individually.

Table 5.1. Elements of Catholic institutional identity

I. Academics and Teaching		
Characteristic	Explanation	Sample of Relevant Literature
Interdisciplinary Inquiry	Brings multiple disciplines into dialogue with each other, especially with theology, philosophy, and ethics. Dialogue between faith and reason.	<i>Ex Corde</i> , “Land O’Lakes”; Byrne, 2004; Brady, 2013; Briel, 2009; Flanagan, 2010; Macintyre, 2001; Newman, 2001a; Nichols, 2000
Education for a Purpose	Education is used in service to others, not for its own sake. Values are lived through applied learning, putting contemplation into action.	“Land O Lakes”; Bergman, 2011; Caldwell, Domhidy, Homan, & Garanzini, 2000; Flanagan, 2010; Gleinster Roberts, 2008; Levine, 1986; Porth, McCall, & DiAngelo, 2009; Sanders & Clough, 2011
Informative about Catholicism	Students gain knowledge about Catholic history, culture, religious beliefs, and rituals. Understand the founding order’s charism and mission.	Briel, 2009; Gray & Cidade, 2010; Heft, 2009; Hendershott, 2009; King, 2014; King & Herr, 2015; Porth, McCall, & DiAngelo, 2009

Table 5.1 (continued)

II. Research and Scholarship		
Characteristic	Explanation	Sample of Relevant Literature
Ethical Perspective	Research is informed by morals, ethics, and theological perspective.	<i>Ex Corde</i> ; Byrne, 2004; Macintyre, 2001; MacKenzie, 2000; Roche, 2003
Service to the Church	Research is conducted on topics of interest to the Church, relevant to Catholic populations and Catholic culture, and fulfills the needs of Catholic organizations.	<i>Ex Corde</i> ; “Land O’Lakes”; Carney, 2010; Monzell, 1969
Interreligious Dialogue	Research promotes mutual understanding between Catholics and non-Catholics, brings Church into dialogue with others, and promotes intellectual openness.	Vatican II; <i>Ex Corde</i> ; “Land O’Lakes”; Brady, 2013; Ferrari, Bottom, & Matteo, 2014; Ferrari & Janulis, 2009; Penzenstadler, 2000; Porth, McCall, & DiAngelo, 2009; Roche, 2003; Rodden, 2012

III. Student Life		
Characteristic	Explanation	Sample of Relevant Literature
Lived Values	Community members participate in activities that promote human dignity, social justice, and equality. Service activities are tied to religious identity.	“Land O Lakes”; Bergman, 2011; Caldwell, Domhidy, Homan, & Garanzini, 2000; Flanagan, 2010; Gleinster Roberts, 2008; Kender, 2000; Levine, 1986; Porth, McCall, & DiAngelo, 2009; Sanders & Clough, 2011
Holistic Personal Formation	Community members have the opportunity to grow personally, emotionally, spiritually, and professionally as well as academically. University promotes formation in the classroom as well as residence life, co-curricular activities.	“Land O’Lakes”; Brady, 2013; Byrne, 2000; Hendershott, 2009; Ferrari, Bottom, & Matteo, 2014; Gray & Cidade, 2010; James & Estanek, 2012; King, 2014; King & Herr, 2015; Macintyre, 2001; Porth, McCall, & DiAngelo, 2009

Table 5.1 (continued)

Sacramental Experience	University provides opportunities for Catholic and non-Catholic students to worship and practice their faith openly on campus and participate in religious events and activities.	<i>Ex Corde</i> ; Brady, 2013; Gray & Cidade, 2010; James & Estanek, 2012; King, 2014; King & Herr, 2000; Lackner, 2003; Overstreet, 2010
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IV. Administration		
Characteristic	Explanation	Sample of Relevant Literature
Professional Development for Staff	Employees at all levels have the opportunity to learn about Catholic identity and feel empowered to incorporate it into their careers and vocations. Mission-based hiring practices.	Whitney & Laboe, 2014; Sanders & Clough, 2011; Sullins, 2004
Communication	Identity is openly and accurately communicated to internal and external audiences.	Gambescia & Paolucci, 2011; Bonglia, 2010
Values-Based Decision-Making	Administration understands and utilizes Catholic values in decision making	<i>Ex Corde</i> ; Briel, 2012; Bonewits Feldner & D’Urso, 2009; Currie, 2011; Flanagan, 2010; Porth, McCall, & DiAngelo, 2009

5.1 ACADEMICS AND TEACHING

5.1.1 Interdisciplinary inquiry

One of the oldest distinctively “Catholic” characteristics of education, dating back to Newman’s *Idea of a University*, is the notion of interdisciplinary learning. Both *Ex Corde* and

the “Land O’Lakes Statement” draw attention to the importance of exposing students to multiple subject areas and incorporating a theological perspective into all disciplines. Quoting documents from Vatican II, *Ex Corde* states:

In promoting this integration of knowledge, a specific part of a Catholic University's task is to promote *dialogue between faith and reason*, so that it can be seen more profoundly how faith and reason bear harmonious witness to the unity of all truth. While each academic discipline retains its own integrity and has its own methods, this dialogue demonstrates that "methodical research within every branch of learning, when carried out in a truly scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, can never truly conflict with faith. For the things of the earth and the concerns of faith derive from the same God" (Part I, paragraph 7, emphasis in original).

How best to promote this dialogue between faith and reason is a matter of debate. Flanagan (2010) argues that a university’s identity and priorities are reflected in its curriculum, and that the core curriculum of any Catholic university must reflect its religious mission. Brady (2013) correctly notes that Catholic schools must have outstanding programs within each discipline, or those in the academic profession will not take them seriously. He argues that students at Catholic schools should be exposed to the depth of the Catholic intellectual tradition, integrating various fields of study in the tradition of Aquinas and Newman, and that dialogue with non-Catholic traditions is not just possible, but essential to that process. He further posits that the values of the Catholic faith and the values of the academy are complementary, as “a reasoned faith implies faith in reason” (p. 194).

Roche (2003) argues that Catholic universities and their interdisciplinary approach to knowledge are, in fact, better suited to conduct meaningful research than are hyper-specialized, large secular institutions:

Bridging the liberal arts college and the research university, America's leading Catholic universities are the ideal size for interdepartmental dialogue – with enough scholars to form clusters of strength but not so many that faculty members cannot seek out intellectual partners in conversation from other departments. Aristotle suggests in the *Politics* that there is a quantitative limit to the *polis*... This could be said of the university as well, and many research universities challenge this limit, effectively discouraging dialogue across the disciplines and elevating by default overspecializations, which is one of the greatest dangers to contemporary intellectual inquiry (p. 38).

Roche (2003) concludes by suggesting that secular research universities could improve many of their practices by emulating their Catholic counterparts, just as Catholic schools have borrowed liberally from the secular university model in recent decades.

5.1.2 Education for a purpose

An important element of Catholic identity with which virtually all students, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, can identify is the need to serve the less fortunate. Many universities have begun to emphasize community service as a convenient, inclusive way to express their missions. While some scholars denounce this trend as a new or “politically correct” phenomenon (Hendershott, 2009), there are contrary views. Bergman (2011) argues that service and social justice have been hallmarks of Catholic education for centuries, finding evidence of their emphasis in the *Ratio Studiorum* and Newman's *Idea of a University*. As such, he situates

service at the heart of Catholic identity and argues against those who might dismiss it as a fad embraced by schools in lieu of more overt expressions of their religiosity. Gleinster Roberts (2008) writes about her experience studying and evaluating ways in which Duquesne University incorporated community service into its curriculum, concluding that service opportunities give her students a richer experience than classroom teaching alone, and better reflect the charism of Duquesne's founding religious order, the Spiritans. Byrne (2000) describes a similar program at Boston College, designed to encourage students to use their learning for practical, service-oriented community work. He summarizes the tension between Catholic universities, which should be an agent of good for the community, and the values of the modern academy in this way:

Over the past thirty or so years, we have witnessed a great transition in the academic standards and structures at our Jesuit colleges and universities, and our standards now may be said to emulate those of the great secular universities. Their ideal of higher education received its most influential contemporary articulation from Max Weber, whose well-known fact-value dichotomy has led to a correlative divorce...between the academic quest for knowledge and public pursuit of practice.

Unfortunately, this way of conceiving the purpose of the university tends to obscure the fact that the great modern emphasis on science and higher learning was itself derived from the Enlightenment's hope that modern forms of reason would liberate human life (p. 265).

If service learning and education for practical ends is a goal of Catholic education – one that the broader academy has wrongly shunned in our generation – then Catholic universities have a special obligation to preserve this lost art in American higher education, or so the

argument goes. Numerous scholars (Caldwell, Domhidy, Homan, and Garanzini, 2000; Roche, 2003; Sanders and Clough, 2011) have taken this line of argument.

5.1.3 Informative about Catholicism

To help teach students about the Church itself, several Catholic universities (beginning with Minnesota's University of St. Thomas in 1993) have begun to add "Catholic studies" to their lists of major offerings. Such initiatives sometimes take the form of a research center (Sanders and Clough, 2011) but most often have been organized into an academic program or department. Briel (2009) argues that Catholic studies programs are crucial to universities' efforts to infuse Catholic tradition into the curriculum, as they not only provide students with an option to study that tradition formally, but also serve as a resource to coordinate such thinking across departments. Nonetheless, the trend has not been without its detractors. Heft (2009) counters Briel (2009) in arguing that Catholic studies programs tend to be poorly funded and relatively unpopular among students, which can lead to a sense that they are academic step-children of the university, causing faculty members to look down upon them (and, by corollary, the university's Catholic identity) as ancillary or inferior to better-established academic disciplines.

5.2 RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP

5.2.1 Ethical perspective

Byrne (2004) and Roche (2003) both see research excellence as inherently compatible with Catholic identity. However, they both emphasize that Catholic universities have a unique responsibility to incorporate a theological and moral perspective into their research, and to promote a culture in which scholars feel comfortable doing so. Byrne (2004) sees this “research vocation” (his title) as essential to a university’s mission to serve the Church and the broader human family.

Porth, McCall, and DiAngelo (2009) discuss ways to incorporate an ethical perspective into even the most stereotypically narrow forms of professional education. Reviewing the mission statements of Catholic business schools, they find that such schools generally do not mention their religious identities, and that their emphasis on ethics and social justice in the curriculum was largely indistinguishable from that of non-Catholic schools. They advocate for change, urging their colleagues to adopt more deliberate efforts to integrate morality and social responsibility into their business curricula. Further, they note that such efforts need not take the form of religious indoctrination, but rather, should empower students themselves to make good choices in their professional lives:

As universities, our goal should not be the replication of doctrine but the development of understanding and intellectual capacity... (Even) if we desire that students assent to particular beliefs, it must be the free assent that is the outcome of fully reasoned analysis (p. 11).

Ex Corde Ecclesiae likewise confirms that ethics play a role in professional education, explaining that “the programme of studies for each of the various professions is to include an appropriate ethical formation in that profession” (Part II, article 4, paragraph 5). It also urges Catholic universities to seek solutions to new ethical problems that emerge in each generation, and to maintain “concern for the ethical and moral implications both of its methods and of its discoveries” (Part I, paragraph 18).

5.2.2 Service to the Church

I include this sub-heading in the discussion because it is mentioned explicitly by both “Land O’Lakes” and *Ex Corde*, although relatively little scholarship has focused on this point. The “Land O’Lakes Statement” calls on Catholic universities to embrace their “special obligation to carry on...activities, appropriate to a university, in order to serve the Church and its component parts” (article 7). *Ex Corde* states:

Through teaching and research, a Catholic University offers an indispensable contribution to the Church. In fact, it prepares men and women who, inspired by Christian principles and helped to live their Christian vocation in a mature and responsible manner, will be able to assume positions of responsibility in the Church. Moreover, by offering the results of its scientific research, a Catholic university will be able to help the Church respond to the problems and needs of this age (Part I, paragraph 31).

Monzell (1969) discusses the role of Catholic schools in maintaining Catholic cultural traditions and Carney (2010) mentions the potential for a Mercy-affiliated college to serve “as a ‘think tank’ on issues of concern to the Sisters of Mercy” (p. 109), but other scholarly articles on

this specific topic are rare. Nonetheless, to some extent, the universities have heeded the call to serve the institutional Church. Georgetown sponsors the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, a social science institute that collects statistics for Catholic dioceses (cara.georgetown.edu). Notre Dame sponsors the Alliance for Catholic Education, a kind of “Teach for America” program for Catholic elementary schools (ace.nd.edu). Various university presses publish scholarly work relevant to Catholic institutions, including journals like the *Journal of Catholic Education* (Loyola Marymount) and the *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* (Villanova). Carlow University sponsors the Carlow Roundtable, a series of conferences for faculty and administrators at Mercy-affiliated colleges and universities, designed to promote dialogue on the Mercy tradition (Carlow University, 2011).

It is easier to find documentation on instances when the universities, rather than support the Church, challenged the status quo. One particularly controversial instance was the case of Fr. Charles Curran, a tenured professor at the Catholic University of America in the 1980s, who dissented from Church teaching on a number of theological issues. While stopping short of revoking his tenure at Catholic University, the Vatican attempted to exercise its ecclesial authority over his priestly duties, severely limiting his ability to publish and making his employment so uncomfortable that he ultimately resigned. The case drew widespread attention and criticism from academics nationwide, who considered it a violation of academic freedom. Curran remains active in academia today, but at a non-Catholic institution: Southern Methodist University (“Academic Freedom and Tenure: The Catholic University of America,” 1989).

5.2.3 Interreligious dialogue

A key challenge for Catholic schools is the need to help Catholic and non-Catholic students alike to achieve appreciation for the Catholic tradition, as well as for other traditions. There is some scholarly evidence that universities are falling short in this end. Ferrari, Bottom, and Matteo (2014) conducted a survey on two Catholic college campuses, finding that Catholic students reported feeling a stronger sense of community on campus than did non-Catholics (although both groups felt that the schools were making concerted efforts to promote diversity and inclusion among all religious groups). In a separate study, Ferrari and Janulis (2009) found data suggesting that Catholic faculty and staff are more likely than non-Catholics to support their University's mission, but that both groups equally supported diversity and inclusion on campus. It remains important for Catholic universities to find ways to integrate all students into their campus communities and make all feel welcome. Indeed, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* explicitly acknowledges that non-Catholic faculty and students have an important place in Catholic schools, calling on the universities to respect "their religious liberty" (Part I, paragraph 27) and offer them "initiatives for reflection and prayer in accordance with their own beliefs" (Part I, paragraph 39).

Penzenstadler (2000) argues that religious diversity itself is inseparable from the Catholic tradition, and that fully embracing a diverse campus community is not a challenge to Catholic identity, but the fulfillment thereof. She argues convincingly of the "importance of not ignoring alien experiences and drawing all voices into conversation in the search for truth" (p. 310), explaining that respect for other cultures is entirely consistent with core Catholic theology:

All were accepted into the community of Jesus – outcasts, strangers, women, the grieving, the powerless, the persecuted. They were meaningful contributors to the vision

of a community based on love, justice, and peace. From this principle of community that is inclusive flows a way of being, teaching, and learning (p. 309).

