THE INTERIOR LIVES OF EXEMPLARY LEADERS:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF LAY LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT TO
MISSION AND IDENTITY AT A CATHOLIC, MARIANIST UNIVERSITY

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This study demonstrates the value of organization-specific articulations of exemplary leadership. The research topic relates to leadership and organizational studies in general, and higher educational leadership and organizational commitment in particular. The focus of inquiry is the complex, human-organizational phenomenon of exemplary leadership commitment to mission and identity among lay leaders in the Catholic and Marianist tradition of one top-tier research university in the United States. The context of inquiry is the emerging prominence and critical role of lay leadership in Catholic higher education. The researcher offers an in-depth examination of how exemplary lay leaders experience and practice their personal commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity. The research objective is to understand and describe the essential meanings in the lived experiences of exemplary lay leaders, presenting individual descriptions and collective syntheses of the phenomenon in focus. The intended audience includes leaders in Marianist and Catholic higher education;
administrators involved in leadership development and mission and identity enculturation; and researchers in higher education, phenomenology, and interdisciplinary studies in leadership and organizational behavior.

Using the transcendental phenomenological research method, the researcher generates eight individual “portraits-in-words,” containing multilayered human portrayals that allow the reader to intuit and empathize with the interior experiences and meaning making of the exemplary lay leaders in this study. The researcher also analyzes the experiential data collectively, presenting numerous “composite syntheses” of the apparent textures and underlying structures of the phenomenon in focus. Finally, the researcher describes three “streams” within the lived experience of the phenomenon, namely: exemplary lay commitment, exemplary Marianist leadership, and the experience of Catholic and Marianist mission and identity, concluding with a brief “statement of essence” containing essential meanings that do not vary across the descriptions of exemplary lay leaders.

This study contributes to the narrative of Catholic and Marianist higher education by empirically investigating the interior lives of exemplary leaders, articulating a phenomenology of exemplary lay leadership commitment to mission and identity, and drawing insights from the lived experiences of present-day exemplary leaders in order to inform future leadership practice, development, and research. The future of mission and identity in Catholic and Marianist higher education hinges on one critical factor – the ongoing presence of the interior phenomenon of exemplary lay leadership commitment to mission and identity. This study sheds a bright light on this noteworthy and necessary
phenomenon – *sine qua non* (without which nothing) – thus preserving its legacy in institutional memory, and offering “seeds” for reflection, conversation, and action.

Key terms: phenomenology, interior life, exemplary leadership, lay leaders, commitment, mission and identity, Catholic, Marianist, university, higher education, interdisciplinary studies, organizational behavior, educational philosophy, leadership ethics, organization-specific articulations of exemplary leadership.
With Hazel
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I was able to undertake this project because of the support of my family, and most of all, my wife, Hazel, who shared this journey with me, and endured much through its process. I share this dissertation and doctoral degree with her. I am blessed by my parents, Matilda and Eusebio Franco, who always supported me in the pursuits I chose to undertake. I am also strengthened by my sister and brother, Cleo and Alrio, who give me hope, and whose happiness is my joy. I am grateful to Hazel’s parents, Bertille and Rufino Rodrigues, and brother Ignatius, for their prayerful support. I affectionately remember our grandparents who are undoubtedly watching over us. I am what I am today, in great measure, because of my mother – who showed me what it means to love unconditionally; and I thank her for this.

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With my wife Hazel, I offer this work to Jesus and Mary, whose love for us, and ours for whom, is the reason why this dissertation exists. To all who will read this manuscript – thank you! Please share your reflections with others, and perhaps, also with me. (savio.franco@gmail.com)

Savio Dennis Franco

May 07, 2016
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ iv

DEDICATION ............................................................................................................................... vii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................... viii

I. INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................................... 1

Introduction to Leadership Research ....................................................................................... 1

The Scholarship of Leadership ................................................................................................. 1

Leadership is a Phenomenon in Human-Organizational Experience ................................... 2

Searching for Essences Amidst a Multitude of Meanings ...................................................... 3

The Value of Organization-specific Articulations of Exemplary Leadership ......................... 4

Focusing this Study .................................................................................................................. 5

Focus of Inquiry ...................................................................................................................... 5

Research Problem and Need ................................................................................................. 5

Statement of Purpose ............................................................................................................ 8

Guiding Research Question ................................................................................................. 8

Research Site ........................................................................................................................... 9

Audience .................................................................................................................................. 10

Delimitations ......................................................................................................................... 11

Key Terms and Phrases ......................................................................................................... 12

Situating the Self .................................................................................................................... 14

Personal Background ............................................................................................................ 15

Defining Leadership .............................................................................................................. 16

Sources of Understanding Leadership .................................................................................. 17

How I Came to Focus on Exemplary Leadership and Commitment ................................... 18

II. LITERATURE REVIEW ........................................................................................................ 21

Introduction to Literature Review ......................................................................................... 21
Leadership in Higher Education

The Development and Context of Higher Education .................................................. 21
The Complexities of Higher Educational Leadership ............................................. 23
Theories and Emerging Perspectives in Higher Educational Leadership ............. 24
Leader Development and Leadership Development in Higher Education ........... 27
The Study of Higher Educational Leadership ....................................................... 30
The Concept of Commitment ............................................................................. 32

Catholic Mission and Identity in Higher Education

The Fundamentals of Catholic Mission and Identity in Higher Education ........... 35
Research related to Catholic mission and identity in higher education ............. 37
The Emergence of Lay Leadership in Catholic Higher Education ...................... 38
Research related to lay leadership in Catholic higher education ..................... 40

Marianist Educational Culture and Leadership

Marianist Educational Culture ............................................................................. 43
The Marianist family ......................................................................................... 43
Mary and the educational nature of the Marianist charism .............................. 45
Collective articulations of Marianist educational approach ............................ 45
Research related to Marianist educational culture ........................................... 47
Leadership in the Marianist Tradition ............................................................... 52
The centrality of lay leadership in the Marianist narrative ............................. 53
Articulations of leadership in the Marianist tradition ...................................... 54
Collective articulations .................................................................................... 55
Individual commentaries ............................................................................... 56
Reflections for Marianist leaders ................................................................. 58
Marianist spirituality in leadership ................................................................. 58
Marianist leadership in administration ......................................................... 59

Insights from the Literature Review .................................................................. 61
Significance of this Study .................................................................................. 63

III. METHODOLOGY ............................................................................................... 64

Introduction to Methodology ............................................................................ 64

Qualitative Research Methodology ................................................................... 64
Why Qualitative Research? ............................................................................... 64
Philosophical and methodological compatibility ............................................. 65

Phenomenological Research Methodology ....................................................... 67
Why Phenomenology? ....................................................................................... 67
Engaging is rigorous, human science research ................................................. 68
Seeking the truth that reveals itself through the process........................... 69
The Tradition of Phenomenology ......................................................................... 70
Phenomenology and Catholic intellectual tradition .................................. 71
Orientations in phenomenology ................................................................ 72
Why Transcendental Phenomenology?................................................................. 73
Perspective on practice-oriented phenomenological research .................. 74

Research Methods in this Study ........................................................................ 75
The Pre-Execution Phase ...................................................................................... 76
  Groundwork ................................................................................................ 76
  Proposal writing ........................................................................................ 77
  Pilot interviewing ...................................................................................... 78
Strategy for Building Trustworthiness.............................................................. 79
  Peer debriefing, an external-to-study check.............................................. 80
  Member checking, an internal-to-study check.......................................... 80
  Epoché, an inner, phenomenological attitude check.. ................................. 81
The Sampling Phase .............................................................................................. 83
  Prospecting ................................................................................................ 83
  Recruitment ............................................................................................... 85
  Selection .................................................................................................... 86
The Data Collection Phase .................................................................................... 88
  Before the interview .................................................................................. 89
  Beginning the interview ............................................................................ 89
  During the interview ............................................................................... 90
  After the interview .................................................................................. 91
The Data Analysis Phase .................................................................................... 92
  Phenomenological reduction: Developing textural descriptions .......... 92
  Imaginative variation: Developing structural descriptions ...................... 93
  Synthesis of essential meanings: Developing essences ........................... 94
The Experience of Reflective Analysis ................................................................ 95
  Writing ...................................................................................................... 95
  Follow up .................................................................................................. 96
  Presentation of findings ............................................................................ 97

IV. INDIVIDUAL “PORTRAITS-IN-WORDS” ............................................................ 100

Introduction to Descriptions ............................................................................. 100
Ann: A Portrait-in-words .................................................................................... 102
  Textural Description ............................................................................... 102
  Personal journey ..................................................................................... 102
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal understandings</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission and identity</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenological structures</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causal influences</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience through time</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial awareness</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressions of body-hood</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of self</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with others</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential meanings</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Karen: A Portrait-in-words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Textural Description</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal journey</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior experience</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday practice</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Description</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal understandings</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission and identity</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenological structures</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causal influences</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience through time</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial awareness</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressions of body-hood</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of self</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with others</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential meanings</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Noel: A Portrait-in-words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Textural Description</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal journey</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior experience</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday practice</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Description</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal understandings</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience through time</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial awareness</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressions of body-hood</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of self</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with others</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential meanings</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam:  A Portrait-in-words</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textural Description</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal journey</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior experience</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday practice</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Description</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal understandings</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission and identity</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenological structures</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causal influences</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience through time</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial awareness</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressions of body-hood</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of self</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with others</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential meanings</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.  COMPOSITE SYNTHESES</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Findings</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite Textures of the Phenomenon</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative Influences</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The meta-story underlying personal journeys</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeding:  Values imbibed prior to entering the community</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rooting:  Finding fertile ground in community</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing into:  A gradual movement towards commitment</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving:  As a present, servant-leader</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary and Jesus</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The inspirational Marianist founders</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The witness of Marianist religious persons</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother Ray, servant leader</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The antithesis of Marianist leadership</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appealing qualities in Marianist role models</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal attractiveness</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal selflessness</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A personal sense of responsibility</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An active intellect within a holistic practice</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person-centeredness</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior Dimensions</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior change</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The hidden work of leadership</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer and reflection</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal discernment</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falling short</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low points</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The challenges of being lay</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphases in Practice</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating intentionally</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An active intellect</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking up for mission</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultative consensus building</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with difficult relationships</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding sustenance in supportive relationships</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyfulness and a whole life</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing Commitment and Leadership</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A shared responsibility</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formational programming</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marianist educational associates</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission-orientation in organizational processes</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing commitment</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing leaders</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporizing Marianist language and application</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite Structures of the Phenomenon</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causality</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The presence of exemplary persons in early life</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial resonance with Marianist values</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The influence of exemplary Marianist persons</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A deepening immersion into the Marianist charism</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The experience of extended conversations</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A growing gratitude that evoked deeper commitment</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporality</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive phases of growth in commitment</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Predisposition .............................................................................. 382
Initial attraction ........................................................................... 382
Affirmational ongoingness.......................................................... 382
An increasingly conscious commitment ..................................... 383
The continuing work of perseverance ......................................... 383
A sense of connection with the past and the future ............... 383
A lifetime of meaning making ..................................................... 383
Spatiality ............................................................................................................. 384
Metaphors of immersion ............................................................... 384
A gradual broadening of the scope of commitment ................ 385
The importance of conversational spaces ................................. 385
The blurring between interior life and exterior practice .......... 386
The balancing of personal and professional spheres ............... 386
Body-hood........................................................................................................... 386
Metaphorical expressions............................................................... 386
Groundedness and change............................................................ 387
Doing physical labor .................................................................. 387
The university as a living being .................................................. 387
The interconnectedness of persons ............................................. 387
Physical expressions ............................................................................... 388
Being visible and present ............................................................ 388
Pondering in light of one’s own aging ....................................... 388
Integrating feminine and masculine attributes ....................... 388
Physical manifestations of commitment ..................................... 389
Tangible material objects ............................................................... 389
The Cross in the classroom .......................................................... 390
Mission and identity-related documents ................................. 390
The university chapel ................................................................. 390
Self...................................................................................................................... 390
Adaptability of temperament ....................................................... 391
Several identities ........................................................................... 391
A collective sense of Catholic identity ....................................... 392
Openness and self-disclosure ....................................................... 392
Striving for personal humility and selflessness ....................... 393
Being and becoming ................................................................. 393
Relationality ..................................................................................................... 394
Growing in commitment in the context of relationships ........ 394
Building relationships in light of mission and identity ............ 395
Metaphors of connectedness ....................................................... 395
Working “through” community ................................................... 396
Review of Introductory Chapters

Introduction
Literature Review
Methodology

Evaluation of Research Design

Trustworthiness of this Study
Credibility of the participants
Trust-building checks incorporated into the design
Rigor of the phenomenological research process
Limitations of this Study
Limitations of the sample
Limitations of the phenomenological approach
Limitations of the findings
Recommendations for Future Research Designs
Alternative research sites
Alternative research samples
Alternative research methodologies

A Closer Look at Research Findings

Contributions to the Literature
Findings that affirm or extend related scholarly narratives
Leadership in higher education
The scholarship of commitment
Catholic mission and identity in higher education
Contributions to the Marianist narrative
Striking Allusions in the Data
The recurring presence of the antithesis of Marianist leadership
The prominence of the layperson-to-layperson dynamic
The underemphasized legacy of the exemplary-lay
Insights for Marianist Practice
Emphases in leadership practice
Infusing reflective practice with Marianist ideas and values
Embracing non-dualistic, principle-centered, virtuous living
Applications for leadership development
Fostering growth experiences and developmental relationships
Promoting the sharing of lay personal narratives
Clues for nurturing commitment
Accentuating lay commitment in unexpected settings
Exploring the margins of the Marianist open circle
Recommendations for Future Research Studies ................................................. 456
Exploring related hyphens ............................................................................... 456
  The unlikely-committed .................................................................................. 457
  The dissimilar-committed ............................................................................ 457
  The disappointed-committed ....................................................................... 457
Studying related phenomenologies .................................................................. 458
  The interior experience of “commitment conversions” ................................ 458
  The challenge of being a role model amidst hypervisibility ............... 458
  The spirituality and practice of Marianist accompaniment ................. 459
Articulating related narratives ....................................................................... 459
  Narratives of early enculturation in Marianist institutions ................. 459
  Narratives of right relationships in difficult contexts ......................... 460
  Narratives of Marianist imagination ....................................................... 460
Developing related arguments ....................................................................... 460
  The moral implications of working at a Catholic university .......... 460
  The equal potentiality of religious and lay leadership ....................... 461
  The value of human science in Catholic intellectual tradition .... 461

Concluding Reflections ......................................................................................... 462
  The Relevance of Organization-specific Articulations of Exemplariness .... 463
  The Changing (Not Dying) of the Light ....................................................... 465
  The Phenomenological Mystery of Faith and Charism ........................... 467
  A Note to the Lay Leader Reading this Work in the (Distant) Future ........ 470

REFERENCES .............................................................................................................. 472

APPENDICES ............................................................................................................... 494
  A. Frame for Conversation ........................................................................... 494
  B. Request for Nominations ......................................................................... 495
  C. Online Survey ............................................................................................ 496
  D. Informed Consent ..................................................................................... 497
  E. Participant Details ...................................................................................... 500
The essential is the interior.

– Blessed William Joseph Chaminade

Marianist Founder, 1761-1850
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Introduction to Leadership Research

This research study is situated in the scholarship of leadership. In this section, I
argue that leadership is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon in human-organizational
experience; and furthermore, even though it is an elusive construct in general, it is
possible to study its lived experience in applied, professional settings using
phenomenological research methods. In essence, this study demonstrates the value of
organization-specific articulations of exemplary leadership.

The Scholarship of Leadership

Leadership is a word that means many things to many people. A glance through a
contemporary bookstore or a study of the marketplace for workplace learning and
development is likely to illustrate the importance this topic receives within the
contemporary discourse concerning organizational life. The scholarship of leadership has
its roots in classical literature. Wren (1995) traces the conceptualization of leadership
from its formulations in antiquity to its expressions in modernity, across a diverse array
of thought leaders. Arguably, much of the language used in the rhetoric concerning
leadership today is influenced by leadership practitioners and scholars in the preceding
century, especially in its second half, which experienced a kind of “renaissance” in
leadership thought. Northhouse (2013) provides a detailed exposition of leadership
theory and practice in an attempt to bridge the gap between “. . . often-simplistic popular
approaches to leadership and the more abstract theoretical approaches” (p. xiii).
Leadership continues to be one of the most explored and contested constructs in the study
of organizational behavior related to educational administration (Hanson, 2003; Owings
& Kaplan, 2012). The concept and narrative of leadership are multi-dimensional and
cross-disciplinary in nature. The study of leadership is possible through various
disciplinary lenses, including philosophy, history, sociology, psychology, management,
business, political science, education, literature, and art (Harvey & Riggio, 2011). Riggio
(2011) argues that leadership studies are gradually emerging as a distinct discipline.

**Leadership is a Phenomenon in Human-Organizational Experience**

Understanding the phenomenological nature of leadership is one of the central
concerns in this study. It is noteworthy that Bass and Bass (2008) and Northhouse
(2013), authors of two prevalent handbooks in leadership studies, view leadership as a
valid and observable phenomenon. Bass and Bass (2008) emphasize the generality of
leadership; it is “a universal phenomenon in humans and is also observed in many species
of animals . . .” (p. 7). Northhouse (2013) refers to leadership as a “highly valued
phenomenon that is very complex” (p. 14). In his classic treatise on leadership, Burns
(1978) asserts, “Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena
on earth” (p. 2). In the context of higher educational research, Kezar, Carducci, and
Contreras-McGavin (2006) note, “Leadership is studied as a phenomenon that can be
found throughout the institution” (p. 12). Based on over two decades of research on the
practices of exemplary leaders across diverse types of organizations, Kouzes and Posner
(2003) emphasize, “Leadership is not a fad. It’s a fact. . . . True, the context has changed a bit over time, but leadership remains as an understandable and a universal process” (p. xi). They argue, “While each leader is a unique individual, there are patterns to the practice of leadership that are shared” (p. xi). These insights are important to this study because of its focus on discovering the shared patterns of leadership commitment to mission and identity in the interior lives of exemplary leaders within one organization.

**Searching for Essences Amidst a Multitude of Meanings**

The essences of the human-organizational phenomenon of leadership refer to its very nature – that which does not vary across examples of practice, and without which the phenomenon would not exist. The attention that leadership theory has received seems to have created a cacophony of opinions, definitions, theories, and variables (Chemers, 1995; Heft, 2000; Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1995; Stogdill, 1995). The progress made in leadership research, though noteworthy, is far from settling. Consequently, the discourse around the essential nature of leadership remains in a state of continual flux. Understandably, the resultant complexity has been a concern to scholars who have reviewed the overall state of higher educational leadership in theory and practice (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989; Kezar et al., 2006). Heft (2000) comments on the dangers of this resultant labyrinth of meanings, calling it a mixture of “truths and half-truths about leadership” (p. 204). The scholarship of leadership seems to have produced an unintended mystification of the construct of leadership. This ironic-but-true outcome is evident in the contradiction between the obvious reality of leadership in organizational life and our collective inability to equivocally articulate what leadership really means. In other words, even though the members of an organizational system
experience leadership in their own lives and observe it in others, a communal expression of shared meanings often remains evasive, or simply unexplored. Modern organizational life has evolved into an increasingly complex reality that makes effective leadership a critical lever for organizational survival and success. Thus, the issue of shared, organization-specific articulations of leadership is not just a theoretical challenge but also a practical need. The cry for leadership (Gardner, 1995) is heard far and wide, the crisis of leadership (Burns, 1978) looms large, and there are no easy answers in sight (Heifetz, 1994).

**The Value of Organization-specific Articulations of Exemplary Leadership**

In light of the complexities involved in the theory and practice of higher educational leadership (Bensimon et al., 1989; Kezar et al., 2006), there is value in developing organization-specific articulations of exemplary leadership. Even though an all-settling, universal theory of leadership is likely to remain elusive, the essence of what it means to lead in an exemplary manner that is consistent with the mission and identity of a specific organizational system – such as a single university – is within the grasp of researchers, especially phenomenological researchers who seek to capture the essences of human experiences through “. . . meaning-giving methods for doing inquiry” (Van Manen, 2014, p. 16). Such in-depth phenomenological human science research (Van Manen, 1990) is likely to produce the rich, thick qualitative data that scholars need for formulating theories, administrators need for designing leadership development programs, and leaders need for guiding everyday practice. I find that phenomenology attempts to concretize that which is effervescent – to articulate that which is lived. It is a qualitative research methodology that seeks to discover the “essential, invariant
structure” (Creswell, 2013, p. 82) of a phenomenon in human experience – that which is common and interrelated across several examples of practice. It is for this reason that I have adopted a phenomenological approach in this study, one that seeks to be a meaning-giving exercise for a specific organizational system – one Catholic and Marianist university – with the intent of generating “depthful insights” (Van Manen, 2014, p. 355) that will inform future leadership practice, development, and research.

**Focusing this Study**

**Focus of Inquiry**

The research topic of this study relates to leadership and organizational studies in general, and higher educational leadership and organizational commitment in particular. The focus of inquiry is the complex, human-organizational phenomenon of exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity. This phenomenon is composite in nature; that is, it is made up of several distinct but interrelated constructs. The general context of this inquiry is the emerging prominence of lay leadership in Catholic higher education (Gallin, 1996; Morey & Holtschneider, 2005; Morey & Piderit, 2006). This study explores the lived experiences of exemplary lay leaders at one institution in the Catholic and Marianist tradition, the University of Dayton, a top-tier research university in the United States. It is an in-depth examination of how exemplary lay leaders experience and practice their personal commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity in higher education.

**Research Problem and Need**

The research problem in this study relates to the need for greater alignment between leadership practice and institutional mission and identity across organizations in
general, and higher education in particular. From a historical perspective, the purposes of higher education have been fiercely debated, and several competing philosophies have influenced their articulations over time (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). Contemporary scholars in higher education continue the debate over purposes, pointing to the need for rethinking the notion of the common good in higher education (Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005). This debate develops specific nuances and critical importance across the landscape of Catholic higher education, which has a rich, global history of promoting the idea of the university (John Paul II, 1990; Newman, 1907). Contemporary scholars have examined the challenges faced by Catholic higher education, offering several insights and suggestions in response (Ehret & Möde, 2011; Hunt, Joseph, Nuzzi, & Geiger, 2003; Rausch, 2010; Wilcox, Lindholm, & Wilcox, 2013). At the heart of this discourse is the central issue of sustaining and nurturing mission and identity in Catholic higher education; it is the critical need for preserving the essence of what makes a Catholic university truly Catholic; it is the necessity for lay leadership to be aligned with mission and identity – not just in the form of an intellectualized engagement with the ideas contained in mission and identity, but rather in their lived experience in day-to-day practice, in intentional and personal ways.

From the perspective of Catholic higher education, the future of its organizational leadership is likely to be predominantly “lay”; that is, persons who are not religiously-professed sisters, brothers, or priests are likely to experience increasing responsibility and influence. Morey and Holtschneider (2005) noted that 116 out of 222 presidents of Catholic higher educational institutions in their study were lay persons. The emerging prominence of lay leaders in Catholic higher education (Gallin, 1996) has received some
attention in the literature (Cernera, 2005; Hogan, 2009; Morey & Holtschneider, 2005; Morey & Piderit, 2006; Petriccione, 2009), albeit more focused on executive levels of higher educational leadership; for example, lay presidents and board members. Our present understanding of how exemplary lay leaders in mid to senior-level roles in Catholic higher education personally live their commitment to mission and identity is limited because this area of experience and practice has not yet been widely studied.

