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What are the professional and personal needs of beginning Western Australian Catholic school principals during the first four years of their appointment?

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**WHAT ARE THE PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL NEEDS OF
BEGINNING WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL
PRINCIPALS DURING THE FIRST FOUR YEARS OF THEIR
APPOINTMENT?**

Submitted by

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**Bachelor of Physical Education
Diploma of Education
Post Graduate Diploma of Health Sciences
Graduate Certificate of Religious Studies
Master of Education**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

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Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's 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 in the thesis received approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Notre Dame, Australia.

Signed:

Date:

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I dedicate this journey of learning to my brother Reginald Francis Sayce. Reg was one of the smartest people I have known – he had a natural curiosity, incredible intelligence, desire to learn and humble approach to life. Whilst he left us too soon, his enduring legacy of learning has been embraced.

This thesis has had the benefit of professional editorial advice from Josephine Smith, Wordsmith WA. This advice was restricted to copyediting and proof reading as covered in Parts D and E of the *Australian standards for editing practice* as specified in the *Guidelines for editing research theses* provided by the Institute of Professional Editors Limited.

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore the professional and personal needs of beginning Western Australian Catholic school principals in the first four years of their appointment. The role of the Catholic school principal is becoming increasingly complex and demanding as society, schooling and the Catholic Church undergo rapid and unprecedented change. It is imperative that educational authorities redress the impact of the demands and complexities of school principalship in order to better recruit, prepare, and sustain principals. It is therefore timely that the professional and personal needs of beginning Catholic school principals are examined.

The review of literature highlighted four themes, which formed the conceptual framework for this inquiry. These four areas were: beginning principalship which examined the key skills of technical and managerial skills, socialisation skills and self-awareness skills; dimensions of principalship in Western Australia, which included gender, school locality and school type; preparation programs for principalship; and the religious dimension of Catholic school principalship.

The theoretical framework for this study was located within the interpretive paradigm of qualitative research. Specifically, the interpretive lens underpinning this inquiry was that of symbolic interactionism which highlighted the personal perspectives of the participants involved in the research. The methodology used in the research was an instrumental case study design that sought to explore the professional and personal perceptions of beginning principals. Semi-structured interviews, document analysis and researcher field notes were the methods employed for data collection. Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model of data management and analysis was used to

display and interpret the data.

Findings from the inquiry highlighted various concerns and skill deficiencies of beginning principals. Beginning principals identified three key concerns: financial management, people management and community engagement issues. The beginning principals noted the importance of collegial and system support in enabling them to deal with the burgeoning demands of principalship. In addition, the findings and literature suggested that beginning principals need to be self-reflective in order to improve leadership practices. Literature highlighted the need for new leaders to develop resiliency skills to sustain them, particularly when confronted with challenging times. Finally, the findings and the literature emphasised the importance of faith formational activities thus enabling new leaders to thrive in their leadership role as a Catholic school principal.

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