5.3 STUDENT LIFE

5.3.1 Lived values

Universities cannot exist without students to teach, and so the mission of a university must be reflected at least in part in its student body. Brady (2013) argues that a Catholic university's success can be measured, to some extent, by the degree to which its students learn to integrate the lessons they learn into their everyday lives. Hendershott (2009) considers this a primary part of the mission of any Catholic university and laments that many institutions have, in an effort to appeal to as broad an array of students as possible, become shy or apologetic about efforts to instill Catholic moral principles into their pupils.

In response to the criticism that Catholic universities are failing to cultivate the Catholic faith among their students, Gray and Cidade (2010) analyzed survey results from self-identified Catholic students enrolled in a wide range of institutions, gauging attitudes at the beginning and end of their college experience. They observed whether these students changed their opinions on social issues like abortion, the death penalty, and poverty during their time as undergraduates, and whether their changes in attitude moved toward or away from established Church teaching. They then compared the results among students at Catholic colleges with results from students at other types of colleges. Data suggested that, regarding most social issues, Catholic students on

Catholic campuses were slightly less likely to move away from the Church than were students on other types of campuses.

5.3.2 Holistic personal formation

James and Estanek (2012) emphasize the need to incorporate Catholic moral principles into student affairs policy, informing such issues as residential life and student conduct. Certain religious principles, such as honesty and respect for others, are fairly universally recognized among Catholics and non-Catholics alike, while other principles, such as a ban on birth control or cohabitation, can be more controversial. Nonetheless, James and Estanek (2012) view a university's Catholic mission as a net positive influence on all students, and one that all students can learn to appreciate regardless of their religious beliefs.

King (2014) surveyed students on various aspects of campus life, from opposite-sex visitation policies in the dorms to drug and alcohol policies. His results suggested that students experience and understand their institution's Catholic identity primarily through co-curricular and residential programs, including on-campus prayer and worship, the presence of other Catholics in their peer groups, and the degree to which Catholicism is discussed openly in the dorms and in the classrooms. Drug and alcohol policies, sexual education programs, and other parts of the student code of conduct were important, but much less central to the students' perception of Catholic identity than was the overall experience with peers. King (2014) concludes that collaborative, grassroots efforts that encourage students to embrace the university's Catholic mission on their own initiative are preferable to heavy-handed, top-down administrative efforts to enforce Catholic identity via restrictive student conduct policies. Student

perceptions were influenced most by what they were able to see and do in their daily lives, not by what was forbidden or mandated of them.

5.3.3 Sacramental experience

A final element of student life at Catholic universities is the ability to practice one's faith on campus, regardless of one's personal religious preference. This can be challenging because, as some scholars observe, members of the millennial generation can be significantly less likely than their parents and grandparents to observe religious traditions (Overstreet, 2010; Smith, 2015).

In the aforementioned statistical study by Gray and Cidade (2010), the authors found that all students across all types of institutions showed a decline in Mass attendance and other types of spiritual practice while in college, but that this decline was less pronounced among students at Catholic colleges. The study thus suggests that Catholic colleges are at least "doing no harm" (p. 235) and are providing a slightly more nurturing environment for the Catholic faith than are non-Catholic schools. This conclusion is contradicted, however, by that of another empirical study (albeit at just four New England campuses) in which Catholic students indicated an overall decrease in attendance at religious services during their time enrolled in Catholic colleges (Bolduc, 2009).

Relatively little scholarship has paid attention to campus ministry programs at Catholic universities scientifically, but some scholars have theorized about campus ministry conceptually and historically. This may be because, as Lackner (2003) explains, campus ministry was once assumed to be a side function of the community of priests that staffed each campus, and was often not formally organized as a professional unit of the university until after Vatican II. Ironically, the Church hierarchy has, at times, paid more official attention to campus ministry at

non-Catholic campuses. Lackner (2003) cites a 1986 pastoral letter from the US bishops, *Empowered by the Spirit: Campus Ministry Faces the Future*, which addresses this issue primarily from that perspective, urging campus ministers at secular institutions to provide a welcoming place for Catholics to worship.

In the case of Carlow University, this may explain why “(f)or a number of years, access to the Eucharist has been hindered by the lack of a chaplain” (Carlow University, 2015). It is ironic that, despite the presence of a Catholic cathedral in walking distance, and despite a community of Oratorian priests in Oakland devoted to campus ministry at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh (www.thepittsburghoratory.org), a permanent chaplain was, for years, not assigned to the one expressly Catholic university in the neighborhood. This has since changed under the current administration. While the Diocese of Pittsburgh has always proactively assigned chaplains to the nonsectarian universities within its territory, campus ministry at Pittsburgh’s three Catholic colleges and universities has traditionally been left to the institutions themselves.

5.4 ADMINISTRATION

5.4.1 Professional development for employees

What happens in the classroom is inextricably tied to the quality of the faculty leading the discussions. Many scholars have stressed the importance of hiring for mission, and seeking out faculty who understand and support the university’s religious goals (Briel, 2012; Flanagan, 2010). This is certainly not to say that universities should give hiring preference to Catholic

scholars over non-Catholics. Porth, McCall, and DiAngelo (2009) note that universities cannot simply assume that Catholic faculty support their mission, or that non-Catholic faculty are unfamiliar with Catholic tradition or incapable of sustaining it: “A hiring practice that gave preference to Catholics would not, by itself, guarantee...faculty competence” (p. 17).

Ex Corde Ecclesiae stipulates that universities should strive to maintain a majority of Catholics on their faculty (*Ex Corde*, 1990), but schools have routinely fallen short of that standard throughout their history, particularly in their professional programs (Gleason, 1995). Sullins (2004) found that Catholic universities generally do not give preference to Catholic faculty in the hiring process, but that Catholic faculty are comparatively more likely to remain employed at a Catholic institution for their entire careers. He noted that the long tenure of Catholic faculty means that many schools do, in fact, maintain Catholic majorities in their instructional staffs, and that these majorities cannot be ascribed to pure happenstance, as they exceed the proportion of Catholics in the population of the United States. Thus, many universities remain compliant with *Ex Corde* through serendipity rather than deliberate policy.

Perhaps the most interesting contribution to this discussion comes from Whitney and Laboe (2014), who describe a faculty development program at DePaul University that, they believe, successfully introduces faculty to the institution’s Catholic tradition and helps them incorporate the charism of its founding religious order, the Vincentians, into their pedagogy. They identify six main activities and practices at DePaul that enabled one faculty member, despite his original misgivings, to come to understand and buy into the University’s mission:

1. Meeting individual people and forming relationships with those who embody, transmit, and help to translate mission...
2. Being provided accessible resources for further study and learning about the mission...

3. Making accessible and known the established program of formal and informal assistance...
4. Deepening mission expertise through formal and informal processes of recognition and affirmation...
5. Providing forums within one's particular field or academic department to foster intellectual connections between institutional mission and one's specific discipline...
6. Offering faculty the opportunities and incentive to share their mission learning and growing mission expertise through public speaking and writing (pp. 148-9).

Sanders and Clough (2011) describe a similar process at St. Xavier University in Chicago, where a newly established Center for Religion and Public Discourse has engaged the faculty and helped to promote understanding and appreciation of the school's religious mission, even among those professors who were initially skeptical of it. Rather than emphasize hiring for mission, these two studies show how the right professional development activities can nurture support for the mission among all faculty, regardless of their initial level of understanding.

5.4.2 Communicating the mission

Many scholars have pointed out challenges or inconsistencies in the way Catholic universities talk about their institutional missions. Bonewits Feldner and D'Urso (2009) observe that Catholic universities have multiple stakeholders, and with diverse constituents come diverse communications challenges. Alumni, students, parents, academic peer institutions, Church authorities, and others all have varying preferences about what type of institution the university should be, and schools can sometimes struggle to communicate to all of these audiences using

the language that each wants to hear. Bonglia (2010) writes of this challenge as it affects university fundraisers, who must often engage in dialogue with donors who come to the table with diverse priorities and beliefs regarding Catholic identity.

Gambescia and Paolucci (2011) examined the websites of 207 Catholic colleges and universities in the United States to determine how prominently the institutions mention their religious character online. They sought out references, either on the home page or on a secondary page easily accessible by one or two clicks, to each institution's Catholic affiliation, sponsoring religious order, embrace of the Catholic intellectual tradition, on-campus spiritual opportunities, service opportunities, efforts to hire for mission, and history. After an exhaustive review of primary and secondary web pages, they discovered that Catholic colleges, on average, exhibited 3.7 of these seven characteristics on their websites. Interestingly, only 40% of institutions identified themselves as Catholic on their homepages, and just 28% did so on their human resources pages.

5.4.3 Values-based decision making

As noted in section 1.2.3, Sheila Carney, RSM, at Carlow University is part of a new generation of administrators specifically charged with maintaining their institutions' Catholic identities. Because this phenomenon is so new, few academic studies have yet been completed on it. However, the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) recently conducted what may be the first survey of vice presidents for mission (VPMs). The resulting report, titled the *AJCU Mission and Identity Survey*, shows just how prevalent such offices have become. Of the 28 Jesuit institutions in the country, 26 have established a VPM or its equivalent (the only

exceptions being Spring Hill College and the University of Scranton). The universities that have established such an office used a variety of titles for the position:

14 - “vice president”

5 - “special assistant” or “assistant to the president”

3 - “vice/associate provost”

3- “director,” “facilitator,” or “executive director” of an office that has some responsibility for articulating and developing university mission

1 – “university council for Jesuit mission” (3-member commission)

(Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, 2014)

The only institution to place this function in the hands of more than one individual was the University of San Francisco, which utilized a “University Council for Jesuit Mission,” co-chaired by three senior administrators. The fact that most of these positions work closely with the campus president, and/or serve as high-ranking administrators in their own right, indicates the privileged place they have come to occupy in the university hierarchies. Interestingly, only 17 of the 26 VPM positions identified in the AJCU survey are occupied by a priest (Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, 2014), which reflects both the shortage of religious vocations in the United States as well as the overall shift toward lay control of these institutions.

The *AJCU Mission and Identity Survey* indicates that all 26 VPMs and their offices provide some orientation programming for staff, while a slightly smaller number provide orientation for faculty (p. 5). The intensity of these orientation programs varies widely, from six-month seminars for new administrators at the College of the Holy Cross (p. 10) to online videos posted for voluntary viewing at Canisius College (p. 9). Most commonly, the VPMs report that they speak publicly at university functions and keep a visible presence at events like trustee

meetings, faculty assemblies, graduations, and new student open houses. Unfortunately, the AJCU report also makes it clear that most VPMS and their offices do not engage in a robust effort to measure the effectiveness of their work on campus, and empirical assessments of their activities are rare. Many universities echo the sentiments of the University of San Francisco, which reported a desire to “improve in this area (measurement and assessment)” when resources permit (p. 34).

At Carlow, Carney herself has written about the relationship of Mercy-affiliated schools to the Conference for Mercy Higher Education (CMHE), the organization established by the Sisters of Mercy in 2002 to promote Mercy values in its member institutions. She is optimistic overall that the Conference for Mercy Higher Education can and will maintain the Mercy charism and identity among its member schools, and that it will develop into a valuable conduit for keeping those institutions linked now that their formal ties to each other, and to the Sisters, have evolved (Carney, 2010).

Similarly, Currie (2011) writes from a Jesuit perspective, situating modern debates about Catholic identity in the context of historical controversies surrounding the Jesuits and their adherence to Catholic doctrine. He concludes that administrators at Jesuit schools cannot passively expect their institutions to maintain a Catholic identity, but they must proactively engage with the Jesuit order and other Church officials to ensure a vibrant and living relationship. Likewise, Flanagan (2010) writes optimistically about faculty enthusiasm for maintaining Franciscan heritage on campus, although he admits that faculty at his institution generally ignore the formal principles outlined in *Ex Corde* in favor of more informal initiatives, like dialogue with each other and with the Franciscans who live at the university.

6.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

Let me begin this chapter with a summary of the main points already argued and outlined in Chapter 2: Framing the Inquiry:

1. The purpose of this study is to explore how faculty, staff, and students at Carlow University perceive, conceptualize, and experience their institution's Catholic mission and identity, including current University efforts to sustain that mission. It seeks to understand how the complex issues surrounding Catholic identity identified above have taken shape on this particular campus.
2. Catholic identity can be extremely difficult to define, making it difficult to design empirical studies that measure that identity or measure constituent opinions on that identity. Many published articles therefore focus on anecdotal, individual case studies, hoping that they can provide illustrative "best practices" to other colleges and universities.
3. Studies that do address this topic empirically almost exclusively rely on surveys. Surveys are an expedient, but imperfect means of data collection because they force researchers to write questions ahead of time and to make assumptions about which concepts are important to measure. Focus groups, which allow for a richer, more open-minded approach to data collection, are a more appropriate means to explore stakeholder perceptions on this topic.

4. In addition to filling a methodological gap by using focus groups, this study attempts to fill a substantive gap by focusing on the perceptions of “end-user” faculty, staff, and students, rather than on the practices of high-level administrators (as is often the approach in individual case studies). As such, it focuses on “outcomes” rather than “inputs” (Sanders, 2010) in an attempt to understand how stakeholders are perceiving and reacting to current mission-related initiatives on campus.
5. While methodologically similar to an evaluation, this study does not intend to evaluate Carlow’s current practices or pass judgment on how “Catholic” the University is. It simply seeks to understand how Catholic identity is expressed and understood by ground-level constituents on this particular campus.

6.1 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND JUSTIFICATION

6.1.1 Why focus groups?

The research design of this study, using focus groups to collect data in the context of a case study, is informed and inspired by a number of authors who have published recent scholarly work on the benefits and limitations of that method. As Cyr (2016) explains, focus groups have value in their ability to uncover individual opinions as well as group consensus in a relatively short amount of time, resulting in a rich depth of data that other methods, like surveys, struggle to match. Citing Bratton and Liatto Katundu (1994), Cyr (2016) also notes that “focus groups excel in revealing what participants think and why they think as they do” (p. 234) – both of which are key objectives of this study. Given that the purpose of this research is to uncover

stakeholder perceptions of Carlow's Catholic identity, it is important to design the inquiry method in a way that acknowledges the nuances and ambiguity that often characterize opinions on this topic. A simple, written survey asking stakeholders to "agree" or "disagree" with statements about Carlow's mission might have captured very basic data, but it would not have provided details on the "how" and the "why" behind respondents' opinions as extensively as focus groups have the potential to do. Given that understanding these subtleties is a key goal of this research, it became clear fairly early that focus groups were an ideal, if more labor-intensive, data collection tool.

The size and composition of the focus groups is informed primarily by Menter, et al. (2011), who suggest 4-12 participants, grouped together by "similar characteristics" (p.148). By grouping stakeholders together in defined peer groups (students, faculty, etc.), instead of in mixed groups that include representatives from each category, my goal is to provide respondents with a comfortable forum to express opinion and consensus while minimizing power dynamics that might make some individuals more reticent to speak their minds. Although some level of power hierarchy is unavoidable, particularly in the faculty and staff focus groups, the research design is intended to limit it as much as possible without compromising the random nature of the selection process within each group. Nonetheless, power dynamics themselves are not at all irrelevant to this research, and the opportunity to observe power relationships as part of the group conversation can be an important, revealing part of the data collection. As Cyr (2016) explains, focus groups can often reveal tensions in the group and provoke debate. In the classroom and in the workplace, the issue of Carlow's Catholic identity may indeed fuel debate among stakeholders – a debate often characterized by disparate power structures between administrators, faculty, and students. Since a major purpose of this research is to explore how stakeholders

perceive their own and others' level of responsibility for maintaining Carlow's mission, it would be wrong to ignore or attempt to avoid power dynamics in the focus groups entirely. Their expression (or absence) in groups is an important element of the analysis.