From the perspective of Marianist leadership, Giardino (2011) observes, “There isn’t much writing that explicitly focuses on leadership in the Marianist tradition, though the need for this is calling forth theorists and practitioners to respond to it” (p. 120). Due to the declining numbers of Marianist religious personnel and the growing role of lay leaders in Marianist ministries (Alvira, 2012), the Society of Mary has responded with a new, Sponsorship model of engaging in ministry (Marianist Province of the United States, 2013). The initiative is intended to foster deeper levels of commitment to the Marianist charism, and new forms of collaboration between religious and lay Marianists. This approach aligns with an organizational principle emphasized by Marianist founder, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, who said, “New times call for new methods” (as cited in Society of Mary, 1996, p. 29). This study assumes special importance in the context of the Sponsorship initiative because it seeks to clarify and richly describe what exemplary lay leadership commitment in the Marianist tradition looks like in real life.

From a sociological perspective, this study relates to the felt need for leader-organization engagement across diverse types of organizations, especially in the context of the global “war for talent” (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001, p. 1); that is, the critical necessity for organizations to attract, engage, and retain talented leaders at
every level and function, amidst the highly competitive environment of the market economy in general (Nagpal, 2013), and relatedly, of higher education (Weisbrod, Ballou, & Asch, 2008). In the context of leadership and organizational development, this study has special relevance because it presents an organizational case-in-point of exemplary leader-organization engagement. Institutions in higher education, as well as other socio-economic spheres, could find this study useful as they consider their own organization-specific strategies for fostering leadership commitment to their respective missions and identities.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe the phenomenon of leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity, as experienced by exemplary lay leaders at the University of Dayton. The specific objectives of the study are: (a) discover the essential meanings that exemplary lay leaders ascribe to their lived experiences of leading in a manner committed to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity, (b) present individual descriptions, and (c) collective syntheses of the phenomenon in focus.

**Guiding Research Question**

The guiding research question in this study is: “What are the meanings that exemplary lay leaders ascribe to their lived experiences of endeavoring to lead in a manner committed to the Catholic-Marianist mission and identity of the University of Dayton?” The response to this question will provide the text that completes the following statement: The essential meanings within the phenomenon of exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity are . . . .
Research Site

The site for this study is the University of Dayton, located in Dayton, Ohio, in the United States. I chose this site because of (a) its rich ethos of leadership in the Marianist tradition, providing ample and distinctly-identifiable cultural artifacts related to mission and identity; (b) its positioning as one of the 10 largest Catholic universities in the United States (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2015); (c) the large numbers of lay employees and mission and identity-related award recipients among whom I could seek and recruit exemplary leaders for this study; and (d) the practicalities of access and resources that were possible for me.

The university’s mission statement emphasizes that it is a top-tier Catholic research university that is “. . . a diverse community committed, in the Marianist tradition, to educating the whole person and linking learning and scholarship with leadership and service” (University of Dayton, n.d.). The university’s strategic plan places the goal of sustaining and promoting its Catholic and Marianist identity at the center of all other strategic goals (University of Dayton, 2010). The university offers several undergraduate and graduate programs (including some doctoral programs) across the arts and humanities, natural and social sciences, business, education, engineering, and law. In Fall 2015, the university employed 535 full-time instructional staff, 390 part-time faculty, 1380 other full-time staff, and 463 full-time research institute staff; educating 11271 students, including 2585 graduate and law students, and 8226 full-time and 460 part-time undergraduate students (Finance and Administrative Services, 2015).

The university has several documents that articulate its Catholic and Marianist character and history (Office for Mission and Rector, n.d.a). Founded in 1850 as a school
for the children of immigrant and economically marginalized families, the institution gradually grew into a college, and later into a nationally and globally recognized research university (University Communications and the Mission and Identity Task Force, 2011). References to the idea of servant leadership are commonplace in the university’s culture, and the essence of its educational philosophy is captured in the phrase – “learn, lead, and serve” (Office for Mission and Rector, n.d.c). The Catholic and Marianist tradition of the university calls for “creative fidelity” to the vision of its founders for educating faith-filled leaders (University Communications and the Mission and Identity Task Force, 2011, p. 6). The nurturing of leaders, especially lay leaders, is an educational emphasis that is characteristically Marianist (Society of Mary, 1949; Mission and Identity Task Force, 2012).

**Audience**

This study is generally relevant to practitioners and researchers in the fields of higher education, phenomenology, and interdisciplinary studies in leadership and organizational behavior. In particular, this study is relevant to all types of leaders and influencers in Catholic higher education, and especially, Marianist higher education. It is also relevant to those involved in leadership development, faculty development, mission and identity enculturation, and other organization-spanning roles and initiatives. Specific institutions that will find this research helpful include approximately 1,861 Catholic colleges and universities located around the world, including over 260 Catholic higher educational institutions in the United States (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2015) and three Marianist universities in particular (Association of Marianist Universities, 2016b). Moreover, it is important to note that this study is
generally applicable to any organization that is seeking to nurture the interplay between its mission and identity and leadership practices, regardless of its corporate nature – religious or secular, non-profit or for-profit, higher education or any other social sphere.

**Delimitations**

In order to ensure clarity and focus, I have delimited this study in three ways. First, the progression of organizational focus in this study can be expressed in the following sequence: Organizations → Higher education → Catholic higher education → Marianist higher education → University of Dayton. Second, the progression of research focus in this study can be expressed in the following sequence: Organizational behavior → Leadership studies → Phenomenology of higher educational leadership → The phenomena of lay leadership and commitment in Catholic higher education → The composite, eight-dimensional phenomenon of exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity. Third, the insights derived from this study are delimited by the locational and cultural contexts of its research site, the University of Dayton, and also by the period during which the study was executed, that is, the articulations of exemplary lay leaders who were in active leadership roles in 2015. Lastly, it is important to note that higher educational leadership is an applied field; it is concerned with integrating theory and practice. Thus, the orientation of this study is towards understanding experience in order to inform and develop practice. Put in another way, this study is not an abstract rumination on leadership; rather, it is aligned with the *phenomenology of practice* (Van Manen, 2014), which encompasses “. . . the kinds of inquiries that address and serve the practices of professional practitioners as well as the quotidian [ordinary] practices of everyday life” (p. 15).
Key Terms and Phrases

The following terms and phrases are commonly used throughout this study. I have listed them in alphabetical order, alongside a brief description of their intended meanings in this study.

**Catholic higher education.** This phrase refers to all colleges and universities that are connected with the educational tradition of the Catholic Church.

**Catholic-Marianist.** This hyphenated term expresses the interconnectedness between the Catholic and Marianist dimensions of the university’s tradition.

**Charism.** This term, though difficult to define, is essentially a distinctive experience of the divine, and a spiritual gift to the Church and the world. “A charism is an experience; it partakes of the mystery of [God’s] Spirit” (Giardino, 2011, p. 2); “[it] leads to a particular manner of experiencing God (spirituality) and a way of making a difference in the world (approach to service)” (p. 7).

**Commitment.** “The state or quality of being dedicated to a cause, activity, etc.” (Oxford University Press, 2016a).

**Culture.** “. . . learned and shared values, beliefs, and attitudes which shape and influence both perception and behavior” (Glodek, 2012, p. 2).

**Essence.** The essential nature of the phenomenon in focus; that which makes it what it is, and without which it would become something else (Van Manen, 1990).

**Exemplary.** “Serving as a desirable model; representing the best of its kind” (Oxford University Press, 2016b).

**Human science.** The “study of meaning”; it is the activity of explicating the meanings that human beings ascribe to their experiences (Van Manen, 1990, p. 181).
**Interior/Inner life.** All aspects of personal experience that are intangible in nature, especially spiritual and psychological experiences that seem very real to the person experiencing them, but not usually obvious nor directly observable to others.

**Lay.** In the context of the Catholic Church, persons who are not religiously-professed sisters, brothers, or priests.

**Leader.** Any person who exercises leadership in formal and/or informal capacities across any level, function, or role within the organization.

**Leadership.** This term is broadly defined in this study as “the exercise of influence for the common good of the group or community” (Giardino, 2011, p. 120).

**Leadership commitment.** This phrase expresses the combination of meanings implied in the terms leadership and commitment. It is used to refer to a conceptual relationship that is central to this study; that is, the intersection between exemplary leadership and commitment within the lived experience of the phenomenon in focus.

**Lived experience.** This phrase refers to “our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 35), which is the central focus in phenomenology. It is the present, continuous experience of phenomena.

**Marianist.** The Marianists are a global, religious organization within the Catholic Church. The term Marianist is used to refer to its people – lay and religious persons, as well as its institutions – universities, schools, parishes, and other educational and social ministries.

**Mission and identity.** This phrase contains two distinct but interrelated terms that express the fundamental nature of an organization. Mission refers to its reasons for existence – “Why we exist,” and identity refers to its core character – “Who we are.”
**Phenomenon in focus.** In this study, the phenomenon in focus is: exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity.

**Phenomenology.** A particular qualitative research methodology as well as the broader philosophical tradition within which the methodology evolved. In this study, this term is used in its methodological connotation; “... a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76).

** Tradition.** “A continuing pattern of culture beliefs or practices” (Dictionary.com, 2016); an ongoing narrative that is handed down and developed across generations.

**Situating the Self**

Moustakas (1994) recommends that phenomenological researchers should introduce their study by commenting on their own journey – the curiosity, puzzlement, or passion that led them to the focus of their research. Knowing about the researcher’s background and perspectives helps the reader appreciate the personal contexts with which the researcher approached the study. Moreover, the process of explicating personal perspectives helps the researcher move towards an inner state of epoché – a Greek word meaning, “to stay away from or abstain” (p. 85). The researcher achieves this by intentionally bracketing (setting aside) “prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” (p. 85) to the extent that is humanly possible, thus striving to enter the phenomenological research process with “an unbiased, receptive presence” (p. 180). In the sections that follow, I have summarized my personal background and relevant perspectives at the time of this study.
Personal Background

I was born and raised in Mumbai, India. My wife and I, and our families, are Catholic in faith. I grew up in a melting pot of national and international cultures and religious traditions, with an early sense of vocation as an educator, and a growing sense of being a global citizen. I have a strong interdisciplinary disposition and educational background. My educational qualifications include an undergraduate degree in Psychology; two Master’s degrees – one in Counseling, and another in Business Administration; one graduate-level diploma in Training and Development; and more recently, doctoral candidacy in Higher Educational Leadership.

My vocation as an educator has evolved over four distinct phases: A pre-career “ministry” phase, an early-career “learning and development” phase, the central “leadership and organizational development” phase, and the emerging “higher education and scholarship” phase. I have approximately 16 years of professional experience in learning and research-oriented roles in corporate and higher education. I have considerable multicultural and cross-industry experience in leadership development, organizational learning, ethics, culture, and executive education. I have served in several leadership positions in multinational companies in the Information Technology (IT) and IT-enabled services industry, in four types of learning-oriented functions: Education and Research, Organizational Development, Training, and Human Resources. I have served as a youth leader and music minister in several Catholic religious and educational ministries. I have been associated with the Marianists since 2009 and have collaborated with several Marianist educators and scholars, designing and facilitating leadership-related programs and initiatives for diverse Marianist audiences.
Defining Leadership

When a participant in a leadership workshop that I am facilitating asks me to define leadership, my response typically includes two considerations: (a) The caveat that leadership has been explicated in several ways in the literature (Hughes et al., 1995), and (b) my personal perspective contained in the following statement: “Leadership is the exercise of influence in the service of the common good [or shared cause].”

“Exercise” implies intentionality, which involves accepting personal responsibility and taking action in a variety of formal and informal ways. “Influence” implies a certain gentleness, respect, and reciprocity – distinct from exercising power or role authority. “Service” implies attending to the needs of others before one’s own, in a spirit of self-giving and, if needed, sacrifice. “Common” implies that leadership is relational. It is not about the leader per se; instead, it is about the people (common good) and the mission (shared cause) being served. Lastly, that which is “Good” is the easiest to intuitively recognize but the most elusive to define. By “Good,” I mean that which is true, right, and beautiful – shared values or causes worth striving for, and common purposes or ends worth attaining. Consequently, one needs a yardstick to assess what “Good” is, without which one can slip into a meaningless and purposeless form of relativism. For me, the Catholic faith and intellectual tradition has been that yardstick. I have gradually come to appreciate how the accumulated “deposit” of the Catholic tradition can be a rich resource within which one can find wisdom for nurturing intellectual development, spiritual growth, and professional practice in both Catholic and secular organizational contexts.
Sources of Understanding Leadership

My professional meaning making concerning leadership is rooted in three sources of knowledge and know-how: (a) my study of leadership and organizational theory and practice, (b) my professional work in leadership and organizational development, and (c) my learning and teaching of servant leadership principles and practices. I will briefly comment on each of these sources next.

First, I have found several handbooks related to leadership theory and practice to be important resources in my personal study of the scholarship of leadership. Wide-ranging texts such as Bass and Bass (2008), Northhouse (2013), and Wren (1995), to name just a few, have helped me appreciate the complexities involved in leadership theory and practice. Second, I am grateful for the numerous occasions wherein I had the opportunity to translate leadership research and theory into my professional practice. In doing so over many years, I have come to empathize with theoreticians and practitioners alike, and see my role as bridging the theory-practice gap through my work as an educator, researcher, consultant, and facilitator. Third, though my perspectives about leadership have certainly evolved with experience, Greenleaf’s (1973) conceptualization of servant leadership has remained a constant theoretical lens across my professional practice. I have continued to endorse the idea that the world needs leaders who desire “. . . to serve, to serve first” (Greenleaf, 1995, p. 22). The servant-first principle is a much-needed antidote to the self-centered forms of leadership that often seem to pervade our culture. Leadership is a key human-organizational phenomenon that is shaping the future of our world, and a critical lever for bringing about positive change related to the real issues of our times, especially that of overcoming systemic injustice, promoting peace,
and building authentic communities within the human family, thus incarnating God’s presence little by little, in our hearts and in our world. Therefore, leadership is ultimately a service to our fellow human beings in response to a sense of purpose that originates, consciously or unconsciously, in our experience of the mystery of God.

**How I Came to Focus on Exemplary Leadership and Commitment**

Through my work as an educator and consultant, I came to recognize that engaged leaders, in both secular and religious organizations, tend to be keen observers of leadership talent; they tend to have a strong sense of who their best people are across different areas and levels within their organizations – their exemplary leaders. I could recall several instances of listening to senior leaders telling me, each in their own way, that their organizations would be so much more resilient and generative if they had a few more exemplary leaders, like the ones they had come to recognize and appreciate within their organizations. I also observed several cases of exemplary leaders who had extraordinary success in particular organizational cultures, but were less effective, or even failed, in other settings and contexts. Furthermore, through my leadership development work with diverse groups and organizational systems, I came to perceive that organizations with long-standing traditions usually had reasonably adequate articulations of their stated ideals, often in the form of mission, vision, values, and strategy statements. However, what they generally lacked is a detailed explanation of what these ideals “look like” in everyday practice within their respective cultures, especially in light of their organization-specific missions and identities. In other words, definitions of leadership characteristics were helpful but insufficient; what was really needed was an empathetic understanding of the experiential sources and inner dimensions
of exemplariness – an inside-out perspective on how this exemplariness came to be, and what human-organizational dynamics seemed to be causing/influencing it.

Thus, in time, I came to argue that one of the significant gaps that leadership development professionals need to address is not merely that of articulation and training of organization-specific leadership values and competencies, but rather that of thick description of lived experience of exemplary leaders who are already living those values and competencies in their day-to-day practice within the organization. Simply put, the succinct articulation of the “ideal what” of leadership is needed but not enough; what is also required is the elaborate description of the “messy how” of exemplary leadership. Thus, I gradually conceived that one of my contributions to leadership theory and practice could be to build upon the idea of exemplary leadership – developing a research method to study this complex, human-organizational phenomenon in particular settings; producing organization-specific articulations of it; and eventually, formulating customized leadership development strategies, processes, and programs based on it. My central proposition is that effective leadership development within a specific organizational culture has a lot to do with “raising empathy” within its leaders – helping them intuit what exemplary leadership “feels like” in the present, continuous lived experiences of exemplary leaders in similar or relatable settings.

As I continued to develop my dissertation project with a desire to contribute to the Catholic and Marianist narrative, I came to realize that the future of Catholic and Marianist mission and identity hinges on one critical factor – the interior phenomenon of commitment within its lay leaders. By “interior phenomenon,” I mean – an inner state of being, an experience within – not just an intellectual understanding gained through well-
articulated documents. As Catholic and Marianist higher education evolves and adapts, it is critical that emerging lay leaders continue to experience the phenomenon of commitment in their interior lives, as did their exemplary lay predecessors who are part of this study. Conversely, if this phenomenon ceases to be experienced and sustained in the interior lives of lay leaders, the potential erosion of Catholic and Marianist mission and identity will inevitably intensify. Thus, as the future of Catholic and Marianist mission and identity in higher education unfolds, the phenomenon of exemplary lay leadership commitment is, to use a Latin phrase, *sine qua non* – without which nothing.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to Literature Review

In keeping with the central emphasis on “thoughtfulness” across all stages of phenomenological research and writing (Van Manen, 1990, p. 12), the purpose of this literature review is to situate this study within the scholarly literature, providing background information that helps the reader appreciate its interconnected themes. Newman, Benz, Weis, and McNeil (1997) recommended that the best approach for beginning a literature review is to focus on the key terms highlighted in the research problem. In relation to this study, I find that the reader will benefit from an overview of the scholarly literature related to three overarching themes: (a) Leadership in higher education; (b) Catholic mission and identity in higher education; (c) Marianist educational culture and leadership. I will conclude this chapter by summarizing the key insights from the literature review, followed by the significance of this study.

Leadership in Higher Education

The Development and Context of Higher Education

In order to understand present-day higher educational leadership practice, it is important to appreciate the sociological, philosophical, organizational, and economic nuances of its historical development. Brubacher and Rudy (1997) traced the
development of American higher education from its Christian beginnings to its eventual secularization. They provided several historical details that explained the sociological contexts of various paradigm shifts within higher education, such as the gradual movement from elitism to meritocracy, and eventually to the democratization of public education at large. Similarly, they observed how various educational philosophies have influenced higher education across its evolution; these philosophies include mental discipline, humanism, rationalism, pragmatism, liberal education, and the value-free education doctrine (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997).

An analysis of the history of higher education presented by Brubacher and Rudy (1997) also reveals distinct paradigm shifts in how organizational governance and leadership have been perceived and practiced in higher education, through the phases of professionalization, standardization, and eventually, corporatization. Professionalization was a response to the need to modernize higher education and to ensure that the most qualified professionals were teaching and administering higher education in a manner that was consistent with the highest standards of practice in their respective fields. Standardization was a response to the growth in the number and types of institutions and programs within the higher education system, and relatedly, the felt need to avoid chaos and fractionation among institutions and states across the country. Corporatization was a response to the growing fiscal, regulatory, and market (competitive) pressures that higher education increasingly faced in its modern era.

In addition to the sociological, philosophical, and organizational shifts discussed above, higher educational practice has also been influenced by prevalent economic conditions. Barr and McClellan (2011) elaborated on the economic context of higher
education in recent times, including the challenges involved in responding to the realities of recessionary trends, increasing competition for funds, rising costs, regulatory complexities, the rise of for-profit education, accountability and performance funding, and the often-conflicting demands of multiple public and private constituents. Weisbrod et al. (2008) pointed to the need for institutions of higher education to balance “lofty social missions and crass money-making activities . . .” (p. 2), highlighting the relationship between mission and money as an important consideration in terms of how higher educational leadership translates into action on the ground.

**The Complexities of Higher Educational Leadership**

Both Bensimon et al.’s (1989) seminal work on administrative leadership in higher education, as well as Kezar et al.’s (2006) updated version of it, refrained from providing a simplistic definition of higher educational leadership. In general, higher education studies consider both academic and non-academic constituents. The literature is not restricted to formal and top-level roles; it includes faculty, administrators, and staff who exercise formal as well as informal leadership across the complex organizational structure of higher education; for example, Diamond and Adam’s (2002) exploration of academic leadership, and Kezar and Lester’s (2011) exploration of grassroots leaders in higher education. Similarly, Kezar et al. (2006) noted that the literature has expanded to cover leaders across the university, including deans, chairs, and professional staff, as well as non-positional change agents. These insights are important in the context of my study because of its focus on diverse exemplary higher educational leaders at mid to senior levels within the organization.
In the context of the complexities of higher educational leadership, Bensimon et al. (1989) pointed to the prudence of integrating a wide range of perspectives, noting that “. . . views about leadership that incorporate many dimensions of leadership take a both/and approach. By confronting the paradoxes of leadership, they create conflict that allows us to see the phenomenon in new ways” (p. 27). Bensimon et al. concluded, “. . . no consensus presently exists – or is even likely to – on a grand unifying theory of academic leadership” (p. 80). This insight is important in the context of my study because even though a grand theory of leadership is likely to remain elusive, there is potential value in organization-specific articulations of exemplary leadership philosophy and practice. My study presents a case-in-point for such organization-specific shared understandings, in their local, site-specific contexts, aligned with Bensimon et al.’s argument, “In organizations . . . leadership exists to the extent that people believe it does, and that belief depends in part on how participants, through their interactions, construct the realities of organizational life and define the role of leaders within them” (p. 26).

Theories and Emerging Perspectives in Higher Educational Leadership

Northhouse (2013) delineated the development of leadership theories across modern scholarship, including the evolution of trait, skills, style, and situational approaches; the development of contingency, path-goal, and leader-member exchange theories; and the relatively recent attention given to transformational, authentic, and servant conceptualizations of leadership. Likewise, in the context of higher educational leadership, Kezar et al. (2006) traced the development of trait, behavioral, power and influence, contingency, cognitive, and cultural/symbolic leadership theories, followed by newer conceptualizations related to social constructivist, critical, and postmodern
paradigms in leadership studies. Based on Northhouse’s (2013) and Kezar et al.’s (2006) work, it is arguable that there are elements of reality within each of these theories and paradigms; in other words, each is probably “true,” at least sometimes, in some contexts, and with some persons or groups. However, it is equally important to recognize that some leadership theories come closer to the realities of higher education than many others do. Here are three examples:

First, Bensimon et al. (1989) argued, “Cultural and symbolic theories deserve serious attention because they present a view of leadership that is highly compatible with the characteristics of academic organizations” (p. v). Cultural and symbolic theories suggest that, over time, organizational constituents tend to develop and recreate shared meanings, which in turn influence organizational culture. The culture of higher education is distinctive and replete with symbolism. Thus, cultural and symbolic theories are particularly relevant to higher educational leadership because they recognize the “influence of leaders in maintaining or reinterpreting the systems of shared beliefs and values that give meaning to organizational life . . .” (p. iv).

Second, Preskill and Brookfield (2009) developed the idea of “learning leadership” (p. 1), exploring how learning can be a way of leading – a model for leadership action that incorporates critical reflection, collective leadership, building community, and several other themes relevant to learning and teaching. Educational leadership is distinct from leadership in other types of organizations because it requires leaders to integrate their identities of being an educator and a leader – to be an educator-leader. Thus, Preskill and Brookfield’s conceptualization of learning as a way of leading becomes especially relevant to the culture of higher education.
Third, Kouzes and Posner (1987, 2012) present a research-based framework of the five practices of exemplary leadership, namely: “model the way; inspire a shared vision; challenge the process; enable others to act; encourage the heart” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 15). In the context of higher education, Kouzes and Posner (2003) explained how academic administrators could apply these exemplary leadership practices to their day-to-day relationships within an educational community. Their approach is relevant because it illustrates how leadership frameworks derived from research involving diverse organizational types can be contextualized to the realities of higher education.

As the complexities of higher education have intensified, new perspectives in higher educational leadership have entered the narrative, including theories that appear to be better suited to the cultural dynamics of academic life. For example, Kezar et al. (2006) discussed the growth of several revolutionary ideas in leadership theory and practice, including team leadership, organizational learning, cultural and symbolic leadership, ethics and spirituality, collaboration, and empowerment. Kezar et al. observed, “. . . models of servant leaders and collective leadership have replaced the command-and-control leader reflective of much of the writings on leadership in the 1970s and 1980s” (p. 13). Servant and collective leadership conceptualizations are particularly relevant to leadership at the research site in my study because of the university’s traditional emphasis on developing servant leaders and practicing leadership in community (Fitz Center for Leadership in Community, n.d.; Office for Mission and Rector, n.d.c; Student Development, n.d.; University of Dayton, n.d.). Wheeler (2012) discussed the principles and practices of servant leadership, pointing out their
applicability to the realities and challenges of higher education. Wheeler argued, “. . . it’s not only important to identify and create more servant leaders, but it is also critical that the institutions of higher education play more of a servant role in society” (p. 4).

