

**EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS' DAILY WORK WHICH
NOURISH AND SUSTAIN THE SPIRITUALITY OF LAY TEACHERS
IN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOLS**

Submitted by
Michael John Downey

M.A. (ACU)
Grad. Dip. A. (Rel. Stud.) (ACU)
Grad. Dip. Teaching (Secondary) (QUT)
B.Sc. (AES) (Griffith)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Education

School of Religious Education
Faculty of Education

Australian Catholic University

Research Services
McAuley Campus
PO Box 456
Virginia, QLD. 4014
Australia

January 2006

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis for which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other persons work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in this thesis received the approval of the relevant ethics/safety committees of the Australian Catholic University.

Michael John Downey
29th January, 2006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to my principal supervisor, Associate Professor Kathleen Engebretson. Her guidance, encouragement, as well as her wisdom in knowing when to push and when to breathe, helped me throughout this journey to bring to birth what became one of my abiding passions.

I would also like to acknowledge my co-supervisor, Dr. Ross Keating. His openness to explore ideas and wonder with me, kept me pondering rather than rushing to conclusions.

Throughout this journey, I have been richly blessed by many wise and generous teachers who were ready to listen, discuss, encourage and extravagantly give of their own scholarship and experience. To paraphrase the words of another, if I have seen something here, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants. These companions included: Parker J. Palmer, James Fowler, Thomas Martin (osa), Michael Scanlan (osa), Walter Conn, John Caputo, Judy Brown, Brian Mahan, Edward Hays, John Shea, Marcy Jackson, Gary Eberle, Paul Micallec, Eileen Daily and especially Thomas Zanzig who has a special gift for encouragement.

Finally, I am grateful for the love and support of my wife and best friend, Marian and my sons, John-Michael and Patrick. Their understanding as I committed countless hours to reading and writing, as well as their faith in me and my quest, nurtured and sustained me.

ABSTRACT

The hierarchy of the Catholic Church has stated that formation of lay teachers is essential for the personal sanctification of the teacher and the apostolic mission of the Church (CCE, 1982, #65) and that “formation must be broadened and kept up to date, on the same level as, and in harmony with, human formation as a whole (CCE, 1982, #62). The research reported in this thesis: (1) explores Catholic Church documents and other literature in order to gain insights into the spirituality of teachers who teach in Catholic schools; (2) identifies experiences of teachers’ daily work in Catholic high schools that nurture and sustain teacher spirituality; (3) explores how the insights revealed can inform the practices of formation for lay teachers in Catholic schools.

The demonstrated success of a teacher formation known as *The Courage to Teach* invited exploration to gain understanding of the principles and practices of formation that could prove helpful for developing formation practices within Australian Catholic Education.

The research reported in this thesis included teachers reflecting upon their daily experiences of work and identifying, what one called, “moments of grace” that nourished and sustain teachers’ spirits. These experiences were identified as teachers’ experiences of community and their experiences of making a difference.

For Catholic schools to continue to have authenticity, the ongoing formation of lay teachers is essential. This does not mean, as others have said, “adding more water to an already overfull cup” by including formation as one more thing for teachers to do. It means making space and providing the opportunity for teachers to discover the ‘moments of grace’ that providentially fill their day. In conversation

with Catholic Scripture and Tradition, these moments of grace will nurture and sustain the vocations of lay teachers in Catholic schools, so that lay teachers will both flourish and “teach with authority” (Mk. 1:22).