Menter, et al. (2011) also note the limitations of focus groups, explaining that they are often exploratory in nature and that their results cannot be generalized. As such, focus groups fit the purpose of this study, which is conceptualized as a first-step to understand current ground-level opinion on the Carlow campus. The study is not intended to provide definitive conclusions about Carlow's efforts to express its mission, but is intended to establish a baseline of data that can serve as a foundation for future exploration on a more long-term, longitudinal basis, should Carlow choose to pursue this type of research internally. (My hope, echoed by Carlow administrators, is that Carlow will indeed continue to build off of my efforts in future years as part of its own ongoing self-assessments.) The study is also designed to complement existing self-studies that Carlow has already completed (such as the *Mission Accountability Self-Study and Peer Review* [Carlow University, 2015]) that have focused on "inputs" but were often unable to focus on "outcomes" for a variety of reasons, including time and resources.

6.1.2 Coding

Coding the transcribed results was an important element of the analytical process. The coding strategy for this study was informed principally by Saldaña (2011) and Mertens (2005), and was approached in an iterative manner. Although naturally I approach the project with my own biases, I have taken pains not to develop a firm hypothesis about the results prior to collecting the data. The goal, rather, was to follow a "grounded theory" approach in which theories and conclusions emerge from the data itself, as described in Mertens (2005). Question

prompts in the focus groups were designed to be open-ended, allowing the respondents to take their answers in the direction that makes sense to them, rather than to the researcher. While questions like, “Who do you perceive to have most responsibility for maintaining Carlow’s identity?” were meant to spark thought, they were not designed to lead to a particular answer, and my goal was to let the data emerge organically from each group discussion.

Citing Strauss and Corbin (1990), Mertens (2005) identifies three steps in the coding process: (1) Open Coding, in which responses are labeled according to their basic component parts, (2) Axial Coding, in which those component parts are grouped according to common themes, and (3) Selective Coding, in which broader categories are related to each other. I have attempted to follow this process with my own data. As a hypothetical example, a student might respond to a question about Carlow’s identity by saying, “I never think about what makes Carlow distinct. I expect my professors to lead me in the right direction.” Such a response would initially be coded in step 1 as, “denial of personal responsibility.” In step 2, it would be grouped with other responses that seem to “pass the buck” of responsibility for Carlow’s identity to someone else. Such a response would be compared in step 3 with other responses – from students, faculty, and staff – that take the issue of Carlow’s identity “impersonally” and see it as something to be experienced, but not necessarily sustained through personal effort.

Saldaña (2011) provides more detailed breakdowns of the stages of coding, identifying numerous approaches to the initial and secondary steps. I have attempted to use some of the coding strategies he describes, including:

- Emotion Coding (p. 86), in which the participants’ level of interest is inferred by the emotion in his/her voice and level of passion in response. As Catholic identity can be a

matter of personal identity for some people, I anticipated that some respondents may have had strong feelings about the topic while others would be more passive.

- Values Coding (p. 89), focusing on the attitudes associated with beliefs. The study focuses on Carlow's institutional values, so the values of stakeholders (and their concordance with or divergence from Carlow's expressed values) is essential to the analysis.
- Narrative Coding (p. 109), focusing on how speakers tell their personal stories and shape their own identities. Like most Catholic universities, Carlow seeks to shape its students and employees holistically and contribute to their personal formation, so it was important to seek evidence of this in their responses.
- Verbal Exchange Coding (p. 113), which focuses on analyzing dialogue. I approached the data collection with the understanding that a debate could take place in one of my focus groups. The level of passion, civility, and community spirit that participants show in such an exchange was itself relevant to the study.
- Pattern Coding (p. 153) and Axial Coding (p. 159), both second-level analytical strategies that group responses into themes, similar to the strategy explained by Mertens (2005) above.

While all of these techniques were particularly important, I attempted to keep an open mind to other approaches as the data took shape and unforeseen patterns emerged in the responses. My goal was always to approach both the data collection and analytical processes with as few preconceived notions as possible so as to understand, as objectively as possible, the message that subjects communicated to me. To help maintain objectivity, I conducted multiple read-throughs of the focus group transcripts at different points in time, and at different intervals.

I found it helpful first to read each transcript individually, and then set it aside for approximately three weeks before revisiting it. I made several passes through the data using different coding strategies. After the initial coding was complete, I waited a week and re-read the transcripts together in various combinations – reading all of the undergraduate student transcripts on one day, reading faculty and staff transcripts on another, and so on – seeking patterns, similarities, and differences across groups. These strategies not only helped me to become intimately familiar with the data, but also forced me to return to the data anew multiple times as my perspectives on it evolved and my ability to cross-reference the transcripts grew.

6.2 METHODOLOGICAL SPECIFICS

A total of five focus groups were conducted on the Carlow University campus during the fall 2016 academic term – each focusing on one particular stakeholder group:

1. Full-time faculty.
2. Full-time staff.
3. Graduate students and nontraditional undergraduate students. (At Carlow, “nontraditional” is defined as any undergraduate student who earned a high school diploma four or more years before admission, or any student enrolled in the RN-to-BSN program.) While these two types of students are pursuing different types of degrees, they were included in a single focus group because they presumably experience Carlow in similar ways. Both groups consist of adults who are living off-campus, often enrolling part-time, and frequently juggling work and family obligations that can be different from those of traditional-age undergraduates. These similarities in their experience, and the

belief that they would be difficult to schedule for an in-person meeting, led to the decision to combine the two types of students into a single group.

4. Traditional undergraduate students living on campus (“residents”).
5. Traditional undergraduate students commuting from off campus (“commuters”).

These particular constituent groups were chosen because they represent the core of Carlow’s mission, as the people who are most invested in the University and who spend the most time in the campus community. Traditional undergraduates were split into two groups (resident and commuter) in the hope that this separation might reveal some meaningful differences in their experiences.

Other focus groups were considered, but ultimately not pursued for logistical or theoretical reasons:

1. Online students, who are not accustomed to coming to campus and likely would not be available for an in-person meeting. Moreover, like many universities with online programs, Carlow had done little (to date) to try to engage online students in specific mission-related activities.
2. Alumnae/i. Although many Carlow graduates live in the Pittsburgh area, the focus of this study is on the current on-campus environment.
3. Part-time faculty and staff. Although they play an important role in the University, part-time employees are not as enmeshed as full-time employees in the campus community and have not been targeted for the same level of mission-related professional development (so far). Moreover, their erratic schedules would make an in-person focus group difficult to arrange.

4. Students at satellite locations. Carlow offers coursework at satellite centers in Butler and Westmoreland Counties, but these centers are small compared to the Oakland campus and have not been the target of much mission-related outreach by the University to date.
5. Sisters of Mercy. Many of the Sisters who reside at the motherhouse do not hold any formal role at the University. Because the motherhouse is legally separate from the University, getting access to it for research purposes would have required many additional steps and may have been subject to strict Pennsylvania laws regarding research at retirement facilities and nursing homes. Moreover, the purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of the predominantly lay stakeholders who now have responsibility for living and leading Carlow's mission.

6.2.1 Recruitment

The study relied entirely on volunteer subjects. Formal access to Carlow University was provided via letter from the Special Assistant to the President for Mercy Heritage and Service on August 23, 2016. The research protocol was approved by the University of Pittsburgh Human Research Protection Office on September 8, 2016, and that approval was then forwarded to Carlow University's own institutional review board, which accepted it without objection.

As an incentive to participate, students were promised that all volunteers would be entered into a random drawing to win one of four \$25 gift cards to the Carlow University Bookstore. (These gift cards were generously funded by Carlow's Special Assistant to the President for Mercy Heritage and Service, who provided them to me for distribution, so as to preserve the anonymity of the winners.) Faculty and staff were not offered the chance to win a gift card, but all five groups were told that food and beverages would be provided during the

sessions. These refreshments were funded through a generous grant from the University of Pittsburgh Council of Graduate Students in Education.

Initial contact with prospective research subjects was by email. I provided a written recruitment announcement to Carlow's Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning, who then forwarded it to faculty, staff, and students (without sharing the identities of the recipients with me) during the week of September 26, 2016. Those interested in volunteering were told to contact me by email and provide a list of times when they would be available for a focus group. Initially, different strategies were used to sample each group:

1. Faculty: A random sample of 20 faculty members received the initial invitation. That email yielded six volunteers. In an attempt to boost participation, the invitation was sent to another random sample of five additional faculty members on October 6, 2016. Unfortunately, this second email did not result in any additional volunteers.
2. Staff: A random sample of 35 full-time staff members received the initial invitation, yielding five volunteers. Once again, an additional email was sent to five more randomly identified prospects on October 6. This generated one additional volunteer.
3. Students: All of the currently enrolled graduate and undergraduate students on the Oakland campus were invited to participate:
 - a. Graduate/Non-traditional Students: 856 students received the initial invitation, seven of whom volunteered.
 - b. Commuter/Resident Undergraduates: 901 traditional undergraduates received the initial invitation. Students were told to indicate whether they were residents or

commuters when they replied to me. Unfortunately, this approach did not work well, and only three residents and two commuters responded to the email.

Recruiting students proved to be a challenge. Because the email itself did not generate enough interest, I made a number of in-person outreach visits to the Carlow campus. On September 29, 2016, I attended an evening student event in the lobby of A.J. Palumbo Hall, in which the Sisters of Mercy provided a buffet dinner to all students passing by on their way to class (part of an annual tradition known as Founders Fortnight, which celebrates the Mercy heritage on campus). In the span of an hour, I personally handed printed copies of the invitation to 30 students and explained the purpose of the study. This effort yielded just one additional volunteer (a graduate student).

Still in need of more subjects, I eventually asked some of the volunteers from the faculty focus group if they would allow me to visit their courses and speak briefly about the study. Two agreed, and I used the opportunity to speak in the opening minutes of three undergraduate courses – two in the social sciences, and one in nursing. One of these courses, a small upper-level social science seminar, yielded no volunteers. The other two, both large introductory-level courses, generated some interest. In both cases, the instructors vouched for the value of the study, but did not offer any extra incentive for students to participate. The combination of all of these efforts resulted in an additional three volunteers for the commuter group and seven for the resident group. (However, several of these volunteers did not actually attend, as will be noted in section 6.2.2 below.)

One advantage of utilizing in-person recruitment techniques is that I was able to get some anecdotal feedback as to why some students did not want to volunteer. Most frequently, students said that they found the study interesting, but that they had no time to take on any new

commitments in their schedules. Many said that they were struggling to keep up with schoolwork while working one or more jobs or taking care of loved ones. The idea of spending time away from these responsibilities (even in a one-hour focus group) amounted to more than they could promise. This makes a great deal of sense, since a high percentage of Carlow students (49% of all undergraduates and 48% of traditional undergraduates) receive Pell Grants – the type of federal aid reserved for the very poorest students under government guidelines (Carlow University, 2016). That Carlow provides educational opportunities for so many low-income students is laudable, but it does mean that many Carlow students cannot afford the luxury of devoting an hour of their time to an unpaid volunteer project like this research study.

6.2.2 Execution

The five focus groups (each one hour in length) were scheduled between October 20 and November 15, 2016. All took place in meeting rooms on the Carlow campus. I recorded and personally transcribed audio from each session. A number of volunteers from all groups (except the staff group) had to cancel their participation at the last minute due to illness, weather, or other reasons, but each session ultimately took place with at least four participants.

Table 6.1. Focus group schedule/structure

Date/Time	Group	Total Number Invited	Number of Initial Volunteers	Number Who Actually Attended
Thursday, October 20, 2016 11:00 am – noon	Faculty	25	6	5
Wednesday, October 26, 2016 noon – 1:00 pm	Staff	40	5 (first email) 1 (second email)	6
Thursday, October 27, 2016 5:00 pm – 6:00 pm	Grad/Nontraditional Students	856	7 (from email) 1 (from visit)	4
Monday, November 14, 2016 5:00 pm – 6:00 pm	Traditional Undergrads (Commuter)	901	3 (from email) 3 (from visit)	4
Tuesday, November 15, 2016 6:00 pm – 7:00 pm	Traditional Undergrads (Resident)		3 (from email) 7 (from visit)	5

To preserve anonymity, I will not identify names or job titles of any of the participants. However, below is some basic demographic information about the makeup of each group. As would be expected given the demographics of the University, the large majority of participants were women. Participants were not explicitly asked to identify a religious preference, but many volunteered this information during the course of the conversations:

Table 6.2. Makeup of focus groups

Faculty Group	4 women 1 man	4 Catholics 1 other religion
Staff Group	5 women 1 man	3 Catholics 2 other religions 1 not religious
Graduate/Nontraditional Student Group	4 women (2 graduate students, 2 nontraditional undergraduates)	1 Catholic 2 other religions 1 not religious
Commuter Undergraduate Group	3 women 1 man	3 Catholics 1 non-identified
Resident Undergraduate Group	5 women	3 Catholics 1 other religion 1 not religious

6.2.2.1 Discussion prompts

Working closely with Carlow administrators to identify what information they most wanted to gather, and drawing upon themes from the scholarly literature identified in Chapter 5, I developed the following set of discussion prompts for the focus groups:

General (Faculty, Staff, and Students)

1. Is Carlow's Catholic identity an important reason why you decided to join this community?
2. Who do you think has responsibility for maintaining Carlow's Catholic identity?
3. What do you see as your personal role in maintaining Carlow's Catholic identity?
4. Do you see Carlow's Catholic identity as empowering, limiting, or both?
5. Do you see Carlow's mission as relevant to your life and your career?
6. Do you understand and feel connected to the history and spirit of the Sisters of Mercy?
7. Do you have the opportunity to learn about other faiths and religions?
8. How is the spirit of the Sisters of Mercy evident in the life of the University?

Academics (Faculty and Students)

1. Do you understand the history and impact that the Catholic Church and Catholic thinkers have had on academia?
2. Do you feel empowered to use your learning for practical ends, to help others in need?
Do you have opportunities to do so?
3. Do you understand and promote a moral perspective in your discipline?
4. (Students only): What does a "just and merciful world" mean to you, and do you feel prepared to work toward such a world?

Research (Faculty)

1. Does your work engage in a dialogue between faith and reason?
2. Is your scholarly agenda different at Carlow than it would be at a secular university?
3. Do you feel comfortable discussing your religious beliefs, or lack thereof, in a professional setting on campus?

Campus Life (Faculty, Staff, and Students)

1. Do you have opportunities to practice your faith on campus, and do you feel comfortable doing so?
2. Have you come to understand your own personal spiritual and religious identity better during your time at Carlow?
3. Are people of all religious preferences equally welcome on campus?
4. Do you have the opportunity to reflect and connect to Carlow's mission after engaging in an activity/service?
5. Do your colleagues model the spirit of the Sisters of Mercy to others?
6. Do you feel empowered to take responsibility for Carlow's mission?