**Leader Development and Leadership Development in Higher Education**

It is important to distinguish between leader development and leadership development in higher education. This distinction is vital in the context of the potential implications of my study – for individual practice and self-driven leader development, as well as organizational practices and strategically-aligned leadership development.

The distinction between individual and organizational leadership development is noticeable in the work of the Center for Creative Leadership; for example, McCauley, Velsor, and Ruderman (2010) explained that leader development involves three types of development experiences: “assessment, challenge, and support” (p. 4), whereas leadership development is oriented towards the “expansion of a collective’s capacity to produce direction, alignment, and commitment” (p. 20). Center for Creative Leadership (2015) offers the 70-20-10 rule for optimizing leader development through varying the emphasis on (a) challenging assignments (70 percent), (b) developmental relationships (20 percent), and (c) coursework and training (10 percent).

The strategic nature of organizational leadership development is highlighted in Linkage Inc.’s *Best Practices in Leadership Development Handbook*, in which Fulmer and Bleak (2009) argued that strategic leadership development involves developing a leadership strategy, and creating support systems for implementing and evaluating strategically-aligned leadership development initiatives. In the context of the strategic plan of the research site in this study, the institution’s Catholic and Marianist identity is
placed at the center of, and in relation to, all other officially-stated strategic themes, namely: transformative education, outstanding scholarship, international engagement, and responsible stewardship (University of Dayton, 2010).

In the context of leadership development in higher education, Kezar and Beesemyer (2009) defined leadership as “the process of working collectively in an empowered and values-defined fashion to create change” (p. 235). McDade (2009) pointed out, “. . . we know little about leadership development in higher education. The circle of people who research and write on this topic is small . . .” (p. 228). McDade discussed several challenges related to leadership development in higher education, including the lack of empirical research concerning the content and impact of leadership programming, the grassroots nature of many such programs, and the reality that administrators of such programs can get so busy in execution that they often lack the time and/or skills to engage in program evaluation. Similar to McCauley et al. (2010), McDade (2009) differentiated between the individual and collective side of leadership development. The individual side focuses on fostering personal growth and competency development, whereas the collective side focuses on team and organizational development. Thus, leader development and leadership development are interrelated human-organizational processes; however, they are not the same thing.

In the context of higher education, Kezar and Beesemyer (2009) made several critical observations related to the marketplace for leadership development, pointing out that the market “. . . was shaped by a few elite programs developed at institutions such as Harvard or Brown. These programs attempted to attract individuals in positions of authority who typically have a great deal of money to spend on leadership development”
(p. 234). There is arguably a need to reappraise elite and traditional leadership programs within higher education, especially those intended for general audiences, as these may not be fully addressing strategic leadership development objectives at the organizational level.

An important dimension of leadership development is the concept of reflective practice. Schön (1983) encouraged professionals to be reflective practitioners, presenting this approach as a much-needed alternative to the dominant paradigm of “Technical Rationality [which] is the Positivist epistemology of practice” (p. 31). Schön (1987) described reflective practice as “a dialogue of thinking and doing” (p. 31) through which the practitioner becomes more skillful. Schön differentiated between reflection-on-action (reflecting on past actions) and reflection-in-action (reflecting as you act). Reflective practice involves dialectical reasoning – a thoughtful process that is characteristic of educational philosophy and ethics in general (Dewey & Tufts, 1932; Strike, Haller, and Soltis, 2005). For example, Dewey and Tufts (1932) explored the concept of reflective morality as a practice that “appeals to conscience, reason, or to some principle which includes thought” (p. 171). Dewey and Tufts considered theories (including thoughts and ideas) to be “instrument(s) for rendering deliberation more effective . . .” (p. 350). When confounded with a moral dilemma, the reflective practitioner (and leader) “. . . seeks a way out through reflection” (p. 173). Strike et al. (2005) provided various case studies to demonstrate how educational leaders have to deal with problems arising from conflicting demands of various constituents, arguing that “ethical reasoning is a skill and that its acquisition requires practice” (p. xi).
The Study of Higher Educational Leadership

Phenomenological methodology can be integrated into educational research (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010; Creswell, 2013; Van Manen, 1990). A selection of empirical research studies related to the phenomenology of higher educational leadership and leadership development is presented next.

Muoneme (2014) used hermeneutic phenomenological methodology to understand the phenomena involved in presidential leadership from the perspectives of one Holy Cross and seven Jesuit priests, and found that their styles “manifested the heart of servant leadership, Level 5 leadership, transformational leadership, and situational leadership” (p. vii). Muoneme’s study shed light on the interrelationships between the lived experiences of individual leaders and the shared meanings present in Catholic and Jesuit higher education as a whole, demonstrating that the phenomenological investigation of individual leader experiences can enhance collective understandings of mission and identity.

Mitchell (1984) studied the phenomenology of educational leadership by investigating the experiences of both leaders and followers, and observed that educational leadership, as a state of being, is interpreted in terms of its normative and value-based dimensions rather than behavior or personality. The essences of educational leadership emanate from the purposes and aims of education itself. Thus, the process of preparation for future educational leaders is likely to benefit from opportunities for clarifying personal values, growing in appreciation of the values and goals of education, and inculcating a sensitivity towards the dialogical nature of being-with-others in an educational environment.
Herbstritt (1999) studied the influence of developmental experiences, persons, and events, on eight chief academic affairs and student affairs officers. The findings indicated that these administrators “. . . learned to be leaders by being leaders. . . . by watching others, by trying and failing, by accepting challenges, by taking risks. . . . because there was no formal program or process to train or develop them” (p. iv). The lessons learned by participants related to five kinds of knowledge: knowledge of fundamentals, of others, of role, of self, and of leadership. Herbstritt’s study is important in the context of my study because it highlights the phenomenological nature of not only leadership but also leader development, demonstrating the reciprocal relationship between being a leader (lived experience of leadership) and becoming a leader (leader development).

Raynis Meeker (2008) investigated the developmental experiences of 19 presidents of Catholic institutions of higher education, both religious and lay, in order to inform models of preparation for future presidents in Catholic higher education. Using a qualitative, interview-based methodology, Raynis Meeker explored the knowledge, skills, and competencies that presidents needed to be successful in the contexts of their personal journeys. The findings indicated the importance of proactive developmental experiences in preparation for the presidency. From the perspective of my study, Raynis Meeker’s investigation sheds light on the value of proactive leader development for lay leadership roles within Catholic higher education.

Sherick (2014) investigated the developmental relationships experienced by Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) in higher education. Using qualitative questionnaires and interviews, Sherick found several key themes in the developmental experiences of CAOs,
such as the effectiveness of collaboration, problem solving, peer relationships, and the existence of multiple developers. Sherick’s study is particularly relevant to my study because of its most prominent finding – the significant influence of role modeling in the developmental relationships experienced by CAOs. In the context of my study of exemplary leaders, the emphasis on being exemplary implies the capacity for becoming a role model – an example worthy of emulation.

The Concept of Commitment

The phenomenologies of leadership and commitment are interrelated, and my study focuses on their intersections in the context of organizational mission and identity. Meyer and Allen (1997) pointed out that there is little consensus in the literature about what commitment really means. The conceptualization of commitment becomes complicated due to the variety of connotations in its everyday use as well as the presence of related notions such as loyalty, engagement, attachment, and allegiance. Retention is a major focus in the literature related to organizational commitment; that is, the study of why people stay with organizations (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Meyer and Allen’s (1991) seminal work conceptualized organizational commitment in terms of “affective, continuance, and normative” dimensions (p. 67). The affective dimension relates to emotional attachment and involvement with the organization, the continuance dimension refers to the assessment of the costs associated with leaving the organization, and the normative dimension refers to the feeling of obligation or moral responsibility towards the organization. My study is generally aligned with Meyer and Allen’s (1991) understanding of commitment as a “psychological [interior] state” (p. 67).
Hunter (1999) proposed that commitment involves a dual action: (a) active, psychosocial synthesis, as well as (b) empathic receptivity and discernment. Hunter argued, “If one pole of this duality is the group and the other is the individual, it seems intuitively likely that commitment forms through the simultaneous and reciprocating interaction of the two” (p. 136). My study explores Hunter’s explanation, providing empirical, phenomenological data for corroborating its propositions.

Stanage (1970) offered an important phenomenological conceptualization of commitment, developing a processual understanding of it using linguistic phenomenology. Stanage observed, “A commitment is commonly understood to be either a state of being a person may be in, or a form of action in which [s/]he engages” (p. 33). Stanage argued that the process of committing moves through three levels, namely: “(1) consentive, (2) intendive, and (3) active levels of commitment” (p. 38). The consentive level implies that “a person must believe in something before [s/]he intends to act on it”; the intendive level implies that the person is “determined to do something about what [s/]he believes”; and the active level implies that the “process which begins with consent, continues through intent, and finally reaches active engagement” (p. 38). Stanage’s phenomenological conceptualization of commitment has a strong bearing on my study of exemplary leadership commitment because the latter examines the inner experiences implied in the movement from consent to intention, and then, from intention to action.

Benbow (1994) conducted a phenomenological study of individuals who were actively committed to radical social change, and observed that an underlying theme across their life choices was “. . . their commitment to a set of values rooted in concepts
of freedom and equality” (p. vii). Benbow concluded that the phenomenon of commitment to social change could not be fully explained through socialization and educational experiences alone, but rather through the interaction between the person’s consciousness and a specific set of values. These findings are relevant to my study because they help explain how commitment is linked to values, and therefore, to mission and identity – a construct that is abundantly value-laden.

MacRenato (1995) investigated the phenomenology of moral commitment by identifying participants who engaged in sustained service activities outside their work lives and inspired others to do the same. An analysis of the lived experiences of four women and six men involved in blue-collar or professional occupations revealed that moral commitment is experienced as a “way of life”; it is a process that typically involves “. . . (1) becoming aware of the needs of others and (2) either feeling compelled or choosing to serve others as an extension of earlier life experiences, compassion for others and beliefs in God and justice” (Abstract, para. 4). MacRenato found that intention to make a difference was paramount, regardless of the outcomes of the service. This insight is important in the context of my study because it indicates the need to carefully examine the nature of intentionality, and relatedly, the movement from intention to action, thus exploring the phenomenon from the inside out.

**Catholic Mission and Identity in Higher Education**

There are approximately 1,861 Catholic colleges and universities worldwide, of which approximately 12.5% (over 260) are located in the United States, educating approximately 939,907 students in the academic year 2012-2013 (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2015). The distinctive ethos shared by institutions of Catholic
higher education provides the backdrop and specific need for my study. In recent years, there have been several scholarly commentaries on the challenges and responses within Catholic higher education; for example, Ehret and Möde (2011), Hunt et al. (2003), Rausch (2010), and Wilcox et al. (2013). Two central and interrelated themes within this discourse are described next, namely: (a) the fundamentals of Catholic mission and identity in higher education, and (b) the emergence of lay leadership in Catholic higher education.

The Fundamentals of Catholic Mission and Identity in Higher Education

In the context of official Church documents related to Catholic mission and identity in higher education, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (John Paul II, 1990), which means “from the heart of the Church,” stands out as a central articulation. This apostolic constitution on Catholic universities quoted an earlier (1972) Church document titled *L'Université Catholique dans le monde modern* (The Catholic University in the modern world), emphasizing that the essential characteristics of “every Catholic University, as Catholic” (para. 13) are:

1. A Christian inspiration not only of individuals but of the university community as such;
2. a continuing reflection in the light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge, to which it seeks to contribute by its own research;
3. fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church;
4. an institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal which gives meaning to life. (para. 13)
Ex Corde Ecclesiae elaborated on the mission of service of the Catholic university in a four-fold manner: first, its service to both the Church and to society; second, its pastoral ministry to the members of the university community; third, its contributions to cultural dialogue; and fourth, its contributions to evangelization as a “living institutional witness to Christ and his message . . .” (para. 49). Thus, Ex Corde Ecclesiae provides an important explanation of the integral relationship between the Catholic university’s identity (who we are) and its mission (why we exist).

More recently, Pope Francis (2013) reiterated this central nature of Catholic educational institutions. In his apostolic exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel), he pointed out:

Universities are outstanding environments for articulating and developing this evangelizing commitment in an interdisciplinary and integrated way. Catholic schools, which always strive to join their work of education with the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, are a most valuable resource for the evangelization of culture . . . . (p. 107)

Therefore, the mission of Catholic higher education is not separate from the fundamental mission of the Church itself, thus reconciling the seemingly antithetical realities of our “. . . search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth” (John Paul II, 1990, para. 1). The Catholic intellectual tradition is a manifestation of this search; it is “a practice of faith seeking understanding and understanding seeking faith – [it] addresses the great human questions, aspirations, and challenges as they unfold across centuries and across cultures” (The Catholic intellectual tradition and the mission of the university: A continuing conversation, p. 2).
Research related to Catholic mission and identity in higher education. Morey and Piderit (2006) explored the understandings and meanings that administrative leaders ascribed to their realities and work within the context of Catholic culture, identity, and mission. They identified four models of Catholic universities, describing different approaches that individual institutions have adopted towards sharing their heritage with their constituents. These are: (a) Catholic immersion universities, which emphasize “being pervasively Catholic” (p. 62); (b) Catholic persuasion universities, which intend to “. . . instill in all students, whether Catholic or not, a certain religious maturity in knowledge of the Catholic faith” (p. 63); (c) Catholic diaspora universities, which seek to “. . . orient students to the Catholic Church without requiring much knowledge or practice” (p. 64); (d) Catholic cohort universities, which seek to “attract academically talented students, whatever their religious background, who, upon graduation, will use their influence to promote Catholic viewpoints . . .” (p. 65).

Jensen (2008) used hermeneutic phenomenological methodology to explore the phenomenon of laicization (the demographic shift from religious to lay personnel), and the meaning that lay faculty members (n = 12) attributed to their lived experiences at a Catholic, Jesuit university. Jensen reported three emergent themes in the phenomenological data: “. . . University is a Noun, Catholic is an Adjective; Heart of a Teacher; and The Big Tent” (p. x). These themes shed light on the tensions related to balancing corporate and religious identities; how lay faculty achieve a sense of personal identity and integrity in the context of a Catholic, Jesuit institution; and their perceptions and experiences of the sense of openness, community, caring, and values-related attributes of a Catholic, Jesuit university.
Cole (2013) explored the experiences of lay participants in mission and identity programs in three Jesuit higher educational institutions. Using qualitative interviews, Cole found that such programs help foster a common language for mission, which in turn is a valuable resource for building community within and across groups on an educational campus. The findings differentiated between the role of mission and identity programs and leadership development programs, suggesting that “mission and identity programs served more often as vehicles for enculturation rather than leadership programs” (p. v). Participation in these programs built reflective practices in most participants, deepened involvement for many, and served to rekindle or enhance personal spirituality in some.

Olin (2005) conducted a single case study of a Catholic institution in the northeast United States, investigating the challenge of balancing the need for staying true to the founding mission and identity while simultaneously adapting to the competitive environment in American higher education. Olin found that a clear and strong institutional identity created a niche that increased competitiveness towards attracting students, and the university site with a historical ethos of promoting lay leadership had a distinct advantage in terms of its adaptive capacity to deal with modern-day market forces that influence Catholic higher education.

The Emergence of Lay Leadership in Catholic Higher Education

Morey and Holtzschneider (2005) noted that out of the 222 Catholic higher educational institutions invited in their survey-based research, 116 had lay presidents. Cernera (2005) posited that the numbers of lay leaders in Catholic higher education are likely to continue to grow. Cernera also pointed out that lay leaders came to their jobs with different formational backgrounds; for example, with little formal theological
training, as only “four percent ha[d] earned a terminal degree in theological studies” (Cernera, 2005, p. viii). Generally, Catholic institutions have responded to these differences by creating formational programs at various organizational levels, attempting to deepen understandings related to their respective religious identities as well as provide broader exposure to various aspects of Catholic intellectual tradition.

Gallin (1996) examined seven institutional case studies related to the process of laicization within Catholic higher education and noted several common threads, including: a desire to enhance educational excellence as well as institutional image, secure greater fundraising support from lay persons, and bring a more realistic understanding of the secular world to decision-making processes related to lay faculty and students. Though the declining number of religious personnel was undoubtedly a trigger, the movement towards lay leadership had a lot to do with the complexities of addressing practical challenges, especially the need for ensuring professional competence, educational excellence, and financial and competitive viability.

In the context of the continuing laicization of Catholic higher education, several challenges and points of contention have emerged, suggesting specific avenues for further scholarly study and empirical research. Heft (2003b) pointed to several areas of debate within Catholic higher education, including: (a) issues related to the relationship of present-day Catholic institutions of higher learning to the Church that founded them, preserving a sense of “fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church” (p. 41); (b) issues related to secularization; for example, the tendency towards “hiring faculty without concern for the religious mission of the institution . . .” (p. 44); (c) the articulation of what constitutes distinctively Catholic scholarship; for instance, asking
“whether Catholicism can be understood as an intellectual force . . .” (p. 51), and not simply as an add-on to a secular curriculum; and (d) the highly sensitive topic of academic freedom in Catholic higher education, which involves the challenge of integrating the imperatives of academic freedom (American Association of University Professors, 1940) and the principles communicated in Ex Corde Ecclesiae (John Paul II, 1990). Russo and Gregory (2007) argued that Ex Corde Ecclesiae called Catholic institutions to be true to their religious missions while also being viable institutions of higher learning. However, they concluded that Ex Corde Ecclesiae, in terms of its implementation, was “stranded and dead in the water” (p. 155), albeit with a few notable exceptions. Translating espoused mission and identity into lived experience on the ground continues to be a challenge across Catholic higher education (Ehret & Möde, 2011; Wilcox et al., 2013).

**Research related to lay leadership in Catholic higher education.** Morey and Holtschneider’s (2005) survey-based study had a 55% response rate out of 222 Catholic colleges and universities. Among various insights that the data analysis provided, they noted, “Seventy-seven percent of lay presidents claimed they were self-taught in the areas of heritage and mission . . .” (p. 15). They also found that even though lay leaders in Catholic higher education care deeply about sustaining mission and identity, there seems to be no consensus on how to go about building Catholic culture practically. Morey and Holtschneider concluded:

. . . the structural supports of the past have eroded and the future contours of the enterprise appear dimly in the mist. What is clear is that the shape of Catholic higher education in the future will be in the hands of faith-filled and hardworking
lay men and women. Providing a clearer portrait of the emerging patterns of leadership in American Catholic higher education is a place to begin to understand and prepare for that future. (p. 25)

This conclusion is particularly aligned with the purpose of my study, which seeks to provide a “clearer portrait” of the patterns of exemplary lay leadership at one Catholic (and Marianist) university.

Gardner (2006) conducted a qualitative, interview-based study that sought to understand the perceived impact of the transition to lay leadership on the culture of Catholic higher education. The study involved 12 participants, including four tenured faculty members, four senior administrators, and four board members, with a mix of both lay and religious persons at one mid-sized, Midwestern Catholic university. Gardner found that a majority of the participants shared a positive outlook on the transition to lay leadership and “perceived lay leadership to be an effective means of ensuring the future livelihood of Catholic colleges and universities” (p. 223). The leadership and business-related skills that lay leaders offer were seen as enhancers of overall academic and organizational performance. The ethical, moral, and service dimensions of leadership within the community were highlighted as important components. In response to an interview question about defining lay leadership, participants commonly identified lay leaders as “. . . individuals with strong commitments to and beliefs in the mission and Catholic tradition of a university or college” (p. 222). Gardner’s study is of particular relevance to my study because it points to the interconnectedness of the concept of commitment and the phenomenology of leadership.
Petriccione (2009) conducted a survey involving lay presidents \((n = 70)\) in Catholic higher education, followed by interviews with a few participants in order to validate the findings. Petriccione found that the overwhelming majority of lay presidents felt like they were living their vocation in their formal positions and through their life choices. They took pride in their roles as Catholic leaders, had good working relationships with their local Bishop, and connected their satisfaction and effectiveness in the presidential role to their understanding of the charism and tradition of the founding religious congregation.

Ferrari, Bottom, and Gutierrez (2010) reported a quantitative, survey-based study that examined the tactics used during leadership transitions in order to sustain mission and values. The perceptions of lay administrators \((n = 13)\), senior lay faculty \((n = 13)\), and lay trustees \((n = 13)\) were compared using one-way ANOVAs. Significant differences were found between the three groups in terms of perceptions of the university as innovative and inclusive \((p < .001)\), Catholic pluralism \((p < .003)\), and personal importance for mission-driven activities \((p < .001)\) such as urban and global engagement programs, activities that highlight the school’s patron saint and religious order, and faith-formation programs. Post hoc comparisons indicated that trustees reported stronger perceptions (gave higher ratings) as compared to administrators and faculty. Additionally, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to assess the mission and values-related perceptions of trustees; however, none of the regression models significantly predicted the scores related to mission and values or traditional collegiate operational concerns among trustees. Ferrari et al. surmised that the lack of significant findings may be due to ceiling effects; that is, “. . . it is possible [that] items were rated so
highly by participants that there was not enough variance to compare the scales with one another” (p. 70). They concluded, “Perhaps, the use of a self-report, quantitative survey is not the best method to solicit insights from Board members. A semi-structured interview may have yielded much richer materials” (p. 70). This insight is important in the context of my study because it highlights the limitations of survey-based approaches in research related to lay leadership and mission and identity, thus pointing to the value of qualitative studies.

**Marianist Educational Culture and Leadership**

**Marianist Educational Culture**

In order to appreciate the nuances of Marianist educational leadership, it is important to begin by considering its wider backdrop. The Marianist narrative spans more than two hundred years during which its charism, spirituality, and missionary approach have been passed down and developed through the generations, and cultivated in the cultures of Marianist educational communities around the world. In the following sections, I have provided introductory considerations relevant to my study.

**The Marianist family.** The Marianist family is a lived metaphor; it is manifested in diverse ways around the world. It is a spiritual and social movement consisting of lay persons, and religious sisters, brothers, and priests within the Catholic Church, and indeed, the human family. The legacy of Marianist founders – Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, Venerable Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon, and Venerable Marie-Thérèse de Lamourous – is a stellar example of collaboration between religious and lay persons. Against the backdrop of the French Revolution, the early Marianists worked tirelessly to revive faith, thus presenting to the world, as Father Chaminade envisioned – a “spectacle
of saints” (Ross, 1973, p. 4). The Daughters of Mary Immaculate (Marianist sisters) were founded in 1816, and the Society of Mary (Marianist brothers and priests) in 1817 (Phillips, 2011). It is significant that both religious congregations were born out of the work that the founders began in collaboration with the laity. Benlloch (2001) emphasized, “The reason the two religious congregations existed was to serve these lay communities” (p. 47). “Lay Marianists” organized themselves to form sodalities (lay communities), which became vibrant centers of renewing a spirit of faith and community in the aftermath of the French revolution. Thus, the phenomenon of lay leadership commitment is not only as old as the Marianist family but also one of its foundational contexts and essential causes. Since the birth of the first lay Marianist group in the year 1800 (Stefanelli, 2000), religious and lay Marianists have worked together to keep faith alive amidst changing times and increasingly secular cultures. This tradition of partnership between religious and lay persons continues today, within numerous Marianist educational and social ministries, as well as Marianist Lay Communities (MLCs) (International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities, 2011). The Marianist family is a global community of persons committed to living a distinctively Marianist charism, spirituality, and missionary approach. The Marianists are present in over thirty countries worldwide (World Council of the Marianist Family, 2014). In the United States, the Marianists sponsor three universities, 18 high schools, six parishes, and four retreat centers (Marianist Province of the United States, 2016). Several ministries emerge out of these sites, each seeking to embody and exemplify the Marianist charism in its own context.
Mary and the educational nature of the Marianist charism. Giardino (2011) expressed the essence of the Marianist charism using the phrases “Missionaries of Mary” and “being formed by Mary for the mission of Christ,” and described its five manifestations: faith, mission, Mary, community, and inclusivity (p. 17). The educational nature of the Marianist charism is connected to Mary’s own formative influence in the life of Jesus, and in that of the Church. Glodek (n.d.) explained, “Because our communities are dedicated to Mary, the spirituality of Marianist communities is most fundamentally about Mary forming us to be Christ for our world today” (para. 9). Aligned with this formative nature of the mission of Mary, the Marianist conceptualization of missionary activity is essentially educational in nature. Glodek (2012) explained, “Within the charismatic understanding of the Founder, all Marianist apostolic activity is education; teaching was to be one of the means of educating” (p. 3). This educational emphasis is fundamental to all Marianist missionary work, regardless of the different types of ministry, including schools, universities, parishes, retreat houses, research centers, and social justice initiatives. All Marianists are in “a permanent state of mission” (Society of Mary, 1984, p. 39). One of the earliest documents in the Marianist narrative, Constitutions of the Society of Mary (Society of Mary, 1967) states: “The Society of Mary teaches only in order to raise souls in a Christian manner; that is why we have placed all works of teaching under the title of Christian Education; care should be taken never to change this” (p. 31).

Collective articulations of Marianist educational approach. In recent decades, there have been several efforts to articulate the central themes within the Marianist educational approach in the context of contemporary language and settings. In the
following paragraph, I have highlighted some important works relevant to Marianist higher education.

First, *Characteristics of Marianist Education* (Society of Mary, 1996) provided a succinct commentary on five interrelated themes within Marianist educational philosophy, namely: “educate for formation in faith; provide an integral, quality education; educate in family spirit; educate for service, justice, and peace; educate for adaptation and change” (p. 8). Second, *Characteristics of Marianist Universities* (Chaminade University of Honolulu, St. Mary’s University, & University of Dayton, 1999) provided a commentary on the above-mentioned characteristics in the context of various issues and emphases within Marianist higher education. Third, *Principal characteristics of Marianist administration* (Society of Mary, 2013) provided an articulation of the essential dimensions of Marianist administration, including Marianist organizational culture, structure, and processes, as well as its organizational and spiritual assets. Fourth, several institution-specific articulations of Marianist mission and identity in higher education have also contributed to the narrative; for example, *Habits of inquiry and reflection: A Report on Education in the Catholic and Marianist Traditions at the University of Dayton* (Marianist Education Working Group, 2006) described the educational aims of undergraduate education in relation to five themes: sacramentality, community, practical wisdom, reading the signs of the times, and vocation. *Common Themes in the Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton* (Mission and Identity Task Force, 2012) articulated five emphases, namely: “excelling in integrated learning and scholarship; searching for truth grounded in both faith and reason; educating for practical wisdom; building community across diversity; [and] partnering for the common
good” (p. 6). There are several other collective and individual articulations related to the University of Dayton (Office for Mission and Rector, n.d.a). Galligan-Stierle (2013) observed, “. . . as I look across the universe of higher education, this [University of Dayton’s collection of mission and identity-related documents] is incredibly impressive” (35:00).

**Research related to Marianist educational culture.** Glodek (2012) points out that our modern term *culture* denotes what Blessed Chaminade understood as *atmosphere* or *milieu*; “the richness of this word conjures images of the air we breathe and everything that surrounds us in a particular place, and how people relate and respond in this place” (Glodek, 2012, p. 2). In the following paragraphs, I have provided summaries of several works of research related to Marianist educational culture.

Habjan (2007) explained how the cultural and political realities in nineteenth-century France influenced the Marianist founders’ thought and ministry, eventually developing an emphasis on education as a primary vehicle for accomplishing the mission of Mary. Habjan traced the history of the Marianists from the founding era to their contemporary ministries in the United States, describing how Marianists adapted their work to the signs of the times while also trying to stay true to their founding charism; “since the foundation of the Marianists, the goal has been to share our charism with the people with whom we come into contact as we work together to build communities of faith” (p. 203).

Windisch’s (1964) exploration of the Marianist social system has several relevant themes that can benefit educator practice as well as personal growth. For example, (a) the Marianist method of the *System of Virtues* is a resource for spiritual renewal and
growth that lay Marianist educators can practice in their interior lives, and (b) the Marianist approach of the *Three Offices* is a collaborative approach to shared leadership that lay Marianist leaders can adapt to their particular contexts. The System of Virtues has three stages: Preparation, Purification, and Consummation, which progress “from conscious to subconscious, [and] then to unconscious activity” in the spiritual life (Windisch, 1964, p. 184). The Three Offices are related to the concerns of Christ himself (Stefanelli, 2003); that is, concerns for our spiritual, educational, and temporal needs.

Panzer (1965) presented an important study on Marianist educational philosophy, providing a detailed commentary on the educational traditions of the Society of Mary. Panzer connected foundational ideas within the Marianist narrative to specific issues within Marianist schools, such as the educative process, the primacy of religion in the curriculum, and appropriate methods of professional competence, instruction, discipline, and guidance. Panzer pointed out, “The most important factor in this [Marianist] environment was the example of the teacher himself [/herself], who was to teach a Christian lesson ‘by every word, every gesture, and every look’” (pp. 185-186).

Wallace (1997) explained that the research agenda of the *Center for Catholic Education* at the University of Dayton included the focus on identifying “… how the five characteristics of a Marianist education are in action in the schools with a Marianist heritage” (p. 91). A project titled *Experience and Meaning of Marianist Education Today* (EMMET) was conceptualized in order to help Marianist institutions respond to the challenges that arose from the declining number of Marianist religious personnel, and the transition to predominantly lay leadership. The project engaged various constituents within Marianist high schools. Ridenour, Demmitt, and Lindsey-North (1999) reported
on the focus groups conducted through the EMMET project, involving students, parents, teachers, and alumni ($n = 540$) at 13 Marianist high schools. The study provided valuable insights into the meaning and experience of engaging with Marianist educational culture, especially the feeling of belongingness and the emphasis on holistic development rather than academic excellence alone.

Lackner (1997) conducted a comprehensive study of the educational thought of Marianist founder, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, in the context of the need for helping lay personnel understand and commit to the network of meanings within Marianist educational culture. The study was qualitative in nature, and presented in two parts: (a) content analysis of the published works of Blessed Chaminade; and (b) phenomenological interviews with experienced American Marianist educators ($n = 8$), exploring how the Founder’s original intent is remembered, understood, and lived in the present contexts of Marianist education. The insight that Marianist educational culture is especially affirmed and expressed through its teachers – the kind of persons that they are – was central in the thought of Blessed Chaminade. The findings also emphasized the importance of continually manifesting Marianist tradition in the day-to-day life of the institution, including its climate, curriculum, extra-curricular activities, policies, decision-making structures, awards, celebrations, relationships between educators, partnerships with the wider community, and expectations towards graduates. Lackner’s study illustrates the continuity between the Marianist charism that has been handed down and the collective task of keeping it alive in the culture of Marianist education today.

In light of Lackner’s work, Reichel (1999) created a survey instrument for assessing the cultural identity of a Marianist high school. The inventory was based on the
framework of the Characteristics of Marianist Education (Society of Mary, 1996), the construct validity for which was judged by a panel of Marianist experts. The instrument was field-tested with teachers at a Marianist high school \( (n = 49) \) and revised based on the feedback. The reliability analysis showed that the instrument had high internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha coefficient = .96), thus demonstrating that Marianist educational culture has distinguishable and measurable characteristics.

Kelleher (2000) conducted a qualitative study of the unique role of lay administrators as spiritual leaders of Catholic (including Marianist) high schools, exploring a theoretical understanding of lay faith formation through the meaning making of lay administrators \( (n = 20) \). Kelleher found a growing need for personal faith formation in order to strengthen the ability of lay leaders to perform their roles as spiritual leaders of Catholic high schools, and recommended faith formation initiatives that incorporated collegial partnerships with the Church, diocese, and religious orders, and between the administrators themselves.

Markland (2009) studied the phenomenon of collaboration among staff and faculty at a Catholic and Marianist university. Using qualitative, interview-based methodology, Markland examined institutional features that were challenges to collaboration as well as those that facilitated it. The participants in the study had shared experiences in a leadership development program at the university. The findings shed light on several barriers to collaboration, including time and workload issues, the influence of senior leadership, fewer religious personnel to serve as role models, and the often-conflicting expectations within faculty work. Features that promoted collaboration included the university’s mission and philosophy, personal relationships with religious
personnel, the university’s leadership development program, the subculture of the department, and the formative experiences of the participants.

Thompson (2011) conducted a quantitative study using the *Information for Growth* (IFG) Survey published by the *National Catholic Educational Association* (NCEA), measuring how lay educators (n = 55) at Marianist schools in the United States perceived their own theological literacy, beliefs, and practices. Thompson found that participants scored in the high/strong category in relation to all components of the cognitive domain of adult faith formation; similarly, participants scored in the high/strong category in relation to the affective domain, except on moral formation and knowledge of the faith, on which they scored in the moderate category. The study also revealed that among the many options for adult faith formation, lay educators preferred inputs on prayer, spirituality, and Catholic social doctrine. Thompson’s study is indicative of the viability of engaging lay educational leaders in the effort to preserve and develop Marianist educational culture.

Several other studies related to Marianist higher education have appeared in peer-reviewed journals. Seery et al. (2002) explored the experiences of junior tenure-track women faculty in Teacher Education at the University of Dayton, describing how teacher educators supported each other’s scholarly work and development. They found that although each of the characteristics of a Marianist education could be identified in their group’s processes, the characteristic of educating in family spirit was most prominent in their experiences. Twale and Ridenour (2003) explored how a Ph.D. Program in Educational Leadership at a Marianist university can influence the formation of future lay educational leaders, who in turn can play an important role in the future of Marianist
education. They concluded, “... when the distinctive mission of a university aligns with
the professional standards of a field, more effective leadership preparation will result” (p.
181). Collopy and Bowman (2012) argued that the educational achievement gap is a
critical social justice issue, and examined how the Catholic and Marianist educational
tradition has the potential to influence collaboration between university-based teacher
educators and faculty in schools, thus stimulating the ongoing transformation of the
cultures of these schools as well as the teacher-education programs of the university.

**Leadership in the Marianist Tradition**

Contemporary scholars in the field of organizational and leadership studies have
consistently pointed to the critical role that leaders play in the evolution of their
organizations – responding to the difficult task of preserving mission and identity amidst
the continual need for adaptation and change (Collins, 2001; Heifetz, 1994; Kouzes &
Posner, 1987; Senge, 1990). In the context of the economic, social-political, and cultural
dynamics in higher education, Marianist universities are not immune to the contemporary
challenges of organizational life. It is in this context that the need for leadership
development becomes not only desirable but also necessary. One of the ways in which
each Marianist institution can respond to this need is by articulating a clear and
compelling stance on what exemplary lay leadership looks like in its particular
organizational context. Such an articulation can serve to inform, instruct, inspire, and
unite lay leaders in their collective practice and service of Marianist leadership, at the
grassroots as well as every formal organizational level. Moreover, collective
articulations can trigger the development of new approaches, processes, and programs for
leadership development.
The centrality of lay leadership in the Marianist narrative. The concern for forming faith-filled leaders lies at the very heart of the Marianist charism. The early literature in the Marianist narrative is a rich source of leadership insights. For example, the letters of Father Chaminade (Bihl, 1986) and those of Mother Adèle (Stefanelli, 1999) provide several examples of how the founders approached the development of both religious and lay leaders – caring for their spiritual, formational, and temporal needs, and providing them with exhortation and guidance for continually growing in the virtues of Jesus and Mary. Several early documents in the Marianist narrative are important sources of insights for contemporary Marianist leaders. For example, the Constitutions of the Society of Mary (Society of Mary, 1967) provide insights into what the founding Marianists considered as the primary ideals and principles underlying their mission and identity. The aggiornamento (bringing up to date) that was envisioned by Vatican II is aligned with the “. . . lay-Marianist model so central to the aggiornamento of Chaminade” himself (Kauffman, 1999, p. 246). Benlloch (2001) observed that even though the Marianist family originated as a movement among the laity, that reality changed with the development of a strong organization among Marianist religious personnel. Benlloch emphasized, “The Marianist family must return to a balanced ecclesial composition”; and relatedly, “Lay groups must recover strength, numbers, unity, and force” (p. 117). In the context of the decline in the numbers of religious personnel, Benlloch’s proposition is important – not simply because it is a current necessity, but instead, because it is a foundational Marianist ideal and a reality that was present in its founding era.
In light of the centrality of lay leadership in the Marianist narrative, my study becomes especially relevant because it examines the current extent and nature of the transmission of Marianist leadership emphases across the generations; that is, discovering what Marianist emphases are being experienced by present-day lay leaders and how they are living these from the inside out. The following is the basic argument for the importance of studying and articulating the lived experience of present-day lay leadership in the Marianist tradition: The major premise is that the charism inspires and guides practice. The minor premise is that the emerging prominence of lay leadership is an important aspect of contemporary Marianist practice. Thus, the conclusion is that the Marianist charism can inspire and guide the practice of lay leadership. When Marianists, religious or lay, exercise influence in the spirit of their charism, they practice a distinctive form of leadership, which I describe using the phrases: Marianist leadership, charism-centered leadership, a Marianist approach to leadership, and perhaps most appropriately – leadership in the Marianist tradition. I find that the literature related to leadership in the Marianist tradition can be organized into two distinct genres: (a) articulations of leadership in the Marianist tradition, and (b) reflections for Marianist leaders. I have discussed each genre next.

**Articulations of leadership in the Marianist tradition.** This genre of leadership-related literature is concerned with articulating the principles and major themes in Marianist leadership; it is indicative of the theoretical content within the construct of Marianist leadership. Two sub-categories within this genre are described next: (a) collective articulations, and (b) individual commentaries.
**Collective articulations.** On the occasion of the Marianist centennial in the United States, the Society of Mary published a beautiful info-graphic book titled, *Mary’s Plan for Making Leaders* (Society of Mary, 1949). Its opening pages offered brief, thought-provoking reflections on leadership in the Marianist tradition, such as: “His [Father Chaminade’s] vision was then an insight into leadership – a new type of leadership – among all classes of persons”; and “Father Chaminade worked out a plan geared to combat successfully modern errors by providing to the world a spectacle of Catholic leadership” (unnumbered).

An important collective articulation of Marianist leadership can be found in the Marianist *Rule of Life* (Society of Mary, 1984). The Rule offered four principles to those who exercise the service of leadership: “responsibility, participation, subsidiarity, and accountability” (p. 98). Based on this collective articulation, I posit that Marianist leadership is a form of principle-centered leadership. Each principle independently conveys what good leadership is all about; however, when these principles are practiced collectively in the context of the Marianist charism, their synergistic effect is a distinctively Marianist approach to leadership.

The *North American Center for Marianist Studies* (NACMS) presented another collective articulation in its online course on Marianist leadership, exploring five leadership emphases: being purposeful, developmental, responsive and adaptive, collaborative, and transformative (Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation, n.d.). Once again, each of these emphases are good leadership principles in general; however, practiced collectively, they produce a synergy that is distinctively Marianist.
Ferguson and Fitz (2003) described leadership principles and practices that emanated out of the work of the *Fitz Center for Leadership in Community* – a Marianist ministry based out of the University of Dayton, which reaches out to the wider Dayton community in the spirit of building partnerships (Fitz Center for Leadership in Community, n.d.). Ferguson and Fitz (2003) explored the practice of leadership through the dynamic of community building, articulating the following practice principles:

- Communities are built on assets – not needs. Social capital must be cultivated (trust, information sharing, shared norms).
- Community leaders must balance inquiry and advocacy to identify shared futures. For communities to adapt, leadership must emphasize learning together and leading with or without authority. To think and act together, communities must learn the arts of dialogue and deliberation. (p. 4)

**Individual commentaries.** Unlike the conceptualization of Marianist educational culture, it is important to note that the articulation of the theoretical construct of leadership in the Marianist tradition is, relatively speaking, at an early stage of development. Heft (2001) observed:

Even though there is currently no widely-recognized Marianist theory of leadership, there are certain widely-accepted characteristics of Marianist education . . . [as well as] Marianist life and spirituality – both of which suggest types or styles of leadership that would be most appropriate for Marianist educational communities. (p. 1)
Heft identified three leadership insights in the Marianist tradition: “first, an emphasis on collaboration; second, a careful linking of the heart and the head; and third, an emphasis on institutional change” (p. 3).

Fleming (2014) offered a unique, chronological perspective on the narrative of Marianist leadership, observing several enduring characteristics of leadership across Marianist history, especially “a participative and inclusive leadership style” (p. 97). The Marianist founders understood leadership as collaboration, an important manifestation of which was the leadership principle of *mixed composition*, which relates to “the equality of rights and duties among clerical and lay members” (p. 103). Fleming’s reflections on leadership styles across Marianist history point to the need for contemporary leaders to “. . . take on today’s leadership tasks, while remaining solidly rooted in the constants of our charism” (p. 97).

Giardino (2011) provided a framework for understanding a “both/and” approach (p. 127) to Marianist leadership, emphasizing (a) the balance between structural and cultural dimensions, (b) preserving the core while stimulating change, and (c) the role of both exterior influence and interior growth in the practice of leadership. Even though the terms “leader” and “leadership” were not prominent in the times of the early Marianists, Giardino’s reflections indicate that the practice of and concern for leadership was indeed a shared reality.

It is important to note that the conceptualization of Marianist leadership is connected not only to the Marianist narrative that begins with its founders but also to the Christian narrative that begins with the early Church, and indeed, the entire Judeo-Christian tradition. Giardino’s (2011) book chapter on *Leadership in the Marianist*
tradition illustrated this connection, drawing insights from the leadership of the Marianist founders, the leadership dynamics within the early Christian community, and the narrative of the Old Testament (specifically, the leadership roles implicit in the Exodus story). A detailed analysis of the history of the Marianists (Benlloch, 2010; Gadiou & Délas, 1973; Kauffman, 1999), as well as the conceptualization of Christian leadership (Blanchard & Hodges, 2005; Lowney, 2003; Stevens, 2012; Walters, 1983; Woolfe, 2002), is beyond the scope of this literature review.

**Reflections for Marianist leaders.** This genre of leadership-related literature in the Marianist narrative is concerned with reflection on lived experience; it is related to the everyday practice of Marianist leadership. Two sub-categories within this genre are described next: (a) Marianist spirituality in leadership, and (b) Marianist leadership in administration.

**Marianist spirituality in leadership.** The Marianist narrative contains several articulations that describe the classical elements of Catholic and Marianist spirituality in a manner that is relevant and accessible to present-day leaders. For example:

Hakenewerth (1997b) described the Marianist approach of the Three Offices as a form of “invisible leadership” (p. 100). The Three Offices represent three attributes of Christ – priest, prophet, and king; and relatedly, Christ’s concerns for us – our spiritual life, formation, and work. Christ’s concerns, in turn, become the primary concerns of the Marianist leader. This three-fold approach is an important expression of what it means to lead like Jesus. Aligned with the Three Offices, Lee (2000) points out that the leadership tasks within Marianist groups should address its (a) “inner life,” (b) “public life,” as well as (c) “practical needs” (p. 76).
Lee (2000) explored the classical Marianist method of the System of Virtues, suggesting that this method could be understood anew in terms of developing virtuous habits that are necessary for accomplishing the tough leadership tasks of the Marianist mission. Likewise, Hakenewerth (1997a) explored the dynamics of spiritual growth through the Marianist System of Virtues. In the Marianist conceptualization, growing in the virtues of Jesus and Mary is integral to growing as a Marianist leader. In other words, manifesting authentic Marianist leadership calls for personal growth in virtuous habits in light of the Marianist charism.

Benloch (2001) discussed four components of Marianist spirituality: “Mary, who gives us our name; faith, which shapes and defines us; community, which unites and binds us; and the traits that make up the Marianist apostolate” (p. 119). Likewise, Tutas (2013) emphasized that the spirituality of Marianist leadership is essentially about openness to the Holy Spirit. Tutas shared several insights for Marianist leaders, including the importance of focusing on mission and not oneself, letting go of the past and throwing oneself wholeheartedly into the new, seeing and encouraging the goodness and greatness that God has placed in each person, and the priority of personal prayer.

**Marianist leadership in administration.** The Marianist narrative contains several reflective articulations addressing Marianist leadership in administrative roles. For example:

Hoffer (1959) presented various principles and guidelines for Marianist religious administrators who exercise administrative forms of leadership in their communities and schools. Hoffer emphasized several important ideas, such as teaching in order to educate
and administration as service, and offered practical tips as well as spiritual meditations for leaders.

Ramey (2010) reflected on the primacy of lay leadership in the Marianist movement, which is a gift for the Church and a necessity in present-day contexts. Ramey conveyed the importance of avoiding hierarchical views of leadership (in which the laity is at the bottom of the hierarchy), and emphasized the value of egalitarian, partnership-oriented models of shared leadership between religious and lay persons.

Heft (2003a) used the phrase – open circle – to describe an essential cultural dimension of the Marianist university. The term circle suggests “core beliefs and principles that embody the distinctive religious and intellectual mission of the university,” and the term open suggests that “people of other faiths and traditions are welcomed into that community, challenging it and supporting it in the process” (p. 11).

Glodek (1998) highlighted the need for Marianist leaders to develop new skills in responding to the emerging signs of the times. On another occasion, Glodek (2007) exhorted and challenged members of the boards of Marianist institutions saying:

What a grand vision we have been given! You have been called to be stewards of that great tradition. But sometimes stewards of great traditions can be museum keepers. Yours is not a call to tend museums, but a call to be leaders in translating the Marianist culture into our times and your institutions. I invite you to join again ever more deeply this blessed man, Chaminade, who had the vision and apostolic imagination to call us to join him in pushing on that fulcrum, and passionately and with deep faith moving the world toward Christ. (pp. 10-11)
Insights from the Literature Review

My review of the relevant literature revealed several insights related to this study. In this section, I have presented key observations in light of the three overarching themes in this chapter: (a) leadership in higher education, (b) Catholic mission and identity in higher education, and (c) Marianist educational culture and leadership.

In relation to the theme of leadership in higher education: (a) Scholars do view leadership as a phenomenon, thus making it viable for study using phenomenological research methods. (b) Higher educational leadership is a complex and continually evolving area of practice. (c) Some leadership theories appear to be more compatible with the realities of higher education than many others (for example, cultural/symbolic and servant/collective conceptualizations seem particularly relevant). (d) Reflective practice is central to higher educational leadership. (e) There is a need to differentiate between leader development and leadership development. (f) The empirical literature on leadership development in higher education is, relatively speaking, at a nascent stage. (g) Several phenomenological research studies demonstrate the possibility of enhancing our understanding of the phenomenology of leadership. (h) The scholarly study of the concept of commitment provides several clues pertaining to the interrelationship between the phenomena of commitment and leadership.

In relation to the theme of Catholic mission and identity in higher education: (a) The fundamentals of Catholic mission and identity are easily accessible through several Church documents and related commentaries. (b) The scholarly literature highlights how several Catholic institutions of higher education have responded to the challenge of preserving Catholic identity and realizing Catholic mission – each in their institutional
contexts, and despite their limitations and shortcomings. (c) The paradigm of lay leadership in Catholic higher education has emerged with a new set of hopes and challenges. (d) Jesuit institutions seem to be prominent in the literature on lay leadership in Catholic higher education. This may be related to the fact that the Jesuits sponsor the largest number of Catholic colleges and universities ($n = 28$) in the United States (Rausch, 2010, p. 12). (e) The “first wave” of leadership research in Catholic higher education focused on executive levels, such as presidential leadership and trusteeship, and to a much lesser degree on mid to senior-level leaders. This is understandable in the context of the tensions and complexities involved in the “transfer of power” from religious to lay leaders at executive levels within these organizations. However, there is a need for a stronger “second wave” of leadership research in Catholic higher education that focuses more on leaders at non-executive levels within the organizational matrix.