6.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is a trade-off of the focus group method that richness of data often comes at the expense of breadth of data. In interpreting the results of any focus group study, it is important not to assume that they are broadly generalizable across time or across the population as a whole (Menter, et al., 2011). Instead, they provide a snapshot, or “deep dive” into the perceptions of a group of current (and important) stakeholders.

Because the participants were all volunteers, it is reasonable to assume that they had some level of interest in this subject matter even before responding to the invitation. As such, their perceptions might be best interpreted as those of stakeholders who have given some thought to these issues in the past (perhaps more than has the average member of the Carlow community). One immediately apparent discrepancy is that Catholics themselves are over-

represented in the list of participants. In the three student groups, even though all students had equal opportunity to volunteer, self-identified Catholics made up 54% of the final participants, as compared to 34% of undergraduates and 32% of graduate students on the campus overall (Carlow University, 2016). One can assume therefore that the results of the study are skewed toward the opinions of Catholic students. This is a fairly common issue in the academic literature on this subject; Bolduc (2009) found a similar sampling bias in his effort to measure student opinion on five New England Catholic campuses. In his study, women were more likely than men to respond to a survey on Catholic identity, and students with stronger religious beliefs were more likely overall to have an interest in completing the study. Bolduc's (2009) comment on this bias in his study also applies here: "Neither of these introduced fatal flaws, but the net effect is that the overall religiousness of the sample is more likely to be overstated than understated" (p. 134).

In addition, the particular recruitment methods used (including a visit to three undergraduate courses, two of which yielded volunteers) meant that students in those particular courses were slightly over-represented in the two traditional undergraduate focus groups. In the end, two of the four students in the commuter group and two of the five students in the resident group came from those two courses – not a majority in either case, but perhaps an overrepresentation. However, it should be mentioned that both courses (one social science and one nursing) were fairly typical lower-level undergraduate courses, and neither was on a subject matter that could be considered particularly or unusually relevant to Carlow's Catholic identity.

I also approach the study knowing that the lack of true anonymity in a focus group setting may lead some individuals to avoid expressing truly controversial opinions. Face-to-face with coworkers, colleagues, and classmates, some participants might have felt pressure to say the

“right” thing, or give what they assumed to be the answer I was hoping to hear. While all were assured that their identities would be kept confidential, they were all aware that the results of the study would be seen by members of the Carlow administration – something that must be considered and acknowledged when interpreting the results.

6.4 LANGUAGE NOTES

Three men participated in the focus groups. However, to preserve the anonymity of all respondents and for ease of expression, I will only use female pronouns in the discussion below regardless of whether the individual speaker was a man or a woman. Also, for ease of reading, verbal flourishes (including “you know,” “um,” and “like”) are omitted from direct quotes as long the omission does not alter the meaning of the statement. “Mercy” is capitalized when it refers to the order of nuns and lowercase when it refers to the generic virtue.

7.0 RESULTS

The five focus groups provided fascinating insight into how faculty, staff, and students conceptualize and experience Carlow's Catholic and Mercy identity. Although there were occasional, sometimes unexpected differences from one group to another, the overall perception was remarkably consistent. It is clear that Carlow is rooted firmly in the Mercy tradition and that stakeholders still feel passion for and dedication to the founding Mercy values that have animated the University for nearly a century.

The discussion below is organized into five sections, each based on themes that emerged from the focus group data, and each exploring how the stakeholders *conceptualize* or *experience* Carlow's identity:

- Section 7.1 presents evidence that faculty, staff, and students *conceptualize* Carlow's mission primarily in terms of the University's commitment to serving the less fortunate, though different groups can interpret that service orientation in different ways.
- Section 7.2 examines how members of each group *conceptualize* Carlow's "Catholic" and "Mercy" identity, what distinctions they draw between those two terms, how they interpret changes in that identity over time, and how students understand the "just and merciful world" that Carlow hopes to create.
- Section 7.3 focuses on how stakeholders *conceptualize* their reasons for joining the Carlow community, drawing particularly on three themes that emerged from the data:

collegiality, smallness, and the belief that Carlow reinforces their preexisting beliefs and values. This section also identifies questions that emerged from the discussions: whether Catholics and non-Catholics experience Carlow in similar ways, and whether Carlow “attracts” or “shapes” people who support its mission. A close reading of the data shows that Carlow may be shaping stakeholder values in subtle ways that even the stakeholders themselves do not always acknowledge.

- Section 7.4 focuses on how stakeholders *experience* Carlow’s identity *inside* the classroom, focusing on its curriculum and its physical environment.
- Section 7.5 explores how stakeholders *experience* Carlow’s identity *outside* the classroom, focusing on three concepts that received significant attention in the focus groups: interaction with the Sisters of Mercy, campus ministry, and off-campus learning.

7.1 CONCEPTUALIZING MISSION: SERVICE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Catholic identity can mean different things in different contexts, but it is clear that Carlow’s particular expression of that identity is shaped heavily by the vision of Catherine McAuley and the values of the Sisters of Mercy – in particular, service to others and social justice. By far the strongest theme running through all five focus groups was the idea of service, especially to those less fortunate. In a remarkably consistent way, faculty, staff, and students cited Carlow’s commitment to social justice as “the” defining characteristic that shapes its identity as a Catholic institution. Virtually all stakeholders described Carlow as a force for good in the world – something with which they are proud to be associated. Most responses to questions about Carlow’s Catholic identity began by addressing its uniquely Catholic

responsibility to help those who need help most. Faculty, staff, and students, however, sometimes conceptualized service in different ways.

7.1.1 Faculty/staff perspective

In the faculty focus group, it quickly became clear that professors saw their role at Carlow as a kind of service, and viewed their work with students as a form of ministry rather than as a simple job requirement. According to one faculty member,

I deal primarily with undergraduates, and I feel a lot of our mission, and the work I do, we're ministering to these kids here who are really lost. So, sometimes I feel like...these kids who are actually sitting in your office are the ones who hunger to be ministered to. And maybe they were never told, "You're a bright young man or you're a bright young woman, and you can do this." Maybe they never had that encouragement. Or it could be that the single mom who unexpectedly has this baby and like, wants to pump, and needs a place to pump, so even little things like that. I'm like, "Go use my office if you need a place." I mean, what other university will say, "Come use my office to pump milk for your baby?" That's the type of relationship (Faculty Group).

Both faculty and staff mentioned Carlow's high percentage of first-generation college students and Pell Grant recipients, describing those students as the audience they were most motivated to serve. Staff members described the Carlow Closet, a clothing exchange that provides interview attire to students who might not otherwise be able to afford it, as one of the campus resources that most reflects this mission. Staff members also explained that Carlow's Mercy values led them to see themselves more as mentors than as rule-enforcers, showing mercy to students facing academic or financial problems and giving such students a second chance

whenever possible. Both faculty and staff felt that their jobs were defined in large part by service to the students, and perceived Carlow to be unique compared to other universities in that regard. One staff member said,

I'm not a faculty member, but I know that the faculty really reach out to our students...There's a high percentage of Pell-eligible students on our campus, and I don't know all the statistics, but I think it really reaches into the Mercy history of the University, wanting to offer an education to everyone, even those who can't afford it. I think that's a big part of things. For instance, faculty will drive students to places or go that extra mile to try to connect students because they wouldn't otherwise be able to be driven there or would really need extra help...I think there's a lot of academic advising that goes on here because some of our students are coming from underserved schools, don't have the background and need extra help (Staff Group).

Although both faculty and staff briefly acknowledged the presence of more privileged students on campus, the primary focus of their discussions was on those students who are underprivileged and need extra attention to succeed. They readily cited Carlow's religious heritage as part of their motivation to serve such students, and were confident that Carlow was the best possible environment for anyone who needs that kind of personalized attention. Said one staff member,

Where I'm working leads to a lot of thinking about the Mercy heritage and how I should act toward this person – how I can help them come to a solution that will be helpful for them but also not, say, put them in debt or be a problem for them continuing on at Carlow...And then, what happens to that student if they're not here and receiving what we can give to them (Staff Group)?

Faculty and staff also discussed service in the community writ large, and felt that there was ample opportunity for them to get involved in various charities, fundraisers, and food/clothing drives year-round. They saw this spirit as ingrained in Carlow's culture – something the University encourages among its employees as well as its students. There was some acknowledgement that service is also important to the culture at non-Catholic universities, but also a belief that Carlow's approach to service was stronger, better, and more definitive to its mission. The overall sense was that secular universities are catching up to Carlow, not vice versa:

It seems like even a lot of non-faith-based universities are into service. That's just what I'm seeing. My (relative) goes to a private, non-faith-based institution and I know they do a lot of service as well. I don't know if it's like a generational or maybe a millennial thing, like this generation, but I know we not only say it, but it's such an integral part of everything we do here (Faculty Group).

7.1.2 Student perspective

For their part, students recognized that faculty and staff were dedicated to their success, and even found that dedication amusing. From the undergraduates:

Student A: They're very, for the most part, welcoming and always willing to help if needed. They really emphasize that (on) the first day of class, and all throughout the semester, too, like, "Make sure, if you need help, come. Come talk to us."

Student B: A lot of staff, I've even noticed, will go completely out of their way to help, like you don't even have to ask them. They'll just ask you. Like, "Do you need

help?” “No, I’m fine.” And then five minutes later, someone else will walk past you, you know (laughing)? *All right* (Resident Group).

As might be expected considering their age differences, graduate/nontraditional students were more reflective and expressed more explicit appreciation for this campus atmosphere than did traditional undergraduates. While students of all age groups were thankful for the personal attention they have received at Carlow, the older adults spoke with a sense of genuine gratitude that seemed to go beyond mere appreciation. Even though the graduate/nontraditional students all said that they would have pursued a degree elsewhere if Carlow did not exist, they believed that Carlow’s uniquely supportive environment made it possible for them to succeed in ways that would have been impossible at a typical university:

I would definitely still be going to school just because that’s my aspiration, that I want to keep doing more for myself, but I’m really glad that I did find Carlow instead of somewhere else, because I don’t know that I would have made it in another school. I might have either taken time off or transferred or needed a lot more help than I could have found. I just really feel like the reason that I did as well as I did as an undergrad and the reason I came back here (for graduate school) is because Carlow really is a special place (Graduate/NT Group).

Many students acknowledged that they had been the beneficiaries of Carlow’s strong service orientation in this way. They cited experiences in which professors changed a deadline to accommodate a death in the student’s family, or arranged to meet the student off campus when regular office hours conflicted with the student’s work schedule. However, students’ main focus was not on “receiving” help, but on “giving” it – treating others around them in an equally understanding way. In conceptualizing Carlow’s identity, they spoke first about the long list of

service opportunities provided to them by the University, and the degree to which students are encouraged to help others.

Every undergraduate student who participated in the focus groups indicated that she had done some form of community service while enrolled at Carlow, and all were aware of opportunities to do more. They cited curriculum requirements (like a service learning project in a special education class) and Mercy Service Day – an annual campus-wide event in which many of them participated. Even when asked, no students indicated that there was “too much” emphasis on service or that they disliked what they described as frequent, but never annoying reminders that service opportunities exist:

I’d definitely say that they (the administration) do pretty well in putting that concept kind of in your life, like not forcefully, but mentioning it in the (weekly news) email, like having all of these events and everything throughout the school year. I think it helps you to think about it more often than you would on a normal basis (Commuter Group).

On the other hand, a persistent theme across all focus groups is that the University could do even more in terms of service. One faculty member indicated that she wishes service was an explicit requirement for all professors as part of their performance evaluations. Undergraduate students stated that they would be willing to do more community service work if opportunities could be scheduled around their classes and other obligations. Commuter students, in particular, made a point to raise the issue of scheduling, saying that they had too many pressures on their time to do as much volunteerism as they would like. They offered these (unsolicited) suggestions on how to improve student participation in service projects:

- Hold more service-related events (i.e., a food drive) on campus around the noon hour or ongoing throughout the day, so that students could drop in and out as their class schedules allow.
- Incorporate more service projects into coursework as grading requirements. Commuter students find it hard to motivate themselves to spend time and energy on non-required activities. However, students offered glowing reviews of service opportunities that they completed as part of a course assignment, and several indicated that these were some of their best memories of Carlow. Students also indicated that they would be open to more such service-learning opportunities: “I’d almost want to have another class or something...even if it was like a pass/fail or a one-credit or something, just to have that reinforced” (Commuter Group).
- Encourage students to view service projects as resume-builders that have real career implications. “I think if they kind of pushed that aspect a little bit more on students, then they would know, ok, this actually has a point...this can help my future by being involved in this stuff” (Commuter Group).
- Offer more events. While they recognize that there are already plenty of service opportunities available to them, all students indicated that they would be open to more and would not mind receiving even more invitations than they already do. While they felt that service was visibly part of the Carlow ethos, nobody felt that it had already reached the point of saturation.

7.1.2.1 Local vs. global

One conspicuously absent perspective from the student groups was any reference to global or international issues. Even those students who participated in community service and cited it as a core personal value seemed to define it exclusively in terms of the immediate Pittsburgh region. At no time did any student express interest in helping needy communities overseas or working to resolve broader international social justice issues. Majoring in nursing, education, social work, or other similar fields, they tended to conceptualize poverty and injustice in terms of what they see and experience in their own face-to-face interactions every day, and often sought careers that would allow them to work and solve problems at a local, grassroots level. In the faculty group, some professors made indirect reference to this tendency, saying that they have tried to raise student awareness of global issues by bringing their classes to a museum exhibit on refugees or discussing international news. Nonetheless, the conversation in all three of the student focus groups was centered predominantly on local issues.

7.1.3 Service at any expense?

Although all stakeholders valued Carlow's service orientation, staff (who are perhaps most attuned to the financial and management aspects of the University, due to their positions) were the only group to point out that they sometimes see a tension between Carlow's institution-wide commitment to the less fortunate and the practical realities of running the University. Indeed, the spirit of service at Carlow can be so prevalent that it sometimes overshadows other considerations, like sustainability:

Staff Member A: (In) discussions that I've had with people who were, let's say, trying to figure out new programs to offer, very often it's like, "This would be a great

program!” But it’s not going to make any money. “But people need it!” It’s good for people, but not so good for the University. So, like, which takes precedence, you know?

Staff Member B: And I think that’s just an ongoing issue with this place. Wanting to help people but also having to survive.

Staff Member C: If we could get that wonderful program and it could make money, that would be great.

Practical considerations aside, it should come as no surprise that a Mercy-affiliated university should have a strong spirit of service, but the extent to which that spirit permeated every aspect of Carlow was striking. Service – whether to the students or to the community – was the first and most prevalent concept that defined Carlow’s mission in the eyes of virtually every stakeholder. If not surprising in substance, it was noteworthy for its near-universal consistency.

7.2 CONCEPTUALIZING “CATHOLIC” VIS-À-VIS “MERCY”

7.2.1 Faculty/staff perspective

So much emphasis was placed on service and social justice that stakeholders sometimes struggled to describe Carlow’s identity in anything but those terms. In the faculty group, professors were generally more comfortable with the term “Mercy” than the term “Catholic,” both in the sense that “Mercy” was a more precise descriptor of Carlow’s mission and in the sense that “Mercy” was seen as the best possible interpretation of Catholic teaching. One professor said,

When I think of the Mercy spirit, I think of the very, very, very strong women who started Mercy and who took Mercy around the world. So when I think of Mercy spirit, I think of...I don't know how to say this...I don't really think of the Catholic tradition, whatever we're labeling that. What I think of when I hear Mercy, I think of those very strong women who took their vision for social justice out into the world. And so I hold that here at Carlow (Faculty Group).

This opinion is not unusual at Catholic institutions. Other colleges and universities have been known to emphasize or identify most strongly with the charism of their founding religious order (Flanagan, 2010). Mercy-affiliated colleges are no different; in their published article, "At the Intersection of Catholic and Mercy: There's an Elephant in the Room," three faculty members at Mercyhurst University expressed very similar beliefs:

It is not uncommon to hear faculty or administrators say that they prefer to focus on the Mercy part of our identity, implying that somehow they can separate the Mercy from the Catholic. But perhaps they are recognizing the fact that Mercy values of hospitality, justice, and compassion are seeded deeply in our community, and serve as a way to bridge the distance between our Catholic identity and the diverse traditions, beliefs, and positions that our community members hold (Snyder, Edwards, and McCarthy, 2014, p. 68).

In a similar way, Carlow faculty (several of whom freely indicated that they themselves had attended Catholic schools) emphasized that they saw Carlow as a "special" place – not just compared to secular universities, but compared to other Catholic universities as well. They made reference to Mercy values like acceptance, forgiveness, and love when highlighting their desire to create a welcoming atmosphere for students of all races, religions, sexual orientations, and

economic backgrounds. There was a sense that being a Catholic school meant something different in the past than it does today, and that Carlow's evolution toward a more diverse, open environment has been a positive change – leading to the truest fulfillment of the moral principles the Church has always taught, but that Catholic institutions have sometimes failed to live out in practice. According to one faculty member,

I think that's unique to Catholicism nowadays, in a Catholic school...You know, Catholics weren't that embracive for everything. I'll say in the old days, really, they weren't. It was, "You're either Catholic or you're not," really. I can speak with authority...I think, in the old days, Catholics were much more closed-minded, or this University's just unique. That's what I think (Faculty Group).

Throughout the faculty focus group, there was a palpable sense that Carlow's diversity and open-mindedness were not in conflict with its Catholic identity, but were, in a sense, the truest fulfillment thereof. However, even as faculty expressed the belief that Catholic schools *should* embrace diversity in this way, there was an equally palpable sense of astonishment that a Catholic school actually *would* do so – at least, as effectively and thoroughly as Carlow has. The clear implication is that Catholic institutions historically have failed to live out their values in practice, and that the Sisters of Mercy and Carlow got it "right" in a way that some professors never witnessed in their own Catholic educations.

Staff drew a similar distinction between the general term "Catholic" and the more specific "Mercy," sometimes preferring the latter:

Staff Member A: I think there's also an interesting question between the Mercy and Catholic. This (University) maybe is more Mercy than Catholic, which I think is

cool...I wasn't raised Catholic, haven't been around Sisters in my life. I'm (a different religion), but the Mercy is very attractive to me, very open-minded.

Staff Member B: Because it's all-inclusive. Mercy is for everyone...there's no division of it (Staff Group).

Several staff members, along with some faculty, reported that they had participated in one of several mission-related activities sponsored by the University and/or the Sisters of Mercy, and without exception, had glowingly positive things to say about the experiences. Specifically cited were:

- The McDarby Institute, a professional development program in which faculty and staff are invited to learn about Carlow's Mercy heritage. Staff members particularly praised the Institute's accessibility to non-Catholics.
- The Carlow Roundtable, which brings together faculty from Mercy-affiliated institutions around the country to discuss issues related to Mercy education.
- A trip to Ireland, in which some faculty and staff accompany students to retrace the steps of the early Sisters of Mercy.

While not all focus group participants had participated in these activities, those who did were able to discuss (in some detail) important events from the life of Catherine McAuley and the history of the Sisters of Mercy as it relates to Carlow. Tellingly, not all of those individuals were self-identified Catholics, although they all indicated some personal interest in Mercy history because of their own Irish heritage, personal values, or work responsibilities. The focus group discussions suggested that these initiatives are at the very least leaving an impression on the faculty and staff who participate in them (though presumably, participation in those activities – and participation in this study – implies some level of pre-existing interest in the topic).

However, not all faculty and staff are equally familiar with these ideas, nor do they come to Carlow with the same level of familiarity with Catholic culture. As one (non-Catholic) staff member said,

I personally find it (Carlow's identity) in some ways empowering but in other ways limiting, partially because I think I'm not sure I can actually articulate what it is. You know, I did not grow up this way at all, and so, when you talk about the Mercy heritage, (if) you ask me, "What does that mean?" I would have a hard time actually articulating in set terms, well, what does that mean? I mean, I know it's like an atmosphere and that kind of thing, but actually articulating it I would struggle with. So in that sense, I kind of find it limiting, because I'm not really sure what I'm trying to portray. But on the other hand, I think the fact that there is a mission that's, in a sense, possibly not so detailed and specific, that that's kind of empowering, that we have a flag to rally around, that there's something exciting about that (Staff Group).

While the ambiguities of Catholic identity are present at Carlow just as they are present at all Catholic universities, it can at least be said that some faculty and staff have familiarized themselves with basic principles about Carlow's history and internalized some of the source material behind the philosophies of Mercy education. This speaks to the quality of Sisters' efforts to communicate their values to the lay people now responsible for Carlow and keep their Mercy charism alive.

7.2.2 Student perspective

Unlike faculty and staff, students drew very little clear distinction between the terms "Catholic" and "Mercy," often using the terms interchangeably. Although students expressed

admiration for the Sisters of Mercy, there was no implication that the Sisters were in any way different from the rest of the Catholic Church. Some students had only seen Catholic education through Carlow's Mercy lens and seemed to feel that the Carlow experience was a typical Catholic experience. Students who had graduated from Catholic grade schools and high schools did not express any sentiment that Carlow was somehow different, or "more" or "less" Catholic than any other school they had attended.

At no time did any student express any negative opinion about the Catholic Church. One (non-Catholic) student stated that some of her friends judged her for attending a Catholic school, but seemed to think that it was more their problem than Carlow's. This was in contrast to the faculty and staff, who spoke with reverence about the Sisters of Mercy but sometimes poked good-natured fun at Catholicism in general. (One faculty member pointed out that the Church condemned Galileo, and a staff member joked that she knew Carlow was Catholic because of the collection plates constantly asking staff for donations.) But the students were always very sincere when they spoke about Catholicism and couched their comments in nothing but positive terms. No student said that Carlow's identity was in any way limiting to her or prevented her from having the college experience that she wanted. To the contrary, both Catholics and non-Catholic students spoke repeatedly about how Carlow reinforced their own values and beliefs – a topic that will be explored in more detail in section 7.3.2.

7.2.2.1 "A just and merciful world"

When it agreed to sponsor this research, Carlow's Center for Mercy Heritage and Service made a specific request: that part of the study explore how students understand and react to the phrase, "A just and merciful world." That particular phrase has been at the center of a number of Carlow initiatives in recent years, including a curriculum revision that was designed to imbue the

classroom with Mercy values. Appearing on posters, web pages, and emails, the phrase is meant as a reminder of Carlow's mission and a building block of its identity. The University was interested to know how those efforts have been perceived by students, and accordingly, all three student groups were asked, "What does 'a just and merciful world' mean to you, and do you feel prepared to work toward such a world?"

All nine of the traditional undergraduates (in both the commuter and the resident groups) reported that they had heard the phrase before. In the graduate/nontraditional group, however, three of four students said that it was entirely unfamiliar to them. (The one graduate student who was familiar with the phrase had previously earned her bachelor's degree at Carlow, and she attributed her knowledge to her undergraduate days.)

Asked to pinpoint where they had heard it, the undergraduates said that it mostly comes up at school functions and campus-wide events, especially at new student orientation and in the core course required of most first-year students. Two transfer students noted that they did not have to take the same freshman course, but that they were generally familiar with the phrase. One said that she knows about it through campus email announcements: "With the student emails we get, I feel like it's always kind of thrown in there in certain parts. They at least try to hint at it in every email. I feel like I've seen it there" (Commuter Group).

Although all undergraduates said that they were accustomed to hearing about "a just and merciful world," in the context of campus life, most struggled to define it. After some thought, many of them offered only the dictionary definitions of "just" and "merciful" without articulating anything specific to Carlow or relating it to their studies more than superficially. Some examples:

Student A: When I hear, “just,” I think of “fair,” and “merciful” means you’re able to put yourself in a position to help other people who may not be able to help themselves in the situation that they’re in (Resident Group).

Student B: Yeah, kind of just treating people kindly and fairly and doing what you can to give back to others who don’t have as much as you (Resident Group).

Student C: I think the “just” part is like, trying to have fairness and respect for one another and the “merciful” is like, take care of your neighbors but taking care of yourself, too. “Merciful”... (means) the way you approach life and try to live it out in a Christian-like manner (Commuter Group).

It was not clear that the phrase, “just and merciful world” helps students to conceptualize the Carlow mission in any distinct way, although students’ hesitancy to offer more detail in their responses might be attributable to the perception that it was an “official” slogan of the University that had some sort of “official” definition – one that they did not want to get “wrong.” Some insightful replies, however, came from nontraditional undergraduates who had never heard the phrase before:

Student A: This goes back to my faith. I serve a just and merciful God... “Just” is, I think, God’s righteousness, not mine, and that I don’t have to...stress over some things that I’ve done in my lifetime. Because though He’s just and I’ve paid for some of those things, He’s merciful, and mercy to me is the fact that He hasn’t given me what I deserve. I deserve a whole lot worse, but He’s blessed me in spite of who I am, because of who He is. I think that’s what I hold onto when I make mistakes, or I do things wrong, or when I see other people do things that I don’t necessarily agree with. Mercy. God showed me mercy, I can show this person mercy.

Student B: I think it just means to show somebody compassion and patience, because we don't live in a just and merciful world. So it's on us to bring that to another person with our behavior, with our love, with our kindness...Don't judge. You don't bring people your judgment. You bring your understanding. You might not agree with that person, but you can have understanding, just to understand where they're coming from. I might not agree with your religion, you might not agree with mine, but I can understand your religion (Graduate/NT Group).

Indeed, the term "non-judgmental" came up several times in the student focus groups. Students felt strongly that anyone would feel welcome at Carlow, and that this sense of welcoming was central to Carlow's Mercy spirit.

7.2.3 Identifying and articulating change

One surprising aspect of the focus groups was the total absence of a theme that characterizes much of the academic literature on Catholic identity: the idea that Catholic universities are rapidly losing touch with their history and becoming indistinguishable from generic, secular institutions. This concern motivates much of the scholarship on this topic, and has been promoted by conservative groups like the Cardinal Newman Society as well as by individual campus and alumni groups, like Notre Dame's Sycamore Trust (www.sycamoretrust.org), Georgetown's Father King Society (www.gupetition.org), and San Diego's Alumni for a Catholic USD (www.alumniforacatholicusd.org) to name but a few. Moreover, while extremely rare among Catholic institutions, secularization is not entirely unprecedented; a small percentage of Catholic schools have publicly shed their religious

affiliations. Carlow's sister institution, Mercy College in Dobbs Ferry, New York, was founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1950 and today identifies itself as non-sectarian (Mercy College, n.d.).

In these focus groups, however, the idea that Carlow is somehow losing its Catholic roots or abandoning its heritage was virtually non-existent. No one in any group – faculty, staff, or student – so much as suggested that Carlow's secularization was imminent or that the University is being unfaithful to its religious identity. Instead, faculty and staff who had been associated with Carlow for many years (or even decades) stressed that Carlow has much the same spirit today that it always has had, even if the makeup of the student body has evolved:

Well, I felt that way (from the day I interviewed) and I've been here for quite some time, so I don't think that that has changed. From what I've heard, individuals who have been hired over the years, they have the sense that this is a good place, that this is a good space to be in. It has an aura about it (Staff Group).

In fact, there was relatively little evidence of discomfort with change or with the current state of the University in any of the focus groups. Faculty indicated that Carlow's values have always been present, but that the University is now being more deliberate than ever about promoting those values in a concrete, identifiable way. Faculty credited the current president and administration for pushing those values to the forefront of the University's consciousness, and expressed the belief that, while the administration's work might be innovative, there was nothing new about the values themselves or the character of the campus. Speaking about Carlow's inclusivity, a faculty member said,

It's becoming more to the surface, more apparent, more of an expectation. We put it out there to make it intentional. It's intentional now. Before it was there. Nobody was

disregarded. But now it's intentional. We're going out of our way to make it apparent that we're doing it (Faculty Group).

The few instances in which participants did express concern over change mostly took place in the student focus groups – ironically, among the stakeholders who have been on campus for the shortest amount of time. One (resident) student expressed some disappointment that Carlow was moving away from its women-centered focus, but that opinion was not shared widely. A graduate student mentioned some unease about campus renovations, saying that she hopes Carlow maintains the historic character of its old buildings. Beyond that, while no one indicated that Carlow was perfect, it was very clear that all stakeholders took a great deal of pride in the current state of their University and saw little indication that it is headed down the wrong path.

7.3 WHY CARLOW?

An emergent theme in all five focus groups was the extent to which people spoke passionately about what first drew them to Carlow, about the “specialness” of the University, and the particular qualities that make Carlow unique. This section presents some responses related to this theme. It begins with the importance Carlow stakeholders place on collegiality. In the process, it touches upon two debates that took shape in the focus group conversations: first is the question (a classic chicken-or-egg dilemma) of whether the people make Carlow or Carlow makes the people; second is the question of whether Catholics and non-Catholics experience Carlow in the same way. Lastly, this section explores the importance stakeholders place on Carlow's small, intimate campus environment. All of these themes and questions emerged

organically from the focus group conversations, and the data suggests that Carlow stakeholders consider them important, if not central, to the University's mission and identity.

7.3.1 Collegiality

Second only to service, collegiality is the characteristic that most seems to define Carlow in the eyes of its stakeholders. In the faculty focus group, the conversation danced around terms like "hospitality," "dignity," and "cohesiveness" before the participants finally settled on "collegiality" as the key quality that distinguishes Carlow from other universities. Faculty spoke of their responsibility to model collegial behavior to their students and to "support one another," share "intellectual property" and show "compassion" toward others as a starting point for their service mission (Faculty Group).

Many of the same concepts also came up in the staff focus group. Staff acknowledged that collegiality was a good practice in any job and with any employer, but seemed to feel that it was unusually ingrained at Carlow. Said one staffer:

It's very collaborative, so I feel like everybody, at least that I've seen, has in some way promoted that spirit...Some people specifically have mentioned the identity, but other people, it's just the way that they act. But they all very much have ownership on the identity, the Catholic and Mercy identity of the school. No matter their religious background, they're just very much owning that...That's one of the things I noticed in the interview process, though meeting people, it's just very prevalent...Everyone is on the same page, everyone's collaborating, everyone has such a spirit, that spirit of service and Mercy, and it's just prevalent, whether people realize it or not. It's very prevalent when you step onto campus (Staff Group).