In relation to the theme of Marianist educational culture and leadership: (a) The Marianist narrative offers rich resources to contemporary educational leaders and researchers alike. (b) The fundamentals of Marianist mission and identity are easily accessible to those who seek them; these are presented in the form of religious reflections, research studies, and institution-specific articulations. (c) The Marianist narrative contains foundational texts as well as numerous commentaries on different aspects of the Marianist charism, history, spirituality, missionary approach, and educational philosophy. (d) As compared to scholarly commentaries, there are relatively fewer empirical research studies related to Marianist topics. (e) The emergence of lay voices in Marianist scholarship seems to be a relatively recent development within the narrative. (f) The concern for developing lay leaders is central to the Marianist narrative,
originating from the very essence of its charism and not as an afterthought. (g) Unlike several examples of scholarship related to Marianist education, the scholarly conversation related to leadership in the Marianist tradition is, relatively speaking, at an early stage of development. However, there are several reflective commentaries on themes related to Marianist leadership, which provide important clues for future research.

**Significance of this Study**

This doctoral dissertation is the first of its kind in the Marianist narrative; that is, one that (a) empirically investigates higher educational leadership in the Marianist tradition, (b) focuses on the lived experiences of exemplary lay leaders, (c) articulates a phenomenology of exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity, and (d) draws insights from the lived experiences of present-day exemplary lay leaders, in order to inform future leadership practice, development, and research at Marianist universities. Furthermore, this study contributes a case-in-point for organization-specific articulations of exemplary leadership as well as research-based insights to the wider discourse and body of knowledge related to (a) lay leadership in Catholic higher education, (b) mission and identity in Catholic higher education, and (c) the phenomenologies of leadership and commitment in the context of higher education as well as organizational studies in general.

In conclusion, the phrase “The essential is the interior” (as cited in Society of Mary, 1996, p. 19) is a central insight in the thought of Blessed William Joseph Chaminade. In the same spirit, my research is essentially about the interior lives of exemplary Marianist leaders. The essence of all aspects of Marianist practice, and therefore of Marianist leadership, *is* the interior.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction to Methodology

In this chapter, I will present an overview of qualitative and phenomenological research, followed by detailed descriptions of the specific methods used in this study. This chapter contains three sections: First, an introduction to qualitative research methodology, explaining the choice of designing this study as a qualitative investigation. Second, an introduction to phenomenological research methodology, discussing: (a) why phenomenology, (b) the tradition of phenomenology, and (c) why transcendental phenomenology. Third, a detailed description of the research methods in this study, involving: (a) the pre-execution phase, (b) the strategy for building trustworthiness, (c) the sampling phase, (d) the data collection phase, (e) the data analysis phase, and (f) the experience of reflective analysis.

Qualitative Research Methodology

Why Qualitative Research?

Ary et al. (2010) explained that qualitative research seeks to examine a social phenomenon as it is, from the perspective of the human participants; in rich, thick detail; and in naturally occurring settings. It offers the possibility of moving from experience to theory. Heft (2001) suggested that in the absence of a widely-recognized theory of
leadership in the Marianist tradition, we must begin with what we do know – our collective understanding of certain widely-accepted characteristics of Marianist education as well as Marianist life and spirituality. Thus, it is advisable to begin a study of exemplary lay leadership in the Marianist tradition with a qualitative inquiry. This approach has the potential to generate experiential insights, which subsequently can be investigated through quantitative research methods, thus setting the qualitative-quantitative continuum into motion (Ridenour & Newman, 2008). Qualitative research focuses on quality, especially in terms of nature and essence (Merriam, 2009). The focus of this research study is the nature and essence of exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity.

**Philosophical and methodological compatibility.** Qualitative research methods are suitable for this study because of the philosophical and methodological compatibility between their underlying assumptions and approaches, and the purpose of this study. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) explained that qualitative researchers view reality as being co-constructed by those involved in the study, positing that it is impossible to stand completely apart from the individuals being studied, as values and facts are inextricably intertwined, and therefore, highly generalizable laws about human experience and behavior can never be ascertained. Creswell (2007) described five philosophical assumptions in qualitative research, which take on special relevance in this study.

First, ontological assumptions refer to the nature of reality; qualitative researchers view reality as subjective and multiple. I approached this study as an exercise in phenomenological intersubjectivity (Moustakas, 1994); it is a demonstration of meaning making in relationship, and “in community.”
Second, epistemological assumptions refer to the process of knowledge creation in the relationship between the researcher and the researched; qualitative researchers attempt to decrease the distance between the researcher and the researched. Each portrayal of an exemplary lay leader in this study was a result a partnership between the experiencer (the participant) and the interlocutor (myself); in other words, I was the human “instrument” of data collection, analysis, and presentation.

Third, axiological assumptions refer to the role of values in research; qualitative researchers acknowledge that research is value-laden and context-driven. Throughout this study, I sought to acknowledge, delimit, clarify, and eventually integrate the values and contexts of several persons as well as traditions connected with this study.

Fourth, rhetorical assumptions refer to the language of research; qualitative researchers communicate in a relatively informal and narrative style, using personal voice and qualitative terminology. I have presented this manuscript in my own voice, using primarily phenomenological theory and research terminology.

Fifth, methodological assumptions refer to the process of research; qualitative researchers engage in the use of inductive reasoning in an emergent design. I conceptualized this study with an emergent design in which I began with an initial guiding question, and proceeded by making judgments and decisions as the study progressed. I engaged in analysis in order to describe, and not deduce. In other words, I used inductive reasoning, moving from the specifics of participants’ experiences, towards the general essences of the phenomenon in focus.
Phenomenological Research Methodology

Why Phenomenology?

Phenomenology is closely linked with the philosophical roots of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). The Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion notes, “In general, phenomenology is an approach to philosophy centering on analysis of the phenomena which flood human awareness”; etymologically, the term phenomenology comes from the Greek *phainomenon*, meaning “appearance”; and *logos*, meaning “knowledge of” (Reese, 1996, p. 570). From a phenomenological research perspective, Van Manen (1990) explained, “... phenomenology is, in a broad sense, a philosophy or *theory of the unique*; it is interested in what is essentially not replaceable” (p. 7). The purpose of phenomenological research is to describe lived experiences and shared meanings of several participants in relation to a particular concept or phenomenon, reducing individual experiences to a description of the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The objective of phenomenological research is to discover the “inner essential nature” and “true being” of the phenomenon in focus (Van Manen, 1990, p. 177).

In the context of a phenomenological research study, the term *phenomenon* refers to an aspect of human experience that is the focus of the research; it is expressed in terms of a central concept that is being experienced by all participants in the study (Creswell, 2013). In phenomenological theory, a phenomenon is that which “appears in consciousness”; it is linked to the idea of the Greek, *phaino*, which means “to bring to light, to place in brightness, to show itself in itself ...” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). The term *lived experience* refers to “our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 35); it is the natural state of being a conscious human being – a subject
(the observer) who has a sense of awareness of the objects (tangible and intangible realities being observed) in one’s ongoing experience. The term essence refers to that which “typifies the experiences of all the participants in a study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 284). It is that which makes the lived experience what it is, and without which the phenomenon would not be clearly distinguishable as itself or would simply not exist. Van Manen (1990) emphasizes, “Indeed, if there is one word that most aptly characterizes phenomenology itself, then this word is ‘thoughtfulness’” (p. 12).

In the context of this study, the phenomenological approach is most suited for answering the research question, which is directed towards discovering what all participants have in common in their lived experience of the phenomenon of exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity. The phenomenological approach has the potential to generate rich, thick details for describing individual and shared meanings, and clarifying the essential nature of the phenomenon. In essence, this study offers glimpses into the interior lives and meaning making of exemplary lay leaders. Two central value propositions of the phenomenological approach are described next.

**Engaging in rigorous, human science research.** Phenomenology offers powerful, theory-laden approaches for exploring the experience and meaning of being human. It gives social scientists, including educational researchers, a methodology for engaging in human science research. Human science is the “study of meaning” and involves the “activity of explicating meaning” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 181). Phenomenology is a human science because it is concerned primarily with the lived experiences of conscious human beings in the context of their own lifeworlds. The term
lifeworld refers to the “world of lived experience,” and our natural and “naïve” (pre-reflective) attitude towards it (Van Manen, 1990, p. 182).

Human beings are capable of intentional meaning making; each person is the subject to the object(s) of one’s experience – an “experiencer” of innumerable phenomena. Intentionality is fundamental to human experience; human beings share an “inseparable connectedness” to the world around them (Van Manen, 1990, p. 181), characterized by a sense of directedness (an orientation) between the subject and the object. This continuous, orienting activity within human experience is comprised of two features: (a) the noema or what of the phenomenon (the textures of what it appears to be; its external, noticeable appearance); and (b) the noesis or how of the phenomenon (the structures underlying it; its internal, “hidden” appearance) (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). For example, the noema of a tree is that which appears in the consciousness of the observer (the features of the tree that are noticeable from one’s place and perspective); and the noesis of the tree is its underlying, essential nature (that which makes the tree a tree, and not something else). The essential purpose of engaging in phenomenological research is to explore the noema-noesis relationship within the phenomenon in focus, moving from (a) textual descriptions to (b) structural descriptions, and finally towards (c) composite syntheses of essential meanings.

Seeking the truth that reveals itself through the process. Van Manen (2014) explained that the idea of truth in phenomenology is not based on the Roman word veritas; that is, the conceptualization of truth based on justice, which requires the application of some law or reason that distinguishes between truth and falsehood. Rather, the idea of truth in phenomenology is based on the ancient Greek term aletheia, which is
The truth that is revealed, disclosed, and opened up. Phenomenological truth-seeking “involves a heedful attunement to the things that present themselves to us in order to let them reveal themselves in their self-showing” (Van Manen, 2014, p. 343). The notion of veritas is dominant in quantitative, experimental research, and the notion of aletheia is inherent to qualitative, phenomenological inquiry. This conceptualization of truth is important in the context of this study because its method allows the aletheia of the phenomenon to reveal itself through the research process. In presenting the essences of the phenomenon, I do not claim that the syntheses are true (veritas), but rather, that they appear plausibly self-evident (aletheia) in light of the phenomenological data.

The Tradition of Phenomenology

Present-day phenomenological research methods have evolved in the context of the broader philosophical tradition of phenomenology. Though there were several precursors to modern phenomenological thought, the Czech-German philosopher, Edmund Husserl, is generally regarded as its founding figure (Van Manen, 2014). In the early twentieth century, the phenomenological movement spread across Europe through the work of early phenomenologists such as Edith Stein, Max Scheler, Martin Heidegger, and Jan Patočka, and eventually, several sub-traditions evolved through the work of many others, including Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Jacques Derrida (Van Manen, 2014). Husserl argued that the state of the European sciences in his times presented serious limitations to the scientific endeavor towards understanding the true nature of things. Through his own work, Husserl strived to develop phenomenology as “rigorous science” (p. 90), often in the face of much criticism and resistance in the context of the dominant, naturalist
scientific paradigm of his times. Husserl’s clarion call for returning “back to the things [in themselves]” became a foundational maxim of the phenomenological movement (p. 92).

**Phenomenology and Catholic intellectual tradition.** Though the historical development of the tradition of phenomenology is beyond the scope of this chapter, I find it important to briefly point out the connection between phenomenology and Catholic intellectual tradition. Edith Stein (now, Saint Edith Stein) was Husserl’s first assistant and graduate student, as well as an early adopter of Husserl’s phenomenological approach; her own dissertation (on the phenomenon of empathy) was guided by Husserl (Van Manen, 2014). In her later works, Stein continued to integrate her phenomenological orientation into her theology and spirituality, coming to a realization that “... it is possible to worship God by doing scholarly research” (as cited in DeVille, 2008, p. 86). Another prominent Catholic connection with phenomenology is that of Karol Wojtyla (now, Saint John Paul II) who often integrated phenomenological description into his writings, finding phenomenology to be a helpful approach in analyzing concrete human experience (Dulles, 2008). Contemporary scholars continue to engage with phenomenology in the context of the Catholic intellectual tradition; for example, Sokolowski (2000) noted the relationship between phenomenology and Thomistic philosophy, and Kobler (1985) explored the interrelationships between phenomenology and the deliberations and writings of Vatican II. The Phenomenology Center at Duquesne University, a Catholic-Spiritan university in the United States, is an example of the connection between the tradition of phenomenology and Catholic higher education (Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center, n.d.). Van Kaam (1966), a
Catholic-Spiritan priest, developed an empirical phenomenological approach in psychology.

**Orientations in phenomenology.** Van Manen (2011a) observed the complexity of delineating the many philosophical orientations within phenomenology, and presented six key movements: (a) transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology, (b) hermeneutical (interpretive) phenomenology, (c) existential (ontological) phenomenology, (d) ethical phenomenology, (e) linguistic phenomenology, and (f) the phenomenology of practice (an applied orientation).

In the context of qualitative research in the social sciences, Creswell (2013) discusses two central approaches to phenomenological research, namely Moustakas’ (1994) descriptive emphasis in transcendental phenomenology and Van Manen’s (1990) interpretive emphasis in hermeneutical phenomenology. Though there are methodological variances between the systematic method presented by Moustakas’ and the less structured method described by Van Manen (Creswell, 2013), it is important to note that their fundamental difference is philosophical in nature. While both approaches attempt to describe lived experience and discover essences, transcendental phenomenologists place greater weight on the possibility of describing without interpreting; that is, bracketing out (setting aside) personal perspectives and experiences. In contrast, hermeneutical phenomenologists argue that “there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 180), and that the use of language is “inevitably an interpretive process” (p. 181).

In the context of this debate within phenomenology, I find Finlay’s (2009) argument helpful: “Some scholars, including myself, prefer to see description and
interpretation as a continuum where specific work may be more or less interpretive” (p. 11). I have chosen to lean towards description on this contested transcendental-hermeneutical continuum in phenomenology. The descriptive emphasis is congruent with the purpose and context of this study; that is, the need to begin research related to exemplary lay leadership with rich, thick descriptions of human experience.

**Why Transcendental Phenomenology?**

For the purposes of this study, it was important for me to describe participants’ lived experiences in as much detail as possible, while remaining as close as possible to participants’ own meaning making. Thus, I conceptualized my researcher role as that of an “interlocutor,” rather than an interpreter – someone who is present to both the participant who is being described and the reader who is being engaged. Besides, I have not personally experienced specific aspects of the composite phenomenon in focus; for example, I have not experienced long-term commitment as a member of the university community, and neither do I consider myself to be an exemplary lay leader in Catholic-Marianist higher education. Thus, in the absence of personal experience with various particulars of the phenomenon in focus, as well as the absence of prior research studies specifically related to it, I found it appropriate to focus my analysis and writing on description rather than interpretation. Thus, even though I have appreciated Van Manen’s (1990) interpretive emphasis, especially in the context of my own phenomenology of practice (Van Manen, 2014), I chose to adopt, and slightly adapt, Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenological methodology, which I discovered to be especially relevant and useful because of its (a) reflective, descriptive emphasis, and (b) structured, step-by-step method.
Moustakas (1994) described his transcendental phenomenological model as “. . . a way of knowledge and discovery of meanings and essences of human experience. . . . seeing things as they appear and as they are, not judging them, learning to describe experience rather than explain or analyze it . . .” (p. 175). Reflecting on the value of this approach, Moustakas added:

. . .[it is] a way of utilizing description, reflection, and imagination in arriving at an understanding of what is, in seeing the conditions through which what is comes to be, and in utilizing a process that in its very application opens possibilities for awareness, knowledge, and action. (p. 175)

**Perspective on practice-oriented phenomenological research.** Seidman (2013) observes that there is no single approach that could be called phenomenological research, and that different researchers might develop a range of approaches that could be termed phenomenological. In general, my personal perspective as a scholar-practitioner is that of applied, practice-oriented phenomenology. I find that there are two primary reasons for the apparent variety within phenomenological research. A first and obvious reason is the complex nature of the phenomenological narrative; that is, its history, terminology, theory, and methodological development, which presents a difficult (and often confusing) learning curve for first-time phenomenological researchers, including myself. A second and subtle reason is related to the complexities and challenges of practice-oriented, applied research in the social sciences. Van Manen (2011a) asserts, “For human science scholars, who are primarily interested in applying phenomenological method to their professional practice or to aspects of their lifeworld, it is quite appropriate to take an eclectic approach to the tradition of phenomenology” (para. 3). I have come to agree
with Van Manen’s assertion and find value in some amount of methodological flexibility when studying “composite” (multi-concept) phenomena in “applied” (professional) settings. I appreciate why philosophically-oriented phenomenologists perceive theoretical pitfalls in the work of practice-oriented researchers who adopt and adapt phenomenological methods, attempting to study composite phenomena in applied contexts, rather than “pure” phenomena in the metaphysical sense. I find that both transcendental and hermeneutical approaches can be aligned with a *phenomenology of practice* (Van Manen, 2014) – research that is “for practice and of practice,” and reflects “on and in practice, and prepares for practice” (p. 15). In this study, I have primarily relied on Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenological methodology while also drawing from the rich insights offered by Van Manen (1990, 2014), and alongside the simplified descriptions by Creswell (2007, 2013), the interviewing guidelines by Seidman (2013), and the strategies for building trustworthiness by Ridenour and Newman (2008). I also referred to varied conceptual and methodological articulations in qualitative research textbooks, especially Ary et al. (2010), Bogdan and Biklen (2007), Creswell (2012), and Fraenkel et al. (2012).

**Research Methods in this Study**

In this section, I will describe the specific methods and procedures that I used in this study, as related to: (a) the pre-execution phase, (b) strategy for building trustworthiness, (c) the sampling phase, (d) the data collection phase, (e) the data analysis phase, and (f) the experience of reflective analysis.
The Pre-Execution Phase

The pre-execution phase in this study can be divided into three sub-phases: (a) groundwork, (b) proposal writing, and (c) pilot interviewing.

**Groundwork.** My groundwork for this particular study took place over the two-year period of my doctoral coursework. My experiences included: (a) advanced coursework in research methodology and higher educational leadership; (b) personal as well as guided study of Marianist literature related to educational culture and leadership; (c) participating in a wide range of activities related to Marianist spirituality and education; (d) engaging in leadership conversations with Marianist thought-leaders and scholars; (e) facilitating leadership workshops for diverse groups of Marianist religious and lay persons; (f) conducting coursework-related qualitative and quantitative research studies on topics related to Marianist educational culture and leadership; (g) examining cultural artifacts at the research site, especially its physical environment and publicly-available documents; (h) interacting with several administrators and staff involved in mission and identity programming, as well as leadership and faculty development; and (i) writing several detailed reflection papers across my doctoral coursework, clarifying my developing understandings related to leadership, organizational behavior, higher education, educational research, phenomenology, Catholic intellectual tradition, and so on.

From an ethnographic perspective during this groundwork phase, I found that my identity within Marianist higher education developed as that of a “participant observer” (Creswell, 2012, p. 625); that is, I was an “outsider” in terms of my personal demographics and professional background, and an “insider” in terms of my educational
vocation and spiritual convictions. My background and dispositions gave me a distinctive perspective and opportunity to make a meaningful contribution through this study. I was sufficiently inside the Marianist “open circle” to be an authentic describer and interlocutor, while also at a sufficient distance from it – on the “margins” of the open circle – as an authentic researcher and professional. I felt like I was, in a sense, a “marginal Marianist,” or more appropriately – a Marianist on the margins of the open circle.

The outcome of my groundwork was three-fold: (a) discerning a key idea that contributes to leadership and organizational studies – organization-specific articulations of exemplary leadership; (b) discerning the specific focus of my dissertation study – exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity; and (c) discerning the research methodology that is best suited to address the purpose of the study – transcendental phenomenology. Simply put, it seemed to me that I had a good idea, a relevant focus question, and a powerful method.

**Proposal writing.** I wrote four versions of my dissertation proposal, each for a different audience. The first version was rather broad in scope, in terms of site selection (multiple institutions and geographies) as well as sample selection (both religious and lay persons). However, based on the feedback of most scholars and researchers who ideated with me, I came to see the need to (a) delimit the focus of my study to a specific site and sample, and (b) demonstrate the relevance of my idea and the credibility of my approach, rather than attempt to actualize their wider potentials.

Next, I developed two brief versions of my proposal for (a) UD’s Graduate School and (b) Institutional Review Board, respectively. This work has been supported
in part by the University of Dayton Office for Graduate Academic Affairs through the Graduate Student Summer Fellowship Program. Receiving this fellowship was another source of ratification for my proposed study. I also obtained approval from UD’s Institutional Review Board for conducting research involving human persons, detailing various ethical and procedural considerations. Ethical considerations included informed consent, protection from harm, privacy and anonymity, participant rights, risks and benefits, and support services. Methodological considerations included research background, purpose, design, site, sample, and procedures.

Finally, I created a full-length proposal that was reviewed and approved by my dissertation committee. It is important for the reader of this work to note that the composition of my dissertation committee was particularly noteworthy. Though I will not provide a detailed explanation here, I find it important to emphasize that I derived immense value from the diverse range of scholarly and personal orientations among my committee members, which offered balanced “both/and” perspectives that guided this study, thus integrating: (a) qualitative research and phenomenology, (b) educational philosophy and Marianist educational approach, (c) religious and lay Marianist educator experience, (d) Catholic and other Christian faith traditions, and (e) distant and close-range outlooks on the phenomenon in focus.

**Pilot interviewing.** I conducted two pilot interviews with an exemplary lay leader at UD. I selected this person because s/he was (a) a recipient of UD’s Lackner Award in appreciation of her/his long-standing commitment to mission and identity, and (b) recommended to me by several persons within the university community as someone who is an exemplary lay leader. The purpose of the pilot interview was two-fold: (a) to
practice the phenomenological attitude and process, and (b) to test and clarify my interview questions and framework. I audio-recorded, transcribed, and reflected upon the interviews, and sought feedback about my skills, questions, and approach.

My experiences with the pilot produced two outcomes: (a) I came to a better appreciation of the rigor of the phenomenological process, and (b) I devised a mind map (mental framework) for conducting the interview. My mind map for the interview consisted of a 3 x 3 matrix (Appendix A: Frame for Conversation). On the x-axis, I placed the three primary “streams” within the composite phenomenon in focus: leadership, commitment, and mission and identity. On the y-axis, I placed the three question-themes that were relevant to the composite phenomenon in focus: personal journey, interior experience, and everyday practice. Underlying this matrix was a simplified version of my guiding research question from the participant’s point of view: “What does it mean (to me) to lead in a manner committed to Catholic and Marianist mission and identity?”

**Strategy for Building Trustworthiness**

In general, qualitative researchers seek to enhance the rigor of their research by carefully introducing design features that control for researcher bias, and provide evidence that the data are not biased and that the conclusions are linked to the data (Ary et al., 2010; Fraenkel et al., 2012; Ridenour & Newman, 2008). In the context of phenomenological research, it is important to recognize that these design features do not build trustworthiness by default; instead, they need to be carefully integrated into the distinctive phenomenological approach. Van Manen (2014) asserted:
The validity of a phenomenological study has to be sought in the appraisal of the originality of insights and the soundness of interpretive processes demonstrated in the study. No predetermined procedure . . . can fulfill such demand for validating a phenomenological study. (pp. 348-349)

In the final analysis, it is important for the phenomenological researcher to ask, “Does the text show reflective allusions and surprising insights? What depthful insights have been gained through this study?” (p. 355). This criterion – depthful insight – has been my guiding principle for building trustworthiness in this study.

In the context of designing this study, I adopted a three-pronged approach towards building trustworthiness, using three truth-building processes: (a) peer debriefing, (b) member checking, and (c) epoché.

**Peer debriefing, an external-to-study check.** I engaged in peer debriefing during each phase of this study’s execution. Peer debriefing is a process through which the researcher shares extensive details about the study with another professional researcher, in order to gain a neutral perspective on one’s work and thought process (Ary et al., 2010; Ridenour & Newman, 2008). In addition to the continual guidance and feedback provided by my dissertation guide, Dr. Schaller, I engaged in peer debriefing with one experienced researcher, Dr. Ridenour, who was also a member of my dissertation committee. I particularly sought feedback and critique at the beginning and end of each phase of execution; that is, sampling, data collection, and data analysis and writing.