A number of staff members said that they had had opportunities to work elsewhere but chose to work at Carlow because of its unusually supportive environment. Several staff members felt that there was a “self-filtering” process that attracts employees with the right kind of spirit, and that anyone who did not fit into the Carlow culture would not last long:

Staff Member A: I get the sense that they hire the right people...They’re looking for people who have that same collaborative spirit and that same Merciful spirit.

Staff Member B: And I think people who come and end up being not that type of person will end up leaving. They’re not...it’s not a good match for them (Staff Group).

Although this language might sound exclusionary, staff (along with faculty and students) insisted that no one would ever feel unwelcome at Carlow. They simply felt that anyone who did not fully buy into Carlow’s welcoming spirit and reciprocate it would not enjoy working there.

7.3.2 Student perspective

There was enormous diversity in the students’ motivations for attending Carlow. Two non-traditional undergraduates said that Carlow’s Catholic identity had no bearing whatsoever on their decision to apply. Among the traditional undergraduates, three students indicated that the Catholic identity was a decisive factor, with one student saying that she only applied to Catholic universities. However, the remainder (majority) of the undergraduates and graduate students described Carlow’s religious affiliation as a nice “perk” but not a major determinant.

No student was hostile toward the religious identity, although one aforementioned student (who described herself as not religious) said that it took some time to get used to the idea of attending a Catholic institution primarily because of how others in her circle of friends viewed that decision:

When I was first looking, I didn't want to come here because it was a Catholic school. I had a kind of weird idea of what a Catholic school actually was...When I first met my boyfriend...and I told him that I went to Carlow and it was a Catholic school, he told me later that he just assumed that I was super-religious and super strict on religion. And that's like the opposite – and that's not necessarily a bad thing, to be assumed to be super-religious – it's just not who I am. So it's just an assumption that somebody made, and I feel like a lot of people think that way (Resident Group).

That same student, however, explains how she came to appreciate Carlow's identity and find common ground with her own personal values:

The way I act in my life outside of Carlow, I feel like there are definitely things that relate to Carlow's Mercy tradition. I mean, just helping people who can't help themselves or are in need, that's something I was raised to think about, so Carlow has just kind of reinforced it (Resident Group).

This idea – that Carlow “reinforces how I was raised” – came up several times in the student focus groups. Many undergraduate students indicated that they were close to their families and had been raised to have strong moral values, and that Carlow reflected what they already had come to believe about themselves. Resident students (all five of whom said that they grew up within a half-hour of campus) said that they chose Carlow because it offered a chance to live in traditional college housing while still keeping them close to their families, and because it supported the values that their families had already instilled in them. One student explained, “Definitely it (Carlow) reinforces that, and to kind of keep that as my background as I move forward and as I get older is kind of like helping to keep me in that path of helping others” (Resident Group).

Undergraduate students did not indicate that Carlow had changed or shaped them in any way. Instead, the overarching theme was that they chose Carlow because of its values, not that Carlow had impressed its values upon them. A nontraditional student said,

I don't know that it (ethics) is incorporated into my education so much as it's incorporated into my life. It's just how I was raised...Being a nontraditional student, I'm not here. I'm here for class, and I'm gone. So I can't say that it's based on...(trailing off) Although my instructors do touch on certain things like that, I can't say personally that it's what I learn here that has an effect on (my) ethics (Graduate/NT Group).

This opinion closely parallels that of the faculty and staff, some of whom said that they liked working at Carlow because it reflected their own Catholic educational backgrounds, and all of whom said that Carlow's values matched their own. There was very little explicit acknowledgement among faculty, staff, or students that Carlow shaped them or helped to mold their opinions; instead, as the above quotations show, there was more a sense that Carlow hires the right people or provides a platform for students to exercise their pre-existing beliefs. When asked if Carlow had provided an opportunity for their own personal growth, staff responded that, for the most part, they were not looking for such things from their employer (but felt that they could find opportunities if they sought them out).

Despite the perception that Carlow attracts good people more often than it shapes good people, members of all five focus groups did mention subtle ways in which they had grown and changed at Carlow. A staff member described an instance in which she wanted to fire an underperforming student assistant, but learned to be more merciful by watching her colleagues:

I felt like (the student)...really didn't deserve a second chance after making a mistake. And after working with colleagues...and seeing their perspective, which was a

merciful perspective, that you can't help someone grow and learn from a mistake by ejecting them from a situation, I felt like I learned a lot from that particularly. And it changed my perspective a lot...I think most of the world would have agreed with my initial reaction, and very few people would be, I don't want to say insightful, but sensitive enough to think about it in a way that would help the student's growth (Staff Group).

Drawing upon her years of experience at Carlow, a graduate student also stated:

I would say I've definitely grown... (In) undergrad I had a lot of personal struggles, and there were a lot of days that were just kind of difficult all the way around, but having Carlow to come back to and having all of the people here definitely helped me to keep going, helped me to find the strength in myself to keep moving (Graduate/NT Group).

Even if Carlow attracts people who already share its spirit, as many stakeholders outwardly claim, it certainly seems that Carlow contributes to their growth in subtle ways. Although stakeholders claim that they had similar beliefs and values before they entered the community, hearing them describe those values in Carlow's language, using terminology associated with Carlow's mission and the spirit of the Sisters of Mercy, suggests that they are being shaped in ways that even they may not directly recognize. As one resident student said, "I think (service) is something so emphasized around here, it makes people want to actually participate in it, being just and merciful. It's talked about so much, so I think it's helpful" (Resident Group).

7.3.3 Does everyone feel the same?

Many perceptions about Carlow's mission were so consistent from group to group that it was surprising to hear another common theme: the belief that Catholics and non-Catholics might experience Carlow differently. Catholics in several focus groups stated that they cared about Carlow's identity, but that they presumed others on campus did not share their level of interest. In the faculty group, one professor expressed a desire to someday participate in the University's trip to Ireland but wondered aloud if non-Catholics would find the trip as meaningful as she would. Another professor asked rhetorically whether other faculty members "really appreciate" the significance of some of the Mercy symbolism on campus and in the classrooms. Neither offered any evidence for this reaction; they simply had doubts as to how many of their faculty colleagues felt the way they did.

Students expressed similar opinions. Even though they all publicly embraced Carlow's identity, they felt sure that there were others on campus who did not feel the same. Regarding Carlow's service mission, this exchange took place in the resident group:

Student A: I think there's time to do more (service)...but I think that they might need to promote it a little bit better or reach out to people in a more efficient way, because you hear about it, but you don't know how to go about getting into it sometimes.

Student B: That is true.

Student C: I agree that it's kind of there if you look for it, but if you're not looking for it, I think you can miss it completely.

Student B: Yeah, that's what I would say.

Interviewer: Do you think most students are looking for it?

Student B: Not really.

Student D: No (Resident Group).

One (Catholic) commuter student questioned whether non-Catholic students felt the same sense of community that she does. Nonetheless, no students ever implied that any of their peers disliked Carlow's identity. To the contrary, they emphasized repeatedly that all students – Catholic and non-Catholic – feel equally welcome on campus and that all appreciate Mercy values. This was an unexpected, subtle distinction. Even after expressing confidence that people of every background are equally respected and welcome on campus, some focus group participants still questioned whether non-Catholics could, in a sense, get as much out of the school as do Catholic students. Even after expressing the belief that Carlow's values permeate the community, some faculty questioned implicitly whether all of their co-workers were equally knowledgeable or appreciative of those values. When pressed about this seeming contradiction, after some thought, students in the commuter group offered this explanation:

Student A: I think some Catholics feel pride at being Catholics, not that other religions on campus feel ashamed of their religion, it's just that they aren't hearing about their religion on campus like they hear about our religion.

Student B: Yeah, I think that's a good description of it (Commuter Group).

Most of the speakers quoted in this section were self-identified Catholics offering their best guess as to how non-Catholics perceive Carlow. It should be noted that several of the focus group participants were not Catholic, and none of them ever expressed or openly concurred with these views. To the contrary, all of the non-Catholics expressed some level of admiration for Carlow's religious identity and embraced it openly. The idea that non-Catholics somehow felt "different" about Carlow came up principally in the form of speculation by Catholic faculty and

students. The focus group conversations themselves provided almost no direct evidence of this, but several Catholics appeared to make this assumption.

These beliefs were strongest in the faculty and the commuter student focus groups. They were more subdued in the resident and graduate/nontraditional student groups, and virtually absent in the staff group. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that Catholic faculty and students were so often cognizant of this. Those who volunteered for the study seemed to tacitly acknowledge that they had a higher-than-average level of interest in Carlow's mission. This was always expected, but it was interesting to hear an acknowledgement of sampling bias coming from the samples themselves.

7.3.4 Smallness

Stakeholders in all groups praised the intimate community at Carlow. Many described Carlow's ability to provide personalized attention to its students as central to its Catholic and Mercy identity, such that the smallness of the University and the mission of the University were seen as complementary – even inseparable. As students explained,

Student A: I think mostly for me it's because of the size, just how small it is and how close everybody is. If I would have gone to Pitt, I feel like it's so easy just to get lost in a sea of faces and people, and I think the Catholic part has to do with it also, just the close-knit society, whatever you want to call it.

Student B: Yeah, I do feel like Carlow has more of a community feel than a lot of other college campuses have, and I think it's probably a lot to do with the Mercy and the just-and-merciful-world-type view. But I also think that it's the size. It's very small here.

Student C: You can just tell people are welcoming. It's nice to just walk around and people say, "Hi," to you and they say your name. There's a close-knit community (Resident Group).

There was some debate, however, about whether the welcoming atmosphere at Carlow was principally because of its Catholic identity or because of its small size. Many stakeholders had a difficult time separating the two, since both qualities were, in their minds, definitively part of the Carlow experience. Two contrary points of view came from transfer students – one resident and one commuter - who had each experienced a year of college life elsewhere. The resident student noted very little difference between her former (non-Catholic) school and Carlow:

I personally think, just from going to a different school, it was on the smaller side still – but it was a lot bigger than this, this is still smaller – they weren't Catholic, though, and I didn't really notice much difference to be honest. So in my opinion, I think that (sense of community) would be a smaller kind of thing vs. like a Catholic thing (Resident Group).

The commuter student actually noticed a stronger sense of community at her former school, where she lived on campus:

Well, I came from a lot smaller college than this. So when people say it's small here, I'm like, "It's really not that small!" I knew probably everyone on that – well, I played a sport, so that helped – but I knew everyone on (that campus) because you saw each and every person the same day, and I lived on campus so it helped a lot more. But here, honestly, I probably could not name five people I know here. I don't know, I guess

it's just a different atmosphere where I come here, I go to class, go home (Commuter Group).

Although it is clear that stakeholders value both Carlow's smallness and its Catholic identity, many of the qualities they attribute to its Catholic heritage (personalized attention, collegiality, sense of community) are associated conceptually with a small campus environment. It is not clear whether Carlow's unique spirit is primarily a function of its size or of its religious nature. For all practical purposes, the two qualities are mutually reinforcing in the eyes of many faculty, staff, and students; Carlow would not be Carlow without both. But this debate raises important questions about how perceptions of Carlow's identity might change if the University ever expands its enrollment. Its understanding of its Catholic mission is so interwoven with its size that any change in the latter would force the University to rethink its approach to the former.

7.4 EXPERIENCES INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

When asked whether Carlow prepares them to “live out” Catholic and Mercy values for the rest of their lives, students seemed almost bemused. Many were majoring in fields like counseling, nursing, social work, and other service professions, and seemed to feel that the very nature of their future careers would lend itself to Mercy. (A few participants in the focus groups were science majors, but even they laughed at this question, saying that their long-term career goals were in medicine and physical therapy.) In short, students came to Carlow precisely because they wanted to be prepared for service-oriented professions, and Mercy values were seen as ingrained in the kinds of jobs that Carlow trains its students to do. Of course they would be living Carlow's values for the rest of their lives – it was why they chose Carlow in the first place.

7.4.1 Curriculum and learning

For the most part, students felt that Carlow's spirit of service was incorporated into the curriculum, as was a moral/ethical perspective. Graduate students said that they were aware of courses on ethics, but that (as might be expected at that level) they had to seek out such courses themselves. Traditional undergraduates explained that Carlow's emphasis on service came up primarily in the core curriculum, whereas ethics and morality were incorporated more into the major courses. They indicated that, after being introduced to the importance of service as first-year students, they learned about the social work code of ethics, nursing code of ethics, and similar concepts as they progressed through their degrees.

7.4.1.1 Learning about Catholicism

Although service and ethics were seen as inherent in the curriculum, there was mixed reaction to the question, "Do you understand the history and impact that Catholic thinkers have had on academia?" When asked, faculty instantly started to brainstorm about different ways they could incorporate Catholic history and philosophy into their lesson plans. They mentioned the role that early nuns played in building the American health care system, the philosophical work of St. Thomas Aquinas, the contributions of Gregor Mendel and other monks to the field of genetics, and the writings of St. Francis DeSales on education. In the very same breath, however, the faculty admitted that they "could probably do a better job" at introducing these concepts to students. Clearly, many of the faculty had a good understanding of Church history and felt that they *could* incorporate it into their teaching, but they simply had not done so, and had never been prodded in that direction by department chairs or other administrators. These faculty members certainly understood the role of the Catholic Church within their disciplines and had the tools

necessary to address it in class, but they admittedly had never really considered such an approach.

There was some variation in the student reactions to that question. A graduate student said that she had not learned much about Catholic history or culture at Carlow, but explained,

For me, I actually would love something like that, and granted it's probably a choice, and I'm sure that it shouldn't have to be any kind of core requirement or anything like that, but...I feel like maybe in undergrad there's a little more time spent explaining the history of the Sisters and that kind of thing. I know we have a Counseling and Spirituality course, but I've yet to be here when it's offered, and I think it's only offered once a year or something like that. So if it could just be an option, maybe because that is our mission statement... (trailing off). But as far as staff and in my courses, no, I can't say that it's been talked about or touched upon (Graduate/NT Group).

Undergraduate students were able to cite a few instances in which faculty mentioned Carlow's Catholic identity in the classroom – a reference to St. Francis of Assisi in a social welfare class, or a reference to ethics in a biology class – but overall, they agreed with the graduate students that such perspectives were generally absent. The general sense was that Carlow's curriculum and course offerings are clearly inspired by Catholic values but that Catholic history and identity is not often an explicit part of the learning.

7.4.1.2 Core curriculum

Undergraduate students offered very few complaints about Carlow's core curriculum. Many of them were aware that a curriculum revision had taken place recently, and that future Carlow students would follow a different set of requirements than they did. A few participants in the faculty/student groups were familiar with the new curriculum and explained it to the others.

As might be expected in a time of transition, there was some confusion over the new rules. Most of the discussion centered on whether theology was part of the new core. Some faculty assumed wrongly that students had to take theology; in fact, it is available under the new curriculum, but optional in the sense that other kinds of courses can be taken to fulfill the same requirement. There was some mild sense of surprise among some faculty and students that theology would be optional; no student in the focus groups objected to taking it, and no faculty member felt that it was unnecessary. Undergraduate students in particular seemed to expect that a Catholic school would require them to study theology and were, while not shocked, somewhat confused as to why it would not be mandatory.

At the same time, no one in any group objected to the new curriculum with anything more than the mild unease that often accompanies any kind of change. The overall sense was that the core curriculum itself reflects the Carlow values, and undergraduate students said that they liked taking a variety of courses to get a broad perspective. They also felt that the core curriculum, at least as they had experienced it, provided a good introduction to Carlow's service orientation and Mercy values. Transfer students reiterated that they did not have to follow the same requirements as the others, but did not seem to mind.

7.4.1.3 Differences between resident and commuter undergraduates

The curriculum discussion produced some of the starkest differences of opinion between students who live on and off campus. When discussing what they have learned at Carlow, commuter undergraduates (and the graduate/nontraditional students) focused primarily on learning that took place inside the classroom. Their experience was defined, for them, by what professors said, did, and assigned. When asked if she had had a chance to learn about other religions on campus, a commuter student said only that her theology course had not covered that topic. There was no

expectation on her part that “learning” might refer to her interaction with peers or anything outside of the classroom.

Several commuter students expressed the opinion that there are too few academic opportunities to study religion from a non-Catholic perspective. Although theology courses are available, commuters felt that they are predominantly Catholic in nature and wished that Carlow would provide more opportunity to learn about other religions and cultures. They were aware of extra-curricular events on campus that featured Muslim and Jewish speakers and interfaith panel discussions, but had not attended them. One commuter student said that she has Muslim and Jewish friends, but that they never discuss religion.

By contrast, resident undergraduates felt very satisfied with their level of exposure to other faiths. Even when asked, they saw no deficiencies in the curriculum in this regard. Said one: “I think it’s probably easier to learn about the Catholic faith here, but I don’t think it’s impossible to learn about Islam or Judaism or whatever” (Resident Group). Perhaps, as residents, they have more opportunity to talk to peers in other majors, and are therefore more attuned to the full breadth of courses offered at Carlow beyond what they themselves are taking. On the other hand, perhaps they are simply drawing a hazier line between the learning that they experience inside and outside of the classroom. Many resident students stated that they had actually attended interfaith, extra-curricular events on campus, often seeing them as complementary to their classroom experience. They also saw learning as something they experience through their peers. In the curriculum discussion, one resident student pivoted away from her formal education and began describing a student activity:

The theology class that I took, it wasn’t just Catholicism, we kind of talked about religion as a whole, like faith and belief and that kind of stuff, so it gave you the

opportunity to learn about how other people have different faiths and what not. And I'm also in a non-denominational Bible study – there's a Catholic one that's offered, and then there's one that's non-denominational – so that you can go, and there's a bunch of different people talking from different backgrounds about their religion, too (Resident Group).

Both resident and commuter students seemed to feel that Carlow's curriculum reflected its mission, but when asked where they saw the most explicit reminders of that mission, they most often cited non-curricular experiences – like weekly emails, campus events, and campus ministry activities (all of which will be discussed in section 7.5 below). While resident students were more able to take advantage of those opportunities and incorporate them into their education, commuter students saw them as attractive, but inconvenient – often hard to schedule and difficult to embrace as much as they would like. As a result, commuters seemed to experience Carlow's mission primarily through coursework (where the mission is evident but not always explicit), and residents seemed to experience it in a more fluid way in and out of the classroom.

7.4.2 Physical space

In describing their Carlow experience, students, faculty, and staff all gave some attention to the physical environment. A staff member described Carlow as pleasantly isolated from the rest of the city – in an urban environment, but “removed and quiet” and architecturally beautiful (Staff Group). A graduate student echoed those sentiments:

It really struck my mother and (me) when we visited Carlow for the first time, I mean we were just in awe...Just being able to walk around campus and having a Virgin

Mary, just being able to sit there and pray, or just walking around and seeing all the different bits of history that are around campus, I think that's comforting to me (Graduate/NT Group).

Although many participants voiced support for the campus architecture, they paid more attention overall to the symbolism placed strategically around campus. Several mentioned art, statues, and signage in the buildings that draws attention to the spirit of the Sisters of Mercy, including posters referencing Mercy values near elevators. Faculty in particular expressed strong support for the symbolism on campus, which they viewed as simultaneous reminders of Carlow's religious identity and its Merciful, open-minded commitment to diversity. One faculty member expressed her appreciation that the primary religious symbol in each classroom is the Mercy cross (a symbol of the Sisters of Mercy that resembles a Celtic cross) rather than a traditional crucifix, believing the Mercy cross to be a more relatable and unifying. Another cited a painting on the walls of the student center in which the Virgin Mary and Jesus are depicted as black, describing it as a welcome symbol that unexpectedly combines religious expression with racial inclusion.

The most frequently mentioned physical feature on campus was an interfaith prayer room located on the fifth floor of the student center (University Commons). Every group except the graduate/nontraditional student group not only mentioned that room, but described it as a visible reminder of Carlow's religiosity and its openness to all people. Staff were impressed not just that the prayer room exists, but that a nearby bathroom features a device that allows Muslims to wash their feet before prayer. Students cited this feature as well, noting that a sign asks visitors to remove their shoes before entering one part of the room.

All traditional undergraduate students were able to identify exactly where the prayer room was located. None of them said that they had ever used it for any reason; moreover, none of them had ever seen anyone else use it. (Said one commuter student, “It could be collecting dust, for all I know.”) But they all considered it an important and powerful symbol of Carlow’s identity, and even felt that its neglect by students was a positive attribute. They liked that it was provided, but were happy to see it dormant, because the alternative would mean that religion was being forced on them: “I think it would kind of go off the road they’re already going down, if they were to open it up (more forcefully)... (T)hat would kind of just throw off the whole ballgame that they’ve been playing the whole time” (Commuter Group).

The perceived importance of the prayer room underscores the importance that students (and many staff) placed on overall religious expression on campus, including opportunities provided to them by campus ministry. This theme is the partly the subject of section 7.5 below.

7.5 EXPERIENCES OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

A noteworthy theme that emerged from the focus groups was the extent to which many students experienced Carlow’s identity off-campus and outside the classroom. Unexpectedly, many students reported that they felt Carlow’s influence in their jobs, internships, and family lives – and that these experiences sometimes defined their perception of Carlow’s mission as much as their time on campus did. Students and staff (but not faculty) particularly emphasized worship opportunities, religious activities, and campus ministry. All stakeholders also spoke reverently about the Sisters of Mercy, even though their presence on campus today is relatively smaller than in the past. This section explores all of these themes.

7.5.1 Sisters of Mercy

The motherhouse of the Sisters of Mercy sits essentially at the heart of the Carlow campus, visible from most of the major buildings and impossible to ignore for any student, employee, or visitor walking along the main green quad. First and foremost a home to the Sisters, it is not used by the University apart from some rented office space in the west wing. To an outsider, its looming presence might seem almost foreboding, but that was not how most of the stakeholders in the focus groups described it. To them, it was not some mysterious, inaccessible fortress removed from the day-to-day activity of the University, but a benevolent presence anchoring the campus. As one faculty member described it,

I always have a tendency to park up on the hill, because I like to walk down through that convent, and then you see them (the Sisters). I just saw one of the residents walking her dog. You get a feeling of well-being, and then you get to see the children in the (Campus School)...It's cozy...I like the way it looks and feels (Faculty Group).

Other faculty saw the Sisters as a campus resource – experienced, accomplished women who are able to serve students in a sagacious, mentoring role. One professor stated that nursing students are required, as sophomores, to spend an hour in the motherhouse and write about it for a class:

A lot of them at first are very intimidated about going up, just not really putting their whole heart into it, but then I'll tell you, after the experience...it was just, how much they loved it, and enjoyed all that they've learned from the Sisters and...the life that they've had and all that they've accomplished. And one Sister said, you know, here I am with a PhD right now, but they're sitting there doing crafts, just because she was very late in age. But they love that, just sitting talking to them, and saying, "Hey, we went

through some of the same experiences too.” Just because they’re a nun doesn’t mean that they’re not a human being (Faculty Group.)

Another professor echoed the sentiment, saying that she introduced some of the Sisters to her students, and afterward:

The students were like, “Oh my gosh, I didn’t know the Sisters did all that!”...The Sisters have been to all of these different countries around the world, and I have students who say, “Oh, and I thought it was just, you know, they walk their dogs in the afternoon...I didn’t know they did this or that.” And I tried to get them to realize...just how strong these, not only the founders who came to completely no country, in a time period when women didn’t do that, but even now, how these women go into places that I would guess that we probably wouldn’t want to go...So the students loved it. They were amazed (Faculty Group).

The student focus groups largely reinforced this perception by the faculty. Most students (with the exception of the graduate/nontraditional group) said that they had been to the motherhouse once or twice during their time at Carlow, and considered it one of the best memories of their college experience. None had ever visited on her own initiative; all had been required to go as part of a class assignment or a specific orientation program. Without exception, they said that the experience was meaningful. According to one:

I’ve been up to the convent because I’m a nursing major, so we’re required to go up there as well and kind of volunteer and visit and...do different activities with the elder nuns who aren’t as functionable (sic) as some of the other ones...The day I went, we went to a music class and sang and helped them play little instruments, and then we got to talk and we played different religious games, which was very cool, I guess. We threw

around a beach ball that had different questions, like, “Who is your favorite person in the Bible?” – that kind of stuff. And it was fun. I liked it (Resident Group).

In addition to these concrete experiences, some students expressed appreciation for the simple presence of the Sisters and the identity that that presence gives to Carlow, even if most of the Sisters stay behind the scenes. Two students (both of them non-Catholics) explained,

Student A: Something I think about sometimes is, they told us once, (when) we had to go on a tour of the convent, that the Sisters prayed for all of the students at Carlow every day. And that was just...that was nice, and it gave me insight as to what they do.

Student B: ...Like she said, about the nuns over there praying for you every day is something that I kind of think about sometimes (Resident Group).

No student said that she had ever gone back to the motherhouse after those introductions, but all felt that the opportunity would be there for them if they wanted it. One student who had gone to Catholic elementary school and high school noted that she had seen the number of active nuns diminish in her lifetime, watching them retire and seeing them replaced by lay teachers. She saw the Sisters as a rare, disappearing resource that Carlow was fortunate to have – one that other Catholic schools at all levels were losing rapidly. To her, the continued presence of the Sisters of Mercy on campus was something to be appreciated and valued, and an important part of the way she experienced the University’s identity.

Considering how often stakeholders spoke of the Sisters, it was notable that only one Sister was ever mentioned by name: Sheila Carney, RSM, the Special Assistant to the President for Mercy Heritage and Service. When asked, “Who do you think has most responsibility for maintaining Carlow’s Catholic and Mercy identity?” faculty and staff responded almost instinctively by identifying “Sr. Sheila” in a kind of knee-jerk manner. Almost as quickly, both

groups walked back that initial reaction and said that “everyone” has some role in maintaining the identity, but it was clear that “Sr. Sheila” has left a major impression on faculty and staff and was the person they most associated with Carlow’s mission. They spoke of “Sr. Sheila” in a familiar way, as one would speak of a friend or a trusted colleague. Everyone seemed to feel that they were in her circle and that she was the authority figure who personified Carlow’s Catholicity. No one in any group singled out the president, the board of trustees, or any other high-level administrator in this role. Their responses suggested not only that Carney is visible and accessible to faculty and staff, but also that the relatively new position of Special Assistant to the President for Mercy Heritage and Service has already become an important point of reference for many in the Carlow community.

The only focus group not to make reference to “Sr. Sheila” was the graduate/nontraditional student group. All of the traditional undergraduates mentioned her by name, but they tended to see her as one of many individuals responsible for maintaining Carlow’s identity. One commuter student identified “Fr. Adam,” as an important campus leader (referring to Fr. Adam Verona, the University’s part-time chaplain), noting that he and Sr. Sheila seem to work well together. (However, no other stakeholders in any group ever mentioned Verona by name.)

Other undergraduates identified “all the nuns, just in general. They don’t really do much outside of the convent, but I see them as being part of (the Catholic identity)” (Resident Group). Several undergraduates (and one staff member) likewise referred to “the nuns” as a collective body who maintain Carlow’s mission, though only “Sr. Sheila” was ever singled out. The discussions suggested that many students see the Sisters of Mercy as an important but largely amorphous influence on the campus, and that “Sr. Sheila” was, for many of them, the person

who brought a human face to the order. Like many faculty and staff, the students felt that the Sisters contributed to Carlow's uniqueness by their mere presence, and they had a positive opinion about the Sisters in part because they had a positive opinion of Carney and what she represented to them.

7.5.2 Campus ministry

The only other name that came up repeatedly in the focus group discussions was that of Siobhan DeWitt, Director of Campus Ministry. The staff in particular brought up "Siobhan" (using only her first name) so often that I had to ask for clarification. As they described "Siobhan's" role, they explained:

Staff Member A: If you were to ask, "Who is the *second* most important person (responsible for maintaining Carlow's identity, after Sr. Sheila)... (laughter)"

Staff Member B: Right up there.

Staff Member C: Second to Sr. Sheila? Yeah (Staff Group).

Staff members felt that "Siobhan" has a very strong presence on campus, praising her role in promoting spirituality within the community. One staffer mentioned that she had received ashes on her forehead for the first time in her life when "Siobhan" walked around campus distributing them on Ash Wednesday, and described it as a good memory. Others mentioned a Lenten reflections journal published every year by campus ministry, which they felt was a nice way to promote spirituality while also reinforcing Carlow's sense of community. One staff member described the reflections journal in this way:

She (Siobhan) tries to find people from all different walks of life. You've got the Campus School kids, professors, police officers, and every day during Lent there was...a

couple of different Biblical passages and people will write a reflection based on them (Staff Group).

“Siobhan’s” name was invoked so often in the staff group that it was surprising to note its total absence in the faculty group. Faculty did not even mention campus ministry; perhaps this is because they spend less time on campus than staff do, and are therefore less attuned to that part of the community. It may also be that staff members were simply more familiar with their peers and colleagues in the campus ministry office. Whatever the reason, “Siobhan” was clearly a near-equivalent to “Sr. Sheila” in the eyes of the staff, but completely off the radar for faculty. Nor was she mentioned in the graduate/nontraditional group.

Undergraduates, however, did seem to be familiar with “Siobhan” and did mention her by name (again, using only her first name, as one would when describing a close friend). In fact, campus ministry was a major part of how undergraduates experienced Carlow’s Catholic identity, and they spoke frequently about the religious services available on campus. They liked the fact that Carlow offers the opportunity to practice religion in a formal setting, even if they themselves did not always partake of it. A number of students explained that people in their age group often shied away from talking about religion with peers, but that many were curious about faith and spirituality, and interested in exploring it during a formative time in their lives. Although students all agreed that Carlow is diverse, they did not feel that their fellow students were proactively initiating interreligious dialogue on their own, and appreciated Carlow’s ability to offer on-campus spiritual opportunities to people who might want to experiment and find the right balance of spirituality in their personal lives:

I think it’s in part because you hear about people going to college and kind of breaking away from their religion a little bit. This isn’t necessarily the time in a person’s

life when they're, I'll say, super-religious. It's sort of like the time when they're focusing on school or friends or outside activities. Religion, I'm not saying isn't important to them, but maybe they're exploring different religions, or maybe they're sort of taking a backseat to religion (sic). Maybe someone who went to church every Sunday now doesn't go (Commuter Group).