**Member checking, an internal-to-study check.** I engaged in member checking of my writings with the participants in this study. Member checking is a process through
which the researcher asks the participants to confirm if their experience has been accurately and realistically described (Ary et al., 2010; Ridenour & Newman, 2008). I engaged in member checking each time I produced a draft “output” for an individual participant, and also at the end of the collective analyses. All participants \((n = 8)\) reviewed their respective “portraits-in-words” (presented in chapter four). All participants also reviewed the “statement of essence” (presented at the end of chapter five). This follow-up feature generated an ongoing engagement between the researcher and the researched, making the exemplary leaders in this study more than mere informants; it made them co-explorers of their own meaning making – or as Moustakas (1994) put it – they became “co-researchers” (p. 110).

**Epoché, an inner, phenomenological attitude check.** In general, qualitative researchers seek to practice *reflexivity* in order to examine and manage their personal identity, experience, and understanding (Creswell, 2012; Ridenour & Newman, 2008). Reflexivity is the practice of mindfulness during the research process; it is an effort to be conscious of the researcher’s self, which is in relationship with everything else in the study. The process of *epoché* is a unique reflexivity-related feature of phenomenological research and one of its noteworthy strengths. Engaging in the epoché process is the ongoing “first step” across all phenomenological research work; that is, it precedes every single interaction, analysis, and writing activity.

Epoché, a Greek word meaning “to stay away from or abstain” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85), refers to the researcher’s conscious effort to bring to mind, and then set aside, one’s own preconceptions, knowledge, experiences, and natural attitudes towards the world, in order to enter the research process with “new and receptive eyes” (p. 89), “an
open self” (p. 86), and “an unbiased, receptive presence” (p. 180). Achieving this transcendental attitude is not a one-time act; rather, it is a continual activity that requires “unusual, sustained attention, concentration, and presence” (p. 88).

Throughout the research process, I found Moustakas’ (1994) recommendation for engaging in reflective meditation to be a helpful practice. Reflective meditation is an approach towards achieving the interior state of epoché, that is, a transcendental attitude. Moustakas suggested finding a quiet place in which to review one’s current thoughts and feelings related to the person, situation, or issue at hand, and consciously letting go of them with each fresh review. The interior stance within this meditative state is that of “letting the preconceptions and prejudgments enter consciousness and leave freely . . .” (p. 89). The objective is to experience “. . . an internal sense of closure” (p. 89) of one’s natural attitude, and entering each encounter or activity with a phenomenological attitude instead. During the execution of this study, I practiced reflective meditation regularly, especially just before an interaction with a participant or a period of working with the data and writing. I often used a personal, *reflexive journal* to clarify and explicate my own thoughts and feelings. Moustakas (1994) points out that although epoché is “rarely perfectly achieved,” the intention behind the process and the unusual work it entails can “significantly reduce” the influence of personal experiences and preconceptions (p. 90).

In addition to peer debriefing, member checking, and epoché, two additional trust-building features were present in the design of this study by “default,” namely: (a) *prolonged engagement*, and (b) *thick description* (Ridenour & Newman, 2008). Both these features were inherent in my phenomenological approach.
The Sampling Phase

I employed a purposeful sampling strategy in this study. Purposeful sampling is an approach to sample selection in qualitative research wherein researchers use their judgment based on available information, in order to select persons who are most likely to provide the rich, thick data needed to answer the research question (Ary et al., 2010; Creswell, 2012). In phenomenological research, the term sample assumes a deeper meaning, especially when it is considered in the context of its French root word related to “example” (Van Manen, 2014, p. 352). Thus, the group of exemplary lay leaders in this study represents a sample of “best examples” – persons who exemplify the experience of the phenomenon in focus.

The sampling phase in this study can be divided into three sub-phases: (a) prospecting, (b) recruitment, and (c) selection.

Prospecting. I identified prospective participants using two university-related sources that pointed me towards exemplary lay leaders (award recognitions and survey nominations), thus relying on collective discernment rather than my personal choice in narrowing down the sample. First, the initial set of prospective participants included all recipients of UD’s Lackner Award \((n = 62)\). The Lackner Award is given “to honor a lay member of the UD faculty or staff who, over a long period of time, has made a significant contribution to the Catholic and Marianist character of the University of Dayton” (Office for Mission and Rector, n.d.b). Additionally, I considered lay persons working at UD who were recipients of mission and identity-related awards at other Marianist universities. The Lackner award is administered by the Office for Mission and Rector,
and the recipients are selected each year by an independent committee. Usually, two individuals are chosen each year – one female and one male.

Second, I developed a narrowed set of potential participants by inviting three groups of nominators to participate in a voluntary and anonymous online survey that I devised. All nominators were persons who were directly involved in mission and identity-related activities at UD, namely: (a) Marianist Educational Associates (MEAs), (b) religious Marianist persons, and (c) Lackner Award recipients. MEAs were relevant nominators because they “make a public commitment to sustain and enrich the University’s Catholic and Marianist character” (Association of Marianist Universities, 2016a, para. 1). MEAs receive various opportunities to learn about and share the university’s mission and identity. Marianist sisters, brothers, and priests located at the university were relevant nominators because they work closely with lay leaders in various departments and functions. Religious personnel receive extensive formation and experiences in Catholic and Marianist life and educational practice, thus making their recommendations particularly valuable. Lackner Awardees were relevant nominators for the reasons mentioned in the preceding paragraph. I sent an email to the nominators (Appendix B: Request for Nominations), requesting them to point me towards presently-active lay leaders at UD whom they considered to be “best examples” of what it means to lead in a manner committed to Catholic and Marianist mission and identity. I used an online survey template in order to allow respondents to submit their nominations anonymously (Appendix C: Online Survey). I received 27 distinct nominations from 26 distinct nominators. I received most nominations through the anonymous survey \(n = 23\), and a few more \(n = 4\) from nominators who responded personally.
Next, I narrowed down the list of prospective participants using three reflective evaluations: (a) explanations provided by the nominators; (b) publicly available information about the nominated individual, especially looking for cues that suggested reflective practice in relation to my research question; and (c) the diversity of the sample, especially in terms of gender, faith tradition, race, subject/practice area, and functional role. I was able to incorporate all of these considerations into the eventual sample, except one – race. The racial demographics of the Lackner awardees, as well as the nominations that I received, prevented me from recruiting a racially diverse sample. All participants indicated their racial identity using the terms “White” or “Caucasian”; however, some of them also indicated ethnic identities linked to being American, such as being of Hispanic, German, Polish, Anglo, or Swedish descent.

**Recruitment.** I contacted potential participants via email and requested for a meeting in person. I made the decision to recruit each participant through this personal conversation, keeping two considerations in mind: (a) qualifying questions, and (b) practical matters. First, in order to inquire if the individual was actively experiencing the phenomenon in focus, I posed three qualifying questions: (a) Do you consider yourself a leader in the context of your work and contributions at this university? (b) Do you consciously attempt to lead in a manner committed to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity? (c) Does your present role at the university provide you with formal and informal opportunities to lead? I listened intently, especially for cues that suggested reflective practice and elaborate articulation in relation to my research question. Second, I considered practical matters, especially participants’ availability, initial rapport, and
willingness to give informed consent (Appendix D: Informed Consent) and additional
details (Appendix E: Participant Details).

Each recruitment interview also included an explanation of the study’s purpose,
phenomenological approach, interview and follow-up procedures, and relevant details
about my personal background. I obtained informed consent prior to beginning the
phenomenological interviewing process, clarifying details related to confidentiality and
wellbeing, especially the use of audio recording during interviews and pseudonyms in the
writing, as well as the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw at any
time. I emphasized the co-creative nature of the phenomenological approach, inviting
each participant to collaborate with me in a shared quest for “shining a bright light” on
the phenomenon in focus, and discovering the essences of exemplary lay leadership and
commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity.

Selection. I made selection decisions through the recruitment interview described
above, eventually arriving at my sample of best examples (n = 8) based on four
commonalities. Each of these persons had been (a) publicly recognized (through a
collective discernment process) for one’s commitment to Catholic and Marianist mission
and identity, and (b) intentionally nominated (by relevant Marianist persons) as an
exemplary lay leader in light of the specific purpose of my study. Furthermore, each of
them had (c) responded with affirmative and reflective descriptions to my qualifying
questions during the recruitment interview, and (d) agreed to participate in the extended
phenomenological interviewing and follow-up process. Additionally, all participants
were Marianist Educational Associates (MEAs); that is, each had made a public
commitment to sustain and enrich the university’s Catholic and Marianist character. The
sample of exemplary lay leaders in this study \((n = 8)\) consisted of the following demographic details:

- Gender: Female \((n = 4)\) and Male \((n = 4)\)
- Faith tradition: Catholic \((n = 6)\) and other Christian \((n = 2)\)
- Age: 49 to 65 years \((M = 57, SD = 5.9)\)
- Race: White \((n = 8)\) and non-White \((n = 0)\)
- Marital status: Married \((n = 7)\) and Single \((n = 1)\)
- Education: Doctorate \((n = 4)\) and Masters \((n = 4)\)
- Work experience: 26 to 35 years \((M = 31.81, SD = 3.34)\)
- Marianist experience: 17 to 43 years \((M = 27.5, SD = 8.33)\)
- Professional orientation: Academic \((n = 6)\) and Student Services \((n = 2)\)
- Research activity: Active \((n = 4)\), Inactive \((n = 2)\), Not applicable \((n = 2)\)
- Current role orientation: Mostly teaching \((n = 2)\), Mix of teaching and administration \((n = 3)\), and Mostly administration \((n = 3)\)

Participants belonged to diverse subject and practice areas, including education, engineering, business, philosophy, communication, political science, theology, and psychology. All participants considered themselves “Marianist lay educators,” regardless of their current job descriptions. Each belonged to a distinct function within the university. Each had an organization-spanning perspective on one’s role. None of the participants had a close relationship with me prior to this study; four had not interacted with me at all; two knew me as a passing acquaintance, and two had briefly interacted with me in different Marianist contexts. I was reasonably sure that the participants knew each other as members of the university community, especially because all of them were
MEAs. However, I did not reveal their identities to each other. I also did not share their individual descriptions with each other, thus allowing them to provide inputs and feedback independently.

The size of the sample in this study was determined through my subjective experience of saturation during the research process (Ary et al., 2010), which I achieved after interviewing eight participants. The experience of saturation refers to the stage in the research process when the potential benefits of additional interviews cease to outweigh the growing “costs” of complex phenomenological analysis. I was mindful of Van Manen’s (2014) caution, “Too many transcripts may ironically encourage shallow reflection” (p. 353); thus, I chose to build a small sample of best examples – an approach appropriate for the purposes of my study.

The Data Collection Phase

Phenomenological research relies primarily on the long interview as a means to gather descriptive, experiential data needed to answer the research question. Moustakas (1994) explained that the phenomenological long interview is an informal, interactive, and flexible process of utilizing open-ended comments and questions aimed at “evoking a comprehensive account of the person’s experience of the phenomenon . . .” (p. 114). The researcher prepares questions and statements to serve as a guide, but may not necessarily use these during the interview, depending on the flow of thought and conversation.

I will describe the data collection phase in this study in the following four subsections: (a) before the interview, (b) beginning the interview, (c) during the interview, and (d) after the interview.
**Before the interview.** Prior to each interview meeting, I ensured that I had sufficient time to prepare myself interiorly by engaging in the epoché process, especially using the reflective meditation approach suggested by Moustakas (1994). This practice helped me enter each conversation with an interior state of openness and sensitivity, as much as possible. I also made a conscious effort to focus on (bracket in) my guiding research question in this study: “What are the meanings that exemplary lay leaders ascribe to their lived experiences of endeavoring to lead in a manner committed to the Catholic-Marianist mission and identity of the University of Dayton?” Throughout the interviewing process, I continued to use the mind map that I had developed during the pilot phase (Appendix A: Frame for Conversation), and also shared it with the participants who directly or indirectly expressed the need for having some minimal structure that they could keep in mind during the interviewing process. I also asked the participants to choose the date, time, and venue for the interview, emphasizing the need for optimal energy levels as well as a private, conducive setting for the long conversation.

**Beginning the interview.** At the beginning of each interaction, I followed Moustakas’ (1994) recommendation for opening with a “social conversation,” ensuring that the climate and rapport were conducive enough for the participant to “... feel comfortable and ... respond honestly and comprehensively” (p. 114). I emphasized that the interview was intended to be non-directional and spontaneous, and that my role was that of an active listener and interlocutor.

I sought to minimize any potential stress that the participant might be experiencing by reiterating one or more points that I had shared during our earlier recruitment conversation, including: (a) The interviewing process would conclude only
when s/he felt satisfied that s/he had expressed oneself fully; thus, s/he could proceed at one’s own pace. (b) S/he would have more opportunities to share additional insights or clarifications during the follow-up phase; thus, s/he did not need to “get it right” in one attempt. (c) S/he was not expected to provide “deep wisdom,” but rather, a simple, realistic, and natural articulation of one’s experience. I reminded each participant to focus on experience rather than abstract thought, and especially, to describe one’s experience from the inside out, that is, from the perspective of one’s interior life.

I informed the participant before beginning the audio recording. The pace of the conversation was set intuitively, and long pauses and reflective allusions were normal. The length of each interview would turn out to be approximately two hours; however, this was not strictly pre-determined in advance.

During the interview. As a guide for the long interview, I considered Seidman’s (2013) detailed, three-phased phenomenological interviewing process. For each phase, I prepared a guiding statement that I could use or modify intuitively. The three phases were:

First, focused life journey, which involved getting to know the participant’s journey of leadership and commitment to mission and identity, thus gaining an understanding of the human story in relation to the phenomenon in focus. My guiding statement was, “Please describe aspects of your past life that have shaped your present experience of leadership and commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity.”

Second, details of the experience, which involved getting to know what the experience of the phenomenon feels like in the participant’s interior life and everyday practice. I had two interrelated guiding statements here: “Please describe your interior
experience of endeavoring to lead in a manner committed to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity”; and “Please describe your approach in day-to-day academic practice, in relation to endeavoring to lead in a manner committed to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity.”

Third, meaning making, which involved getting to know the participant’s understandings in relation to the phenomenon in focus. My guiding statement was, “Please describe what it means to you to be a lay leader who is committed to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity.”

Throughout the interviewing process, I asked follow-up questions to (a) probe deeply into the experience and meaning of what was being said, or to (b) clarify my own understandings. I did not intentionally steer the conversation in a predetermined direction. I sought to gather phenomenological data that had sufficient breadth (in terms of personal journey), detail (in terms of interior experience and everyday practice), and depth (in terms of meaning making).

After the interview. After each interview, I transcribed the entire recording, clearly delineating the words of the participant and my own. Each line in the transcript was numbered. I tried to capture the flow of spoken language, including significant pauses and emotionally potent sounds, such as chuckling, laughing, or sobbing. After completing a draft of a transcription, I shared it with the respective participant. I asked questions related to any unclear texts as well as follow-up questions that would benefit my developing understandings. I provided each participant the opportunity to modify one’s transcript using the tracking feature in Microsoft Word, thus enabling me to
consider modified text in light of the original. All participants reviewed their respective transcripts and provided additional inputs at their own discretion.

The Data Analysis Phase

Moustakas (1994) offered a systematic, four-staged transcendental phenomenological model for engaging in data analysis. The stages are: (a) epoché, (b) phenomenological reduction, (c) imaginative variation, and (d) synthesis of essential meanings. I have already described the first stage of epoché in an earlier section of this chapter. Next, I will describe the three stages that followed.

**Phenomenological reduction: Developing textural descriptions.** The second stage in transcendental phenomenology involves the process of *phenomenological reduction*, through which the researcher discovers the apparent textures of lived experience – the noema (what) of the phenomenon in focus. The researcher produces a textural description for each participant, and subsequently, a composite textural description of collective experience. The process of phenomenological reduction consists of four steps (Moustakas, 1994):

1. *Bracketing in* the research question in focus, and setting aside everything else, so that the entire effort is “rooted solely on the topic and question” (p. 97).
2. *Horizontalizing* the relevant and potentially useful statements in each participant’s descriptions, giving every statement equal value.
3. *Delimiting* the data that are not relevant or redundant, thus identifying the *horizons* that stand out as “invariant qualities of the experience” (p. 180).
4. *Clustering* the statements in order to develop textural themes, and eventually, individual and composite textural descriptions.
Imaginative variation: Developing structural descriptions. The third stage in transcendental phenomenology involves the process of imaginative variation, through which the researcher discovers the underlying structures of lived experience – the noesis (how) of the phenomenon in focus. The researcher produces a structural description for each participant, and subsequently, a composite structural description of collective experience. The task of imaginative variation is to “seek possible meanings”; to imaginatively use varying “frames of reference” and “divergent perspectives,” gradually allowing the underlying structures of the phenomenon to reveal themselves (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). The process of imaginative variation consists of four steps (p. 99):

1. Systematically considering “possible structural meanings”;
2. Recognizing “underlying themes”;
3. Considering “universal structures” (explained in the following paragraph); and
4. Searching for illustrative statements and developing “structural themes,” and eventually, individual and composite structural descriptions.

I discovered structural insights and meanings underlying the phenomenon in focus through the process of imaginatively varying the underlying themes specific to this study (such as, commitment, leadership, mission and identity, and any other emergent theme), as well as universal structural themes that might be present in the phenomenological data (such as, cause, time, space, material, body, self, and relationships).

Phenomenological theory suggests that every human phenomenon has universal structures (Moustakas, 1994), also referred to as existentials (Van Manen, 2014), which are “helpful universal ‘themes’ to explore meaning aspects of our lifeworld and of the particular phenomena that we may be studying” (Van Manen, 2014, p. 303). In the
context of the phenomenon in focus, I employed “universal structures as themes” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 181). Though I considered several universal structures suggested in phenomenological theory, I predominantly found six within the phenomenological data: causal influences (Causality), the experience of time (Temporality), spatial awareness (Spatiality), expressions of body-hood (Body-hood), descriptions of self (Self), and relationship with others (Relationality) (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014). In relation to the phenomenon in focus in this study:

1. *Causality* refers to the participants’ personal awareness and understandings related to how they came to experience the phenomenon in focus, especially considerations of pre-determination, randomness, or self-authorship.

2. *Temporality* refers to the experience of time – the past, present, and future.

3. *Spatiality* refers to the experience of physical as well as mental spaces, and conceptual themes related to spatial awareness.

4. *Body-hood* refers to the physicality of the experience, in terms of the physical body as well as metaphorical expressions of corporeality.

5. *Self* refers to relationship with oneself, especially considerations of personal identity and individuality within expressions containing self-descriptions.

6. *Relationality* refers to relationship with others, especially considerations of interpersonal dimensions and social experiences.

**Synthesis of essential meanings: Developing essences.** The fourth stage in transcendental phenomenology involves the *synthesis of essential meanings* and the articulation of the “essential, invariant structure” (Creswell, 2013, p. 82) of the phenomenon in focus. The researcher reflectively synthesizes the composite textural and
structural descriptions in order to develop a “. . . unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). Even though the discovery of essences of a given phenomenon is “never totally exhausted” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100), the resultant syntheses offer valuable data-based articulations of shared meanings. The discovery of the universal, invariant essences of the phenomenon is the guiding purpose of all phenomenological research. Van Manen (2014) emphasized, “. . . phenomenology looks not for sameness or repetitive patterns. Rather, phenomenology aims at what is singular . . .” (p. 353). Simply put, phenomenological “seeing” moves from the distinctive (individual themes), to the collective (composite themes), and finally, to the invariant (common essences).

**The Experience of Reflective Analysis**

In a metaphorical sense, the transcendental phenomenological process is like an archeological dig – the researcher sifts through a multitude of data with an unusual amount of patience, persistence, self-denial, and sensitivity to others, in order to discover the essences of the phenomenon. In doing so, the researcher clarifies the previously unknown or unclear knowledge of essences, thus contributing fresh insight into the mystery of being human.

**Writing.** I have presented this section towards the end of this chapter because doing so helps the reader appreciate how the preceding considerations influenced and guided my writing. In reality, however, the experience of writing was integral to my work in this study, from the beginning to the end. Van Manen (2014) pointed out that the experiences of analysis and writing in phenomenological research are intricately intertwined; thus, it is appropriate to say, “The research is the writing” (p. 389).
I used *Atlas.ti*, a qualitative data management tool, to organize the data for the ongoing purposes of my reflective-descriptive analyses and writing. I read each transcript several times before and during the process. I engaged in a brief reflective-meditation every time I entered a period of work. Each time, I focused on the research question (bracketed it in) and then systematically considered the task at hand (line-by-line, topically, thematically, and so on). Beginning with the process of epoché and moving through the processes of phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation, I gradually came to see the apparent textures and underlying structures of the phenomenon, eventually arriving at the clarification of essential meanings.

**Follow up.** During the analysis and writing process, I engaged in two additional follow-up (member checking) interactions in addition to the post-interview transcript check.

First, I engaged in member checking of individual “portraits-in-words” (chapter four) containing textural and structural descriptions. All participants reviewed and commented on the draft of their respective descriptions. Each of them expressed a sense of appreciation for the work and gratitude for the experience of reading it. Some participants \( n = 4 \) offered minor revisions, which I reviewed and incorporated.

Second, I engaged in member checking of the “statement of essence” containing 12 sets of essential meanings that were compiled through the process of drafting the “composite syntheses” (chapter five). Again, each participant reviewed the draft of these essential meanings, and responded with appreciation and personal reflections. Some of them \( n = 4 \) offered minor suggestions, which I assessed and incorporated as appropriate.

Additionally, I invited all participants to volunteer to review the entire fifth chapter.
(composite syntheses). Some of them \((n = 4)\) agreed to do so. I reviewed and integrated their feedback, balancing various perspectives and suggestions.

Prior to conducting these follow-up interactions, I examined the debate concerning member checking in phenomenological research (Bradbury-Jones, Irvine, & Sambrook, 2010). The central issue concerns the pros and cons of allowing the natural attitude (of the participants) to influence the writing that results from the phenomenological attitude (of the researcher). Bradbury-Jones et al. reviewed this debate in phenomenological research and concluded, “... the benefits of member checking far outweigh the pitfalls” (p. 31). They pointed out that member checking allows for an “interactive, dialogical form of feedback and reflection rather than a formal ‘this is my interpretation’ approach” (p. 30). In this study, I found that participants’ feedback enhanced my writing and reinforced the trustworthiness of the findings. Besides, the experience of meaning making in sustained conversation is a particularly Marianist emphasis, and therefore was intuitively agreeable to the participants. Throughout this study, each participant responded with remarkable generosity, giving their time and energy in a spirit of sincere partnership and trust.

**Presentation of findings.** As discussed earlier, I have sought to provide rich, thick descriptions of the findings. In the context of common approaches towards reporting phenomenological findings, my presentation is nuanced in three ways: First, I have chosen to present the various sub-sections in an intentional sequence, subsequent to the interconnected manner in which the textural themes, and then the structural themes, were analyzed. This consistent sequence across individual portraits-in-words as well as composite syntheses enhances the flow and clarity of the manuscript, especially for the
benefit of diverse types of practitioners and researchers who may read this work. Second, I have presented, atypically, a list of essential meanings for each participant, in order to give the reader additional insight at the individual level of analysis. Third, I have presented individual and composite descriptions in separate chapters, using a specific sequence and terminology, which I will describe next.

In chapter four, titled *Individual “Portraits-in-Words,”* I have presented each participant’s textural and structural description next to each other, in order to allow the reader to appreciate a multilayered portrayal of the human person. The phrase “portrait-in-words” seemed especially appropriate because, metaphorically, each is a picture that is layered with meanings – apparent textures and underlying structures. In phenomenological language, each portrait seeks to be *eidetic* in nature; that is, it is characterized by plentiful detail that can evoke vivid mental images. Van Manen (1990) refers to this approach as “*reconstructed life stories*” (p. 170). In this study, each portrait-in-words includes a textural description consisting of: (a) personal journey, (b) interior experience, (c) everyday practice; followed by a structural description consisting of (a) personal understandings, (b) phenomenological structures, and (c) essential meanings.