Those who want to pursue spirituality on campus felt that there is sufficient opportunity to do so, although they speculated that they would have done the same no matter where they had gone to college. They were appreciative of Carlow's ability to nurture their faith:

Student A: All growing up, it was my parents who took us to church and did religious things with us, so now that I'm on my own I'm kind of practicing that on my own and going further with it because it's something I want to do.

Student B: Yeah, I see that, too. I did volunteer stuff and went to church, but it was because my parents did that stuff. But as I've been here by myself and making my own decisions I see that's still something that I want to do. It's still in me and I'm not going to break away from still living like that.

Student C: A lot of my friends from home have stopped going to church when they went to college because their parents didn't make them anymore, and I still try to go every week when I can, and go to Bible study and do other stuff, so I feel like that's good (Resident Group).

All of the above comments reiterate the theme that Carlow "reinforces" how students were raised; many of them chose Carlow because they felt that it would provide an environment in which they would be supported, and where they could continue their personal traditions and grow as they wanted. There was a sense of expectation that Carlow would offer opportunities for

spiritual growth – such that students would be surprised if those opportunities were absent. One student explained,

I was really surprised because we go to Catholic Bible study, and I'll occasionally go to church here – and sometimes I'll go to my church at home – but there is, like, no one ever there, which surprised me a lot because since this is a Catholic school, I was expecting a lot more people to go to the church and Bible studies and stuff, so that was surprising. I didn't see many (Resident Group).

Most students felt, however, that empty pews at Carlow did not reflect any lack of interest in campus ministry, but simply reflected the fact that most students go home on weekends. Commuters said that they rarely come to campus on Saturdays or Sundays, and even residents explained that they go home most weekends and frequently attend services at their own churches. They pointed out that even the dining halls are mostly empty on weekends, so church services would be no different. There was some interest among students in doing more on-campus spiritual activities, along with more volunteerism and extra-curricular work, if such opportunities could be scheduled during on weekdays during down times between classes.

Students explained that millennials often view religion and worship as an individual matter, but as something to be respected and accepted in others. They appreciated Carlow's support for their own choices and its ability to provide a setting for them to exercise those choices, and at the same time, they respected others in their peer group for the choices they made. An interesting corollary to this view is that students also saw *Carlow's* religious identity as something to be respected. They accepted its Catholic identity in the same way that they would accept an individual person's religious beliefs. Anyone who judged Carlow or shied away from attending Carlow because it was a Catholic school was, in the eyes of the students,

uninformed and ignorant. Even the non-Catholic students suggested that they would be somewhat offended if a friend or colleague looked down on Carlow because of its religious affiliation, in the same way they would be offended if they saw religious discrimination anywhere. One resident student described as “closed-minded” anyone who saw the University’s religious identity as in any way limiting or problematic, or as a reason not to attend.

7.5.3 Off-campus experiences

Many students seemed to associate off-campus activities – including jobs, internships, and time at home with family – strongly with their overall Carlow experience. This is perhaps not surprising given that many students live nearby and engage the City of Pittsburgh through volunteerism, but it was striking to note how often students defined their learning (and their memories of the college experience) in terms of what they did away from Carlow. Sections 7.1.2 and 7.5.2 have already shown that many students viewed extra-curricular activities and service as a major conduit for Carlow’s mission, and that many students saw their family life and Carlow’s values as mutually reinforcing. However, some students explained that they actually came to understand Carlow’s mission through their jobs or internships off-campus. One graduate student noted that she became familiar with the history of the Sisters of Mercy through her work with Mercy Behavioral Health – another of the Sisters’ ministries in Pittsburgh that serves those with mental, behavioral, or addiction issues. Her experience and understanding of the Mercy spirit were shaped by her on-the-job training in addition to her time on campus.

Commuter undergraduates offered similar remarks in response to a question about whether they are able to use their knowledge for practical purposes, to help others:

Student A: This week we go into the hospital for the first time, so you're going to take those skills with you, but as you further develop them you can kind of present it in a different way. I think, too, at Carlow, you have a lot of people going into pre-med or whatever the case may be, into helping professions...In part it's because we're small, but I think it also adds to the layers of why people choose Carlow.

Student B: I think it also depends on your outside influences, because I'd say that I take a lot of what I've learned...because I work in a hospital and I also shadow doctors, so I take all of the knowledge that I'm already learning and I apply it to helping other people, but that's just because of my outside experiences that I put myself in (Commuter Group).

Given their interest in service (both from a professional and a personal standpoint), it was not surprising that students seemed to like gaining practical skills in the field to complement their theoretical knowledge in the classroom. No student ever indicated any level of disappointment with Carlow's career services or other job-placement functions. In fact, they did not express any anxieties about whether they would be able to find work during or after their time on campus. When they spoke of off-campus internships and professional development, they were usually very satisfied and identified those experiences as major highlights of their time at Carlow.

Even though this theme appeared fairly often in the student groups, it was more muted among the faculty and staff. Faculty mentioned that they were very deliberate about incorporating experiential learning opportunities into their classes, but never discussed short-term internships, long-term jobs, or the role that those things can play in how students experience Carlow's identity. Staff did not mention career services at all, although this may have been

because their job duties do not directly relate. Still, it was interesting to note that students so often viewed Carlow's mission through the lens of their off-campus work, while faculty and staff emphasized that element comparatively less.

8.0 CONCLUSION

What has this study shown about faculty, staff, and student perceptions of Carlow's Catholic, Mercy mission? What, if anything, can be drawn from this case study to aid our understanding of Catholic higher education on this campus and how stakeholders experience it?

The chapters above have attempted to show that Catholic higher education in the United States is no monolith. There is great variety in the Catholic colleges and universities of this country, as they are shaped by a wide range of religious orders, charisms, local contexts, demographic circumstances, and historical pressures. Nonetheless, many Catholic institutions face similar challenges: the need to compete with secular institutions for students and faculty, the need to adhere to modern American standards for teaching and research, and the need to carve out a distinctive, long-term identity for themselves even as they lose the strong clerical control that defined them for most of their history. Each particular institution has responded to these challenges in its own way, balancing its history and future, and its Catholic and American identities.

There is no golden key or secret sauce that provides a quick and easy answer to questions about Catholic identity. This complex and multifaceted topic is best understood through nuanced reflection. The characteristics that make a university Catholic are best expressed not as a checklist, but as a long-form narrative that takes some effort and dedication to understand.

Studies that attempt to address this topic are, therefore, best served by approaching it in an appropriately complex, nuanced, and reflective way.

In examining stakeholder perceptions at Carlow University through focus groups, this study attempted to provide some insight into this particular time point in the University's long history. It is an important time point, as Carlow embraces the new realities of this generation with an administrative structure, student body, and sociocultural environment that would have been unfamiliar to the Sisters of Mercy who established it in 1929. The data collected here is fundamentally a snapshot, a baseline for future research, and a window into the thoughts and experiences of some important stakeholders on the campus today. Nothing in this study is definitive, conclusive, or universally generalizable, but it can hopefully provide some understanding of Carlow's current state for those responsible for leading the University and for others interested in learning from Carlow's experience.

The results suggest that faculty, staff, and students fundamentally agree on the main building blocks that make Carlow unique. They associate its identity with service to others, with collegiality and respect, and with improving the human condition, especially with regard to the poor, sick, and marginalized. Its brand of Catholicism is very much influenced by the Sisters of Mercy and the values that they have promoted since the days of Catherine McAuley, and it has maintained those values in a visible way even as the Sisters themselves have assumed a less prominent role. Its stakeholders perceive this mission in the University's welcoming atmosphere, its embrace of all people regardless of background, and its commitment to serve students who might not succeed in a different environment.

Some stakeholders see the word "Mercy" as a more precise description of Carlow's mission than the word "Catholic," perceiving Mercy as the embodiment of the best of

Catholicism (though many younger community members, like the students, see less distinction between the terms). There is a level of pride in Carlow's religious identity and its unique spirit, one that tends to attract people who support its mission, even as the University may influence them in subtle ways. People seem to join the Carlow community, and stay, because it reinforces their personal values and provides an environment for them to live, work, and study in the way they like.

Stakeholders experience those values in a variety of ways – in the physical environment, in the structure of the curriculum, in the specialized academic areas in which the University excels, in the personalized attention given to students, and through volunteerism. Professional development and volunteer opportunities coordinated through the Center for Mercy Heritage and Service seem to matter, and seem to leave a lasting impact on those who participate. While nothing about the University's spirit is seen as new to this era, the current administration's proactive attitude toward the mission seems to be bringing its traditional values to the forefront of the stakeholders' consciousness. Events like Mercy Service Day, academic initiatives like the Carlow Roundtable, campus ministry activities, on-campus worship services, and speakers promoting religious and interreligious dialogue all serve as reminders of why Carlow is different and, in the minds of many stakeholders, special. Many seem to appreciate these efforts and, moreover, expect them – and would be surprised if they were not present. While some wonder if everyone at Carlow experiences the full breadth of this spirit, there is no suggestion that Carlow's uniqueness as a university is in any way weakening or endangered.

The Sisters of Mercy remain an important part of the campus identity if only by their presence. Many stakeholders view them with a sense of awe and reverence, not only for what they have accomplished as individuals, but for the values that they collectively represent. They

are living reminders of Carlow's mission and are held in esteem even if they are not in any official University role. Meeting, interacting with, and even seeing them on campus is a highlight of the Carlow experience for many faculty, staff, and students, giving a sense of comfort to the stakeholders and a sense of permanence and stability to the community.

8.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The results of focus-group studies are inherently non-generalizable (Menter, et al., 2011). In this study, the focus group participants themselves openly questioned whether their views represent the majority views on campus. Although this study deliberately chose to make use of focus groups rather than rely on surveys, as is more commonly the approach in Catholic university case studies, surveys have an important role in future research at Carlow. This limited study has provided a baseline of stakeholder opinion that future studies should confirm through broader, more inclusive data collection methodologies. In particular, given the difficulty in recruiting student volunteers, it will be important for future research to engage a broader cross-section of the student body. A survey of the entire campus – feasible given Carlow's small enrollment – could provide a more complete picture of student opinion and help to confirm or discredit the results of this study. Broader surveys of faculty and staff can be beneficial for similar reasons. The themes and concepts that emerged from this study can be excellent source material to help develop a survey instrument.

If focus groups are used in future research, better incentives should be provided to students who participate, as it is clear that a free meal and a chance to win a gift card were not sufficient to draw many volunteers. A more captive student audience might be found in

freshmen/senior seminars, especially if participation in the focus group were to be incorporated into a class assignment. While participation in any research project should always be voluntary and should come as a result of free and informed consent, the students in this study indicated that they prefer when volunteer opportunities are integrated into their coursework, and liked when their professors nudge them toward opportunities that they might not have considered on their own. Scheduling data collection during class time, rather than during students' free time, could potentially result in more participant interest and more complete data.

Longitudinal studies – similar to that of Gray and Cidade (2010), who compared the opinions of students during their freshmen year to the opinions of those same students as seniors, four years later – have lots of potential for Carlow's long-term institutional research and self-evaluation. Collecting data from students at the beginning and at the end of their Carlow experience can provide evidence of Carlow's impact on their behavior, opinions, and perspectives. "Entrance" and "exit" interviews, surveys, or focus groups can provide a much more complete picture than the snapshot provided in this study. Longitudinal studies of faculty and staff – for example, at key employment milestones like five-year or ten-year work anniversaries – can also help to provide insight into stakeholder perceptions as they change over time.

Several stakeholder groups were neglected in this study. Part-time faculty and staff, online students, students in the satellite centers, and alumnae/i all play an important role in the Carlow community, and their opinions and experiences should not be overlooked entirely in future studies. In particular, as Carlow and other Catholic universities move more of their programs into the realm of online education, many new questions will be raised about how best to communicate the mission and spirit of the institution to students who may never set foot on

campus, and who may never interact with others face-to-face. Future research should incorporate these constituent groups as much as is feasible.

There is potential for future research to replicate the methods of this study on other Catholic campuses and compare the results institution-by-institution. Consider the Typology/Evolution Model presented in section 3.4. Carlow represents just one of four main “types” of Catholic institutions as conceptualized here. If this study were replicated on other campuses representative of the other three quadrants of the model, it would be possible to compare results by institution type. Would the same set of discussion prompts generate an entirely different set of responses at a large research university like Duquesne, just three miles away? Would results be similar at other Mercy-affiliated schools, other former women’s colleges, or institutions of comparable size located in different regions of the United States? Given the great diversity in Catholic institutions and their founding religious orders, future research should collect data from multiple institutions if any meaningful conclusions are to be drawn about Catholic higher education writ large.

Focus groups are good for studying the “outcomes” of efforts to promote and maintain Catholic identity. Ambitious future studies might try to correlate these “outcomes” with “inputs” that are already well-documented on many campuses (Sanders, 2010). If this study were replicated elsewhere and a body of data on stakeholder perceptions were available from multiple Catholic campuses, that data could be compared to “inputs” like campus ministry budgets, number of mission-related events on campus, percentage of Catholic faculty, or any other easily-measured variable from each institution. Such research could bring the scholarly community one step closer to a universally generalizable model for Catholic mission and identity by identifying

patterns across institutions, and exploring whether similar “input” strategies produce similar results across various cases.

In the absence of such broad studies, however, Catholic universities are, for now, limited mostly to case studies like this one in which individual universities share what they have been able to learn from their own experiences. Other institutions facing similar circumstances can absolutely learn from Carlow’s experience as described here, but this study should be interpreted first and foremost as an attempt to understand how one Catholic university has interpreted its identity in one specific context. To the extent that Carlow is fairly typical of northeastern, urban, Catholic women’s colleges, its experience can be illustrative, but its current approach to its identity may not be appropriate for other institutions or generate the same results elsewhere.

Moreover, this study itself has a shelf-life. Carlow’s current approach to its mission and identity may not be appropriate even for Carlow in a future era; if nothing else, the history of Catholic higher education in America shows that Catholic identity is a fluid, ever-evolving concept that must adapt to the circumstances of each new age. As John Henry Newman wrote in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*,

But whatever be the risk of corruption from intercourse with the world around, such a risk must be encountered if a great idea is duly to be understood, and much more if it is to be fully exhibited...From time to time...It seems in suspense which way to go; it wavers, and at length strikes out in one definite direction. In time it enters upon strange territory; points of controversy alter their bearing...dangers and hopes appear in new relations; and old principles reappear under new forms. It changes with them in order to remain the same. In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often (Newman, 2001b).

The purpose of this study was not to pass judgment on Carlow University or how effectively its current campus climate is maintaining its tradition. However, reading through the above evidence, it is impossible not to feel, at some level, that Carlow today is taking positive steps toward living out its Catholic, Mercy mission and identity in the context of the modern era.

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