In chapter five, titled *Composite Syntheses,* I have presented (a) descriptions of the composite textures of the phenomenon; (b) descriptions of the composite structures of the phenomenon; (c) syntheses of three streams within the lived experience of the phenomenon (explained in the following paragraph); and finally, (d) a statement of essence, which presents a brief, integrated collection of essential meanings that do not vary across the descriptions of exemplary lay leaders in this study.
My synthesis of composite textures and structures revealed three distinct but inseparable streams within the lived experience of the phenomenon in focus, namely: (a) exemplary lay commitment, (b) exemplary Marianist leadership, and (c) the experience of Catholic and Marianist mission and identity. I used the term “streams” to denote their interconnectedness within lived experience (the present, continuous experience). The term “streams” seemed appropriate because even though these three dimensions are conceptually distinct, they are inextricably intertwined and inseparable in lived experience.

In conclusion, all through the writing process, I have sought to present an articulation that aims to “raise empathy” within the reader, thus evoking a sense of connection with the humanness of the exemplary lay leader who is being portrayed. It is important for the reader to note that the individual portraits-in-words (chapter four) and composite syntheses (chapter five) are not meant for speed reading, nor to be understood merely through the section headings and sub-headings. Moreover, the brief statement of essence at the end of chapter five is not meant to be read in isolation from the portraits and syntheses from which it was derived. Rather, these writings are best suited for reflective reading, so that after it is done, the reader can walk away from the manuscript saying, “This is how it feels like for them!” Van Manen (2014) reflects:

A high-quality phenomenological text cannot be summarized. It does not need to contain a list of findings – rather, one must evaluate it by meeting with it, going through it, encountering it, suffering it, consuming it, and, as well, being consumed by it. (p. 355)
CHAPTER IV
INDIVIDUAL “PORTRAITS-IN-WORDS”

Introduction to Descriptions

In this chapter, I will present eight individual descriptions of the phenomenon in focus: exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity. Each is a retelling of lived experience from the inside out. Metaphorically, each is a human portrait-in-words. Each portrayal is layered with meanings – the apparent textures and underlying structures of the exemplary lay leader’s experiences. Each portrait-in-words is divided into two main sections: (a) textural description, and (b) structural description. A texture is that which is apparent in the individual’s description, and a structure is that which underlies it.

Textural descriptions contain the evident textures of lived experience – what was experienced (the particulars). The three sub-sections of each textural description are:

1. Personal journey, which describes relevant details of the individual’s story of commitment and leadership;
2. Interior experience, which describes the individual’s inner life in relation to the phenomenon in focus; and
3. Everyday practice, which describes the individual’s approach in day-to-day academic life.
Structural descriptions contain the underlying structures of lived experience – *how* the phenomenon was experienced (the meanings). The three sub-sections of each structural description are:

1. **Personal understandings**, which present the individual’s meaning making related to commitment, leadership, mission and identity, and related sub-themes, if any;

2. **Phenomenological structures**, which emerge out of considerations of human existential themes that are present in the data, namely: causality, temporality, spatiality, body-hood, self, and relationality; and

3. **Essential meanings**, which present a concise collection of essences within the individual’s descriptions.

I will begin each portrait-in-words on a new page.
Ann: A Portrait-in-words

Textural Description

This section contains descriptions of Ann’s experiences related to the composite phenomenon of “exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity,” which I will present in three parts: (a) personal journey, (b) interior experience, and (c) everyday practice.

Personal journey. Ann has been associated with the Marianist family for approximately thirty-five years. She studied at a Marianist school, and later, at the University of Dayton (UD). She has been employed at UD in an administrative capacity for approximately twenty-five years. Much of her work has been focused on students, continually reflecting about student learning, and “how that learning is centered in the mission and vision of the institution.” Her role also involves informal forms of leadership, both within and outside her department; for example, mentoring student groups, working on university committees, and facilitating conversations among new hires, as well as faculty, staff, and students in general.

Looking back at the influences that have shaped her as a person, Ann recalls her parents, and especially her father; his “sense of right and wrong… a man of few words, but he lived it every day… a life of faith and service to the Church, to his family, and the community.” Ann tried her best to live up to the high standards that her father expected from her; she recalls:

He never raised his voice to any of his children, but you knew when you had disappointed him. That’s not a place you wanted to be, not because of what he
said or did, but because the message was inside of you – that you should have
known better and done better.

During her time at the Marianist school, Ann became familiar with several
Marianists. Her conversations with them were not particularly “intentional”; however,
she recalls, it was “more of that spirit, that informal spirit you felt.”

When it was time to go to college, she chose to study at UD, not particularly for
its Catholic nature, but for aspirational and practical reasons; “it was a place where I
could meet people from all over the world and have different experiences, and still not be
too far from home.” As an undergraduate student, she was not particularly “in tune with
the Marianists”; “I was more in that phase of doing things for myself, meeting friends,
having fun, you know, what a typical undergrad might be.”

Ann came to work at UD, not necessarily because it was Catholic and Marianist,
but because she “wanted to be respected,” in contrast to her previous place of
employment wherein professional ethics and respect for persons was not part of her daily
experience. Despite being “grounded in the Marianists from an early age,” it was only
after she started working at UD that she “had a different kind of awakening” – a growth
in faith and commitment from “seeing it playing out in other people.” Her first
impressions of working at UD were characterized by “a strong sense of respect for other
people” and “that Marianist sense of hospitality.” She emphasizes, “I had a lot of good
examples of what leadership looked like and what the Marianists looked like.” A few
years into her tenure at UD, Ann was invited to be part of an advisory group on mission
and identity-related matters. Those interactions and conversations were a profound
experience, nudging her towards a “more formal ‘Yes.’”
Among the many exemplary leaders at UD that have influenced her, Brother Raymond Fitz, S.M. (Brother Ray), UD’s former President, is foremost in her thoughts; “he embodies servant leadership in everything he does… an epitome of someone walking the talk.” Ann admires several qualities in Brother Ray whom she refers to as “a model of leadership”; these include: his honesty and humility; his forthrightness about the mistakes he made and what he learned from them; his energy, passion, and commitment to making a change, getting varied voices to the table, and holding people accountable to a very high standard – “but it’s a standard [that] he goes over all the time.”

Ann recalls several experiences that have inspired her along the way. The Marianist Educational Associates (MEA) program was a “profound influence… learning the [Marianist] history in a more deep way… making a public commitment with other faculty and staff, and having those people to turn to.” Her visits to other Marianist universities, St. Mary’s University (San Antonio) and Chaminade University of Honolulu were memorable too; “…really see[ing] the charism manifested in different ways on those campuses, [and] also feeling a connection.” Ann had the opportunity to travel to Marianist sites in Spain and France, accompanied by persons from the three Marianist universities; “you really feel it!” She also feels fortunate to have attended Marianist founder, Father Chaminade’s beatification ceremony in Rome. She vividly recalls a powerful and moving experience:

There was a mass on the day after the beatification… it was for all the people who were there for Father Chaminade…. As everyone said the Lord’s Prayer in their different languages, it was beautiful, really sensing the worldwide presence of the Marianists.
Participating in a campus retreat for “busy persons” was helpful to her at the time; “to take a step back and put some quite time in your life, for prayer.”

Ann recalls attending the ceremony in which she was felicitated with the Lackner Award. She reflects about how her husband, who was present at the event, could also sense that “this institution is very much rooted in its Catholic and Marianist identity… as paramount to who we are….” She reflects, “It’s helpful for me to hear this from the outside.”

Ann is inspired by students who go through the Marianist lay formation experience and make a public commitment, especially because their experiences are quite different from her own as an undergraduate student. She reflects, “To make that level of a commitment, at that young age, is just striking to me, that they want to be a part of that, and they want that to be a part of their lives beyond the university.” She recalls that many students in the past had a strong commitment to faith and attending mass; however, she increasingly notices “more intentionality around it… it’s not just going to church, it’s how they’re going to live their lives.” Ann finds the work of the Fitz Center for Leadership in Community particularly inspiring.

In preparation for a talk she was invited to give at a campus event, Ann recalls doing some research and re-reading about the Marianist founders: Father Chaminade, Mother Adèle, and Marie-Thérèse. She says, “Their relationship at that time must have been very unusual, to have seen the gifts in each other and maintain those relationships in very difficult and uncertain times…. They were amazing people.”

In every phase of her life at UD, Ann has encountered people “who had that quest.” However, she also observes that there are quite a few faculty and staff who do
not proactively “seek out” the mission, in whom “the mission is not that ingrained.” She reasons, “Maybe 20 years ago, we weren’t looking for that… we didn’t try to find out or measure that… now we’re trying to see it, and we’re finding places where we don’t see it.”

**Interior experience.** Ann describes herself as a “pretty reflective person.” She points out that she does not maintain a journal of personal reflections; “…because these thoughts are always going through my head… and part of that reflection [she is moved to tears]… is my interior conversation with God.” Ann is stirred with emotion as she talks about her prayer life; “I’m having a conversation with God all the time in my head [saying,] ‘Is this the way this should happen? Should I be doing something different?’” This relationship with God traces back to her childhood; “I would always have those formal prayers, but I would get those done soon so that I could [get to] that more personal conversation.” Sometimes, prayer is formal, “a prayer book in my drawer… it’s all marked up with tabs and post-its.” Sometimes, prayer is just stopping to have that conversation with God and wondering, “Is this the best way? Am I respecting all the people involved? Am I making the right decisions? And am I impacting the people in a way that is good and helpful for them…?” Ann’s relationship with God also involves recognizing how God may be speaking to her. Moved with emotion, she says, “There are many times when I am troubled by something, and somebody is put in my path that day; we stop and have a conversation, and it’s divine… it’s a manifestation of God knowing what I needed that day….”
Ann has a strong sense of clarity about her priorities amongst the various commitments in her life; however, these commitments are interrelated, and make up an integrated whole. She reflects:

My strongest commitment is to my family… but beyond that, my next commitment is really to this, and by this [I mean]… it’s my job, my staff, the Marianists, it’s all part of one thing, and my faith is tied into all of that.

Ann recognizes and respects the differences in the nature of the commitment that vowed religious persons make, as compared to lay persons; “I mean, I have not given my life to this; this is a part of my life, and it’s an important part… it has been and will be….” The commitment that religious and lay persons make is “different in that, when I go home, I can, in a sense, put some of this in a box; [however,]… it doesn’t truly ever leave me… but for vowed religious… that identity is central, every moment of every day.”

Ann observes that the challenges to commitment initially faced by new employees, or by younger persons, are not so different from those continually faced by tenured employees, or by older persons. She reflects:

It doesn’t matter, the age or the number of years you have been working here… it’s really not so different…. Everybody needs to see that it’s not always going to be perfect… it’s all fallible. The important thing is – we all [must] keep trying.

Ann’s experiences continually remind her of the different levels of commitment among her colleagues, or lack thereof; “we’ve got people all across this continuum… clearly, it’s not part of everybody’s day-to-day existence, or even awareness.” She exclaims, “I don’t know how you can be here and not feel, not understand that that’s a
part of who we are, and not ask how my role is impacted by that…. However, Ann recognizes that as she has grown older, she has become more open to and understanding of people “who may not be in the same place.” She asks herself, “How do we still make a place for them here, and how do we still respect their path…?”

The exemplary leaders that Ann has experienced are a part of her interior conversation; their example influences her amidst day-to-day activities; “it makes me take a step back and look at a decision I’ve made… did I make it in the best way, or what can I learn from these people?” She remembers people who were “mentors or guides or examples” to her; “if there is a question about what does Marianist look like, these are the faces and the names that pop into my head.”

To people who do not know her intimately, Ann supposes that she may seem “pretty sure of [her]self” and “decisive, somewhat direct at times.” She suggests, “I think they would be surprised to know that I do second-guess and question [myself].”

Ann contrasts the autonomy that faculty members seem to have within their classrooms, with her apparent lack of control regarding a range of decisions that impact her work; she reflects:

It’s very humbling… to understand that I don’t get to make all the decisions, I don’t get to decide how this is gonna play out… there are other people and they are in places for a reason… and maybe I just need to focus some of my energies on other relationships here and other things that give me life….

Ann wears her emotions “on her sleeve.” She advises, “That feeling is there for a reason.” She struggles with separating her feelings from her work; “some people can, but I’m not a person who is able to do that.” She jokes, “[Someone] told me, I have… the
gift of tears, and I said, I would like to give that gift back!” She admits, “…some people are very uncomfortable with the emotions, so there are times when I wish they weren’t so evident… [on the other hand,] a lot of people don’t show it, and I wish they had a little bit more…. She reflects, “The emotions are representative of the commitment for me”; “if I did not care deeply… I wouldn’t have the strong emotional tie…. She recollects experiences of speaking up and sharing her thoughts and feelings in difficult situations; “it feels risky, it feels vulnerable…. She acknowledges that it’s not always easy to say what you think, due to the “power differential as an employee”; however, whenever she has done so, it has never been because she was “emboldened to say something,” but just because of “a deep commitment to what’s right.”

Ann has experienced a few difficult relationships with “authority figures,” which have been a source of interior anguish – relationships that were good once, but then deteriorated, and decisions and changes that were made that were different from how she had envisioned them. When she feels “upset or hurt or frustrated,” she reminds herself, “It’s not always just about me.” She reflects:

So even in difficult times, there’s always this bigger thing, this bigger mission, this bigger identity of the institution… a bigger cause – that’s what we’re about, and that’s really the mission of the institution, it’s really the identity of this place and the Marianists.

Ann chooses not to hold on to her frustrations; “it’s not good for me, it’s not good for anybody I work with or anything we’re doing.” She makes a conscious effort to move on because “there’s something bigger at stake here.” Reflecting about why she perseveres, she points out, “It is the knowledge of the greater good here that helps me.”
Once, when she was confronted with the thought of leaving her job, she asked herself, “Is that what I want to do, or am I leaving because I can’t manage what I’m trying to deal with… the answer was clearly the latter, [and so] I decided to stay….” Reflecting upon one particularly strained relationship, Ann reflects about how she moved towards healing:

I very much considered what my role was in the conflict, as much as I didn’t want to think about it, I thought about it, and what that person was asking of me, and I really did start making some very concrete changes in how I communicated.

Reviewing her journey of commitment, Ann finds that even in the most trying times, she has not experienced a crisis of faith, nor a crisis of commitment to the Marianist charism itself. However, her experience of commitment does involve the interior work of questioning and choosing to stay committed. During a particularly difficult period, Ann recalls questioning the value of her commitment; she explains:

I was wondering: Did it make any difference? Did I need to step away? Did I truly believe in what I was saying? [But] that was a short-lived questioning period, and when I recognized that everybody is not going to sense this in the same way, and every day is not going to be great, with everybody filled with total commitment… really all I can do is try to do things for myself; what am I able to do that is in alignment with the mission… with the Marianists, and stop worrying so much about other people in a way that is not productive. So I did, [and] it kind of caused a re-commitment.

Ann’s appreciation for Mary has gradually changed with age; from her childhood image of seeing the statues of Mary, always “quiet and calm,” to reading the scriptures and realizing that she was “a revolutionary woman… she was there from the beginning to
the end, standing at the foot of the cross when others couldn’t.” Ann recollects the annunciation scene in the gospel narrative, when Angel Gabriel tells Mary that she will bear God’s Son, and Mary is confused. Welling up with emotion, Ann says, “To know that she was confused gives me comfort in my confusion.”

Despite her struggles, Ann’s reflections about her interior life are marked with an undeniable sense of joy and gratitude; “there’s a lot of joy, a lot of days here…” and “it’s a great gift to work at a place like this.”

**Everyday practice.** Ann describes herself as “highly intuitive,” but balances that with detail-orientation; “I can think about the bigger picture, and see the direction, and know and trust other people to have the details, although I’m very good with details as well.” She describes herself as a logical, systematic person, but not so much as a creative person. Her creativity is expressed interpersonally; “...[in] how I ask the questions or who I bring around the table.” Even though emotions are an important part of Ann’s everyday practice, she makes her decisions “not based on [her] feelings about something… [but] based on fairness and social justice...”; “…it might tear me up inside to do it that way [she chuckles], but that’s how I think it has to be done.”

Her approach towards building relationships involves an interchange; “getting to know something about them that’s personal, and sharing of myself with them… it comes down to listening and having the true desire to want to get to know somebody.” Ann recalls one of her supervisors from over 20 years ago, who excelled at getting to know his team members on a very personal level, inside and outside of work. She reflects, “Now, there are different boundaries set up, I think, in the workplace.” Ann does not feel the “need to micromanage people”; instead, she tries to “provide direction and minimize
obstacles for them to get their job done.” Following this approach with one of her colleagues, she observes, “He sensed that I was trusting of him, but also that I was a resource to him, and I think that’s good.”

Ann appreciates the work of the Rector’s office in communicating the university’s Catholic and Marianist mission and identity; “if somebody is interested in exploring further, those opportunities are available to them.” She participates in several campus-wide initiatives that give her an opportunity to share her understandings and experiences related to Catholic and Marianist themes; she explains:

If somebody [a new employee] says, what is it like here, I would tell them: The Catholic faith is what we’re founded on, and that the Marianist religious order is a very open, welcoming order, and that a lot of people here who are not Catholic have felt a home here, because they can identify with and respect the values, and see the values at play in their own work.

Ann has worked on several hiring committees; she points out, “We give people information; we don’t ask them questions that quiz them on Marianist or Catholic, but ask them if they have thought about how working here might be different than in another environment.” Her personal experiences with hiring for mission have generally been positive; however, she suggests, “I don’t think that all areas of the institution look at it that way, or put that same kind of emphasis on hiring.” Reflecting about employee orientation, she considers it helpful to organize “smaller sessions where people could come together… ask questions and learn more about the identity of the institution.”

Ann practices consultative decision making and problem solving; “we do bring in that variety of perspectives, but we also recognize that we’re in this together… it’s a
constant learning process… [make] mistakes and correct and figure it out.” Practicing a collaborative form of leadership has its challenges, as it “takes more time, is messier, it’s harder, it involves more people, it involves more opinions… but when it’s done right, it really produces the best results, that everybody can find themselves and see themselves in.” However, Ann acknowledges that a common criticism of this Marianist approach to leadership is that “things move slowly”; but there is also a recognition that the “time was taken for all the right reasons, to get those varied voices at the table, and truly listen to what people said, and then make the decision… with mission at the forefront.”

Ann’s approach to decision making involves both an exterior and interior conversation; she explains her process in detail:

I will consult with people, whoever is involved… I will call people together… and then, depending on how I am feeling, if there’s some uncertainty or if I feel like I’ve rushed to decision too quickly, those are the times I need to take a step back, and maybe give it 24 hours, and listen for some guidance from God or some direction. And that comes in more subtle ways, where you feel like either there’s some sense that it’s okay to move forward, or that something’s not quite right, something’s not quite done, something’s not uncovered, and then we take a step back and have another conversation with people.

Reflecting about learning and development programs she has attended through the years, Ann says:

A lot of programs that I went to as a newer professional, I went not because it was in the middle of the day; I went on my own time, in the evening, because I found
it to be valuable, I thought it was interesting, I wanted to learn, but not everybody has that desire or that kind of time….

Ann’s commitment is continually nurtured through everyday interactions; “it’s the day-to-day people who were in your path, who you have conversations with, who are really living this commitment.” She also notices that her commitment influences those around her, helping them to recognize that the “sense of identity and value of the institution has to be a part of their work.” She gently invites them to figure out how to do this for themselves; “I don’t expect people to convert to Catholicism [she chuckles], and I don’t expect them to attend all the Marianist programs – that’s their choice; I make them available and I support anyone who wants to go to them.”

Ann draws strength and support from several people at work, especially three individual relationships in which “there’s a lot of trust and there’s a lot of history.” She feels assured of their support; “if I need somebody to talk to, whether I am frustrated about something, unsure about something, happy about something, needing input, confused, I can be my honest self with them.”

Reflecting about her participation in this research, Ann feels humbled that many people pointed to her as an exemplary lay leader; “I am humbled that people said me….” She reflects about her articulations during the interviewing process, “I don’t know if this is deep insight or not… it didn’t feel very profound at all [to me]… but it felt real.”

**Structural Description**

This section contains analyses of the underlying dimensions of Ann’s experiences related to the composite phenomenon of “exemplary lay leadership commitment to
Catholic-Marianist mission and identity,” which I will present in three parts: (a) personal understandings, (b) phenomenological structures, and (c) essential meanings.

**Personal understandings.**

**Commitment.** Ann’s reflections about commitment reveal several underlying understandings related to the interior and ubiquitous nature of the act of committing. These include: (a) Commitment is an interior act of one’s will; “I suppose we’re all making commitments all the time… to things that we value, whether it’s a spouse or a faith or our work… a commitment that I’m going to do my best, and [even though] I’m going to fail… I’m going to continue to try.” (b) Commitment permeates “everything”; “somebody did say to me, that’s it, stop saying yes to everything, go home at 4.30, you know, you don’t have to give everything like you do, [but] I can’t do that.” (c) Ann’s experiences illustrate that the interior state of commitment involves an intrinsic human struggle; there is a “cost” to commitment; a “cost [which] is real.” She explains:

(i) Commitment involves risk; “you risk being overcommitted, you risk caring too much, giving too much of your personal self to something.” (ii) Commitment involves sacrifice; “sacrificing your own time and sometimes your emotional health, your personal time, sometimes your physical health, to do the things that you think need to be done, because of that commitment.” (iii) Commitment involves a worthy struggle; “I’ve never felt like it’s not been worth it, but at times of deep struggle, maybe feeling like the gifts that I’m trying to use are not being appreciated… everybody feels like that at times.” (iv) Commitment involves the pain of recognizing when persons, especially leaders, fall short of the ideal; “then you see all the times when we don’t hit that, you think, ‘Well, is this really what we’re about?’” (v) Commitment involves the determination to rise above our
shortcomings; “while this is what we espouse to… on any given day, we’re not gonna get it right in every place on the campus; we’re gonna have pitfalls, we’re gonna make mistakes, but you come back and keep trying.”

**Leadership.** Ann’s reflections about leadership reveal an underlying theme related to the sharp contrast between a distinctively Marianist way of leading and its antithesis – an authoritarian, control-oriented approach. Her experiences with both sides of this spectrum have developed within her an intuitive sense of what good and bad leadership “looks like.” Ann observes several common characteristics among exemplary leaders in the Catholic and Marianist tradition, including “care for others,” “care for the institution,” and “wanting to reflect the best of [being] Marianists”; they are “reflective people who ask questions of themselves and challenge themselves to do things better,” and “who understand this institution and work on behalf of it.” Conversely, Ann feels challenged by leaders who lead with a “sense of authority without collaboration.” She remarks:

When I’ve seen some of the best things come out of this university, it’s been over collaboration and conversation and staying at the table and working things out together…. Certainly, there’s always a sense of hierarchy and structure, but where some of that can drop off and people can have honesty and communication, that’s been good stuff. And when this doesn’t happen over some of the bigger decisions, that’s [when] I’m troubled by that.

Being the “reflective person” that she is, Ann shares insights that come out of her own meaning making about leadership. For example, she extends the “Golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” to make the point that we also need to
try to: “Do unto others as they want it done.” She finds that her own understanding of leadership is not about positional authority or micromanagement; instead, it is “very much modeled after servant leadership”; “to be of service” through empowering people, minimizing obstacles, providing support and direction, and working “with” people.

**Mission and identity.** Reflecting about the Marianist charism, Ann says, “So when we think about those pillars of the charism, when we look at Mary and inclusivity… faith, mission, I also think hospitality is a strong part of the Marianist charism…." She finds that her commitment to mission and identity has helped her navigate difficult times at work, recognizing that “it’s not… just about me”; instead, it is the “bigger cause” of which we can collectively say, “That’s what we’re about.”

**Phenomenological structures.** Phenomenological theory suggests that every human phenomenon has universal structures, that is, existential themes in human experience, including: causality, temporality, spatiality, body-hood, self, and relationality. The following sub-sections emerge from considerations of these themes within Ann’s experiences.

**Causal influences.** Leadership commitment has a causal dimension. Ann’s descriptions shed light on her awareness of several interrelated influences that seem to have nurtured her leadership and commitment to mission and identity. These include: (a) Environment: The cultures of her family, school, and university. (b) Role models: The significant persons, both lay and religious, whom she grew to love, respect and emulate; having many good examples of what good leadership looked like, what being a Marianist looked like. (c) Experiences: Her involvement in mission and identity-related programs and travels. (d) Conversations: Her interactions with persons having varied
commitments and backgrounds, sharing personal understandings and learning together.

(e) Companionship: Her inner circle of close, supportive relationships.

**Experience through time.** Leadership commitment has a temporal dimension; it is experienced continually and includes many gradual phases of growth. Ann’s journey reveals three progressive phases: (a) Receiving the seeds of commitment: The tenets of the Catholic faith and the Marianist tradition were seeded within her, mostly unconsciously, through her experiences with her parents and Marianist persons during her formative years. (b) Beginnings of conscious commitment: In her initial years of working at UD, her interactions and experiences related to mission and identity had a profound influence on her, and stimulated a “more formal ‘Yes’” within her. (c) Sustaining and nurturing commitment in oneself and others: This is the continual work of commitment – an unfolding story of perseverance; moving through the “questioning times,” “frustrating times,” and “doubting times”; strengthened by the experiences of “a lot of joy,” “support[ing] each other,” and all the “good stuff,” and ultimately because “there’s something bigger at stake here.”

**Spatial awareness.** Leadership commitment has a spatial dimension, “spaces” within which Ann’s leadership commitment is manifested and “grounded.” As a supervisor, she provides direction and minimizes obstacles, in the hope that her colleagues feel the same sense of “being grounded in the institution.” Ann’s descriptions illustrate the interconnectedness of personal spaces and work-related spaces; “it’s all part of one thing.” However, she also feels the need to keep these spaces sufficiently separate, giving herself “another space outside of here.” Maintaining this balance is a continuous task. For example, Ann’s efforts at creating these spaces in her life can be
observed in her decision to commit to being a Marianist Educational Associate (MEA), in contrast to her decision not to commit to being a member of a Marianist lay community. She explains, “[The MEA program is]… really about our work here at the institution”; “…not making that Marianist lay [community] commitment, kind of gives me another space outside of here, for my life and my prayer, and whatever else [that is] happening in my life.”

**Expressions of body-hood.** Leadership commitment has a dimension of body-hood, which Ann describes in terms of physical manifestations (especially tears) as well as metaphorical expressions. Ann’s commitment manifests in her emotions, and is often expressed through her “gift of tears.” She asserts, “The emotions are representative of the commitment for me.” Furthermore, Ann uses several metaphorical expressions of body-hood to convey the interior nature of commitment, including: being “grounded in the Marianists from an early age”; being “rooted” in Catholic and Marianist identity; having the mission “ingrained” within persons; and “feeling a connection” with persons and institutions outside the university, who also share the same Marianist charism.

**Descriptions of self.** Leadership commitment is experienced in relationship with oneself, reflected in Ann’s descriptions of self-awareness and mindfulness to interior growth. She describes herself as reflective, introverted, intuitive, logical, systematic, detail-oriented, open, trusting, and understanding. She maintains an open self with people in her inner circle; “I don’t feel like anything’s hidden, I think that they have a very true and real understanding of who I am… what I do well and what I don’t do well, and they reflect that to me.” Ann is aware of how her experiences with mission and
identity have molded her; “I sense that I’ve had an amazing experience with lots of
different opportunities that have formed me into who I am right now.”

**Relationship with others.** Leadership commitment has a relational dimension; it
is experienced and expressed in relationship with others. Ann’s descriptions illustrate
how the work of practicing and nurturing commitment to mission and identity calls for
the inclusion of everyone, regardless of who they are and what their role is within the
institution. She recommends that leadership development initiatives should always have
a mix of both faculty and staff, “so that no matter where they are in the institution, they
can hopefully learn something, or think about something a little bit differently,
[something] that engages them and how they do their job.” Leadership commitment is a
communal act; it is strengthened by the experience of “making a public commitment with
other faculty and staff, and having those people to turn to.” Leadership commitment is
communicated, “taught,” and transmitted primarily through example. Ann emphasizes
the importance of role models who exemplify and demonstrate what leadership
commitment to mission and identity really “looks like” in practice; she exclaims, “If you
don’t have people in a department or division who are exhibiting those behaviors, then
how are people supposed to get it!”

**Essential meanings.** Ann’s own summary of the essence of what it means to
“lead in a manner committed to mission and identity” includes three dimensions: (a)
Attitudinal and intellectual engagement: “…respect for and understanding of the values
that the institution holds.” (b) Reflective practice: “…consider[ing] those values… [as]
integral in my work, and in my relationships…” (c) The resolve to nurture this
commitment in others: “…a decision to promote those values in my work and in my
dealings,” so that everyone involved understands that their experience in this environment is different because of those values.

Several additional, essential meanings can be derived from Ann’s descriptions in relation to the lived experience of the phenomenon in focus. Leading in a manner committed to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity involves:

1. Accepting personal responsibility for the mission; “we all have an obligation to do our work in the spirit of the way this institution was founded.”
2. Choosing collaboration over authoritarianism; “collaborative decision making, collaborative conflict management, collaborative problem-solving.”
3. Choosing inclusivity over exclusivity; for example, Ann points out that being a Marianist Educational Associate (MEA) is not “some special designation” or “this important group on campus.” Thus, there is a need to continually do “a good job communicating to the campus what this is about.”
4. Facilitating conversations; reflecting together about “commitment to community… how our work is impacted, how our students are impacted… it’s a regular part of who we are as a department.”
5. Practicing servant leadership; “it’s not positional”; it’s really about providing “support and direction” and “empowering people.”
6. Balancing adaptability and stability; it is “contextual and situational… but it’s also grounded in the values of the institution.”
7. Allowing the mission to guide everyday practice – and not one’s own preferences; “it’s not just my way because I have this arbitrary way of
deciding how we should function; it’s my way because it’s doing it in a sense that it is the institution’s way.”

8. Holding each other accountable in light of mission and identity; “this institution needs to do things that are reflective of its identity, its values; and when we are doing things that don’t hit that mark, we need to take a step back, look at what we’re doing, and have a conversation….”

9. Stepping back, and then, stepping up; taking the effort to “step back and have another conversation”; considering our mission and identity and saying, “…does this still makes sense? Because if it doesn’t, we have to step up and be the ones to say, we’re not doing it this way anymore, we’re going to change that.”

10. Adopting a patient, long-term perspective on human growth and development; for example, in relation to students, Ann observes, “We don’t see the immediate payoff… but maybe when they’re out of here… and they reflect back on an experience, we hope that they see all the nuances that they weren’t able to understand when they were here.”
Textural Description

This section contains descriptions of Peter’s experiences related to the composite phenomenon of “exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity,” which I will present in three parts: (a) personal journey, (b) interior experience, and (c) everyday practice.

**Personal journey.** Peter has been part of the Marianist family for approximately thirty years. His association began when he took up a faculty position at the University of Dayton (UD). Over the years, he has served the university community in various teaching and administrative roles.

Peter grew up in a Christian environment. Reflecting about his formative years, he emphasizes, “…family and school were particularly important.” He describes his parents as “overwhelmingly influential” on his own leadership and commitment. Remembering them as “very accomplished, but extremely humble people,” he reflects:

They were people who committed, not simply to one another as husband and wife, and to us as their children, but they were committed to their Church, their community, their extended family…. They saw their life as a gift, and it was a gift to be given to others…. Almost everyone who interacted with them was very deeply moved by their presence.

Thinking about his father, Peter says, “He was a model for me, of a faithful Christian”; someone who emphasized a sense of striving, particularly that learning meant a sense of “continual challenge, never thinking that wisdom has been reached.” He remembers the many conversations at the family dinner table that would later influence
his own vocation as an academic; “we talked a lot about theology, and about deeper questions of life.”

Peter’s parents had “a way of encouraging and supporting” him, and his brother and sister, guiding them to avoid thinking “you’re too good at something.” He clarifies, “It was not a criticism, it wasn’t aggressive, I never felt dismissed, or somehow put down, but there was always a sense of striving, and a lot of this was around learning.” Even when they may have thought that Peter was “not making the best decisions,” they continued to be open; “…they would never say – don’t do that; there was always this sense of conversation and engagement.”

Peter’s family was actively involved in the Church. His parents “modeled” for him “what it meant to belong to multiple communities”; “…that not only informed my faith, but it also informed the way I think about the university.” He adds, “Being attentive to the different communal contexts of our work is something I learned, in part, by seeing how my parents were involved in our Church.” Later in life, Peter could relate the trust and confidence that his parents continually placed in him to his experiences of “family spirit” at UD.

As a future academic, Peter was “definitely shaped by the school environment.” His experiences at school helped him to grow in self-awareness; “I was learning little by little about what some of my gifts were, and also what some of my weaknesses were.” Gradually, he came to recognize “what one really is capable of, what one could be capable of if one worked hard,” as well as what one is “not terribly good at.” During his adolescent years, the sense of vocation was an important dimension of introspection; “a sense of what God has given you, and how best to use those gifts in response.” He did
not always like his teachers, but he admired them; “from a pretty early age, I got the idea that I would like to be a person like that.”

Thinking about his journey towards UD, Peter recalls that his decision to leave his previous university was based on a sense of dissatisfaction; “my wife was not happy with where we were living at the time… and I was not happy with the department there, [so] I went back out on the job market.” Thus, he was simply looking for a better place; “…for things I thought might improve my working life… where my wife and I would just feel a little more comfortable.” Furthermore, Peter’s decision to choose UD was influenced by the “sense of pluralism and diversity” in the department he interacted with, which he knew was rare in his academic discipline; “their sense of hospitality in the interview was just powerful.”

Peter’s first impressions of his department at UD were “remarkably distinctive”; “people did listen and attend to one another, genuinely care for one another and their students, even when their ways of doing [scholarly] work were almost diametrically opposed.” His initial experiences of working in a Marianist environment were marked with a sense of “attention, responsiveness, openness… [and] energized newness.” He had never felt that at other places he had been; “those are the things that, I think, both invite and reinforce commitment.” Reflecting about these beginnings, he says, “From the first moment I came, I felt that there was extended to me such a level of trust and encouragement….” The university’s emphasis on cultivating in students “…their faith… their sense of vocation in its deepest sense” connected with his own life story. Thinking about the development of his commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity, Peter points out, “It wasn’t some transformative moment….” Recalling his initial years
at UD, he says, “I was not sure at all… [if] I would stay… [but] gradually, the distinctiveness of the department, our students, and then more and more the university, really dawned on me.”

Peter’s formational experiences as a Marianist Educational Associate (MEA) have played “a very significant role,” and the yearlong formational program was a “very powerful and rich experience, and one that actually took [him] quite some time to process.” Based on his experiences of reading several formal Marianist documents over the years, he observes, “Mission is always front and center; yet, that’s really only come home to me, I’d say, in the last decade.”

Peter’s encounters with “Catholic engagement between faith and reason… in the development and continual advance of the Catholic intellectual tradition” have also been “an important stream” of his experience. He explains:

…so all of that history that shapes Catholic thought… even those pieces of it that I may not personally accept, still, that context is very, very powerful in my own experience… and so it isn’t only about the specific elements of the Marianist charism, but it’s also very much about the way Catholic life and intellect and imagination informs what a university should be, and how that’s affected me personally.

Looking back at his leadership journey at the university, Peter admits, “I was honestly never someone who imagined, or gave any thought to moving into some roles that would be classified as leadership roles.” His decisions to accept increasing responsibilities at different junctures were moments that “expressed commitment,” and also “deepened commitment.” He explains, “I was deliberately putting myself in a
position where, if I was going to be faithful to the university and to the Society of Mary, I would need to stand out that way.” Reflecting about one such decision to apply for an administrative position, Peter recalls his exterior and interior conversations:

…a number of people tried to persuade me to apply… I was not inclined to do that; I was ready to go back to faculty work… I had [many] conversations that I did not seek out, people were coming to me, and I was uncomfortable… I didn’t like that sort of attention. But I did experience it as a moment where I had to ask, given my sense of dedication to the university and our Catholic and Marianist educational mission… is this a moment where I can make an important difference for the community, in ways that I couldn’t really understand at that time. And so that was again, an evocation of commitment.

Peter observes that several Marianist religious persons have had “a powerful influence on [him] as a lay person,” even though he had “no prior relationship with the Society of Mary before coming here.” He exclaims:

…that raises the bar on responsibilities of lay leaders of the institution; we have to ask ourselves, how do you keep that conversation about mission vibrant, meaningful, deep, non-superficial, on a daily basis – and then, how do we pass that on to future generations.

Peter describes Marianist religious as people who “commit every ounce of their being to their faith.” He admires the responsiveness they have demonstrated to him and to so many others, especially “in a way that doesn’t diminish their very focused sense of purpose in their work.” Recalling the names of a few Marianist religious persons that have had a significant influence on him, he emphasizes that there are “countless other
Marianist brothers, priests, sisters” who have collectively influenced him. He adds, “Individuals matter, but it’s… our shared human family that, in the end, bears the real power, and that’s what I think the Christian story ultimately is about.”

In particular, the influence of Brother Raymond Fitz (Brother Ray), UD’s former President, was “especially significant.” Peter recalls how Brother Ray would “talk about the university as a sort of universe of conversations, intersecting conversations.” Peter expresses awareness of how Brother Ray’s leadership has been a model for his own; he elaborates:

…one of the things that… Ray demonstrated, is that leadership meant… [that] he was at key nexus points of these conversations; he was not always… directing the conversation, but he was a nexus through which conversation would naturally flow. Sometimes that meant he was initiating, focusing, redirecting, and doing things that secular institutions would naturally associate with leadership [such as]: developing strategic plans, communicating them, executing…. But in other ways, he was at a nexus of conversation, in that he was a centrally engaged listener and interlocutor; people would come to him from across the institution. And as I’ve thought about the roles that I’ve been fortunate enough to play at the university, it seems to me that that model has a great deal to do with the way in which I’ve experienced leadership.

As an example of Brother Ray’s influence on the university community, Peter recalls the “depth of commitment” that he witnessed during the presidential search to replace Brother Ray – a sense of commitment that Brother Ray himself had “helped evoke and nurture.” He reflects:
One of the things that were most meaningful to me about that moment was not that faculty got together and spoke with some more singular voice; that is important, but I think people did it out of motives that transcended their individual departments, their individual disciplines, their individual schools. And at least for me, I experienced it… as an outpouring of inner dedication to the purposes of the university.

In addition to Brother Ray, Peter recalls the “particularly important influence” that another religious Marianist priest had on him; “he really demonstrated just remarkable attentiveness, support, encouragement… [and] really helped me to experience why the concepts of mission and identity are important concepts for structuring how we think and what we do.” He is “constantly reminded” of these two Marianist religious persons – who had “completely different ways of doing this”; however, both of them always emphasized that “the ongoing conversation about mission is indispensable at every level of the university.”

Interior experience. Peter recalls that he was a “pretty shy, introspective kid,” who would “engage in a lot of internal reflection.” To this day, he values “some sense of aloneness for just reflection….” He explains, “Deep down, it’s not that I want solitude, but I do prefer some time for reflection, which is increasingly precious [he chuckles] given my work schedule.” Peter prefers interacting in small groups; “I’m much more comfortable there.” He clarifies, “People think I’m comfortable in large settings, and it’s not that I’m nervous or anything; it’s just that I’m never quite sure what people expect of me… I’m better in a small-scale setting….”
Reflecting about his understanding of leadership, Peter remarks, “…the term leadership has always been a bit of a puzzle for me.” He explains, “I don’t think I have a well-articulated way of always integrating all of the [formal and contractual] aspects of my job, with this sense of being a responsive, attentive, caring, listener – but I try.” He clarifies, “I wouldn’t say I’m torn by deep conflict, nothing like that; but at times, there’re some forms of tension in different elements of leadership at a Marianist institution.” For example, he observes, “…our empathy is never perfect, our identification with other people is always deficient in some ways, and it’s a form of arrogance to think that you really know where the other is coming from; but one has to try….”

Peter’s experience of leadership involves a sense of “some tension, some friction, some mystery”; continually balancing the need to “attend… and respond” to individuals “while also always maintaining a communal sensibility.” He finds that acting within this tension and mystery is “imperative in the way we do our work in a Marianist institution or community of any kind.”

Another continual struggle in Peter’s leadership experience, which is “something of a significant struggle sometimes,” is related to “being open to the future,” and not acting “as if the future is closed off, as if relationships are fixed and static, as if everything is just scripted for us as a community, and we’re just trying to play out our preassigned roles.” In this context, Peter is inspired by Marianist founder, Blessed Father Chaminade, who had “such a clear sense… [of] a faithful openness to a future that was fraught with real difficulty and danger…..” Likewise, he tries to cultivate and protect
“...that sense of being open, both in being responsive to individual people, but also thinking about our community here, being open to its future....” He elaborates:

I try to maintain a sense that our story as a Marianist university is still very much open, even though we have such a rich heritage and history.... I don’t know that I have a better way to describe the way that feels, except... that sense of the openness of the future....

As compared to leadership, Peter finds that commitment is “a bit simpler” to describe. Reflecting about his experiences of committing, he says, “It’s probably just my personal constitution and upbringing, but commitment comes fairly easily to me.” He observes how people often struggle with their commitments related to their marriage, work life, citizenship, or faith community. In comparison, he says, “I’ve just never found it that trying to commit....” However, he clarifies, “...which isn’t to say I don’t experience temptation, moments of weakness in commitment, doubts – sure, we’re human beings.”

Peter admits struggling with the notion of “mission”; “there was something about the term that, for a long time, bothered me.” He explains, “Because a mission can sound as if you know exactly who you are and where you want to go... [it] can sometimes sound as if you’re on a railroad track, and the story is fixed....” In contrast, his experience with “the Marianist sense of mission” is characterized by “...this idea of the future being open and new, and there being a sense of new possibility and hope.”

Trying to put his interior experience of being mission-driven into words, Peter uses a metaphor, “...[this may] sound a little mechanical; [it’s] kind of like a phone ringing, when it kind of pings me on a regular basis; I guess that’s how the experience
is… this notion of mission.” He adds, “…the little by little, the Marianist sense of mission, which I will think [about] to the day I die, I will always be contemplating and wrestling with.” Peter finds that he interiorly experiences this Marianist sense of mission as “mystery”; he explains:

It’s just clear to me, that Marianists have a very different way of conceptualizing mission, and it’s entirely consistent with, [and] integral to, this sense of attentiveness and response and openness to a new call. And yet, it’s directed – it’s not just undirected responsiveness…. I find this to be just a very intriguing mystery, which I do think, theologically, is centrally connected to many elements of the Christian mystery.

Peter expresses awareness of falling short of high ideals “constantly”; he lightheartedly comments:

People who say these very kind and generous things about me, I feel like they only see me in certain arenas… all of us have so many failings and weaknesses…. I am very gratified if people think I’ve contributed something, but come on! …I have so little to contribute… it’s the way in which we do things together here – that is what matters!

Peter has not experienced struggles with commitment “in a big way”; he explains, “…the low points for me… provoke certain kinds of questions.” Reflecting about his faith journey, Peter says, “My faith commitment has waxed and waned… and there’s no question that my involvement at UD has strengthened my faith commitment enormously.” He speculates, “If I stayed at [my previous] university… it would have exacted a price in my faith.” Likewise, he has noticed that “…for many other people
here… their work here has been a time of… strengthening, deepening, expanding, [and] enriching their commitment… [even for those without] any sort of faith commitment prior to coming [here].”

Peter talks about his prayer life as an area where he finds himself “actually very, very weak.” He describes himself as being “relatively undisciplined” and “unschooled in a lot [of] theologies of prayer.” His approach to prayer amidst daily life is to maintain a “prayerful disposition.” He describes multiple “vectors of prayer” in his interior experience; “…we’re seeking in prayer, but we’re also really trying to receive; we’re trying to hear and appreciate in a deeper way, [and] give thanks for what we receive….”

This prayerful disposition extends across moments of “solitary mulling over a decision or the work of the day, and in the midst of conversations… to be in a discerning mode….”

Peter has come to realize that “prayerfulness has to be, not just in that period of reaching a decision; it has to be an orientation that’s ongoing.” Looking back at big and small decisions, he observes, “It’s hard to know what the big decisions are…. In retrospect, it’s often those smaller things that prove to be the big things… that’s something I pray about a lot – what is the big thing that I don’t see?” He adds, “A lot of the Christian story is about blindness and seeing… we ought to look for those moments when the scales have fallen from our eyes, and we’re not even aware of it… that’s part of my internal experience.” In his experiences with day-to-day decision making, Peter recognizes an interior struggle; he explains:

…things rarely cohere in a perfectly unified, integral way…. I do think for some people, they more readily experience the integral wholeness of everything; [but] in my experience that’s always something for which we’re striving, [and] I’m
always keenly aware of the points of tension, incompleteness, to some degree fragmentation – it doesn’t all fit together.

Peter vividly recalls a particularly difficult experience as an administrator, wherein he had to make a decision about a person’s employment. The person had a serious affliction that was influencing official work with students; “I was deeply torn by this circumstance.” Peter consulted everyone involved, followed the process, gave multiple chances, and did everything that he could to provide help and support. But when the situation did not improve, he had to make the difficult decision of letting the employee go, knowing well that his decision would, most likely, have an adverse impact on the person involved. He reflects:

…as long as I live… that weighs on me very heavily… I sought God’s guidance on this, [and] I still do…. The point that I’m trying to make [is] that it’s not just guidance about the decision to make, but the decision has a story; it has a story for the people we effect, and it has a story for us.

Peter’s commitment has influenced his career decisions as well. He has not looked upon career roles as goals in themselves. Each time a new role opportunity at the university presented itself, he would ask himself, “…this is something new I had not contemplated; this is a challenge for me… what should I make of this?” Reflecting about one such role transition, he says, “Had I not been involved with the MEAs, well, there’s a reasonably good chance I might have decided not to apply for [that] position.” Referring to another role transition, he confided to a friend:
I don’t know if I can do this, I don’t know if I could be of assistance… but some people think I can, [so] I’ll give it a try…. I’m a tenured faculty member, I’m really very lucky, so why not? I think I owe this to the people I work with.

Reflecting about the teachings of Old Testament prophets, and also the Gospels, Peter observes, “There are a lot of teachings about not hardening your heart.” He reflects:

There is a reason why people in universities would sometimes say, “Those administrators, they’re on the dark side.” They feel our hearts will get hardened, and perhaps they do, in some way, because of the pressures of the work. But this is why I think prayer, and a prayerful disposition, and openness to hearing is as important looking back, as it is looking forward.

Peter rarely, if ever, thinks about the “cost” of commitment; he clarifies, “That isn’t to say there aren’t; there probably are some. I honestly think about the value that this contributes to my life and the work that I do.” Reflecting about what his commitment entails, he says, “I have to give a lot of time and energy and spirit, but for the most part, that comes very naturally, and there aren’t many times where that’s just a big struggle.” Reflecting more deeply about possible long-term “costs,” Peter imagines himself retiring someday “long in the future” and reflecting about his work at the university; “…the cost will be that I’ll have to say, if I’m honest with myself… people expected a lot of me and… I’m pretty sure, no matter what happens, I won’t have been able to live up to their expectation.” However, despite the challenges that commitment entails, he asserts, “I don’t experience cost [and] loss… I experience gift and growth, and in ways that I’m just repeatedly overwhelmed by.”


**Everyday practice.** Through the “course of any day or week or year,” Peter experiences leadership from a “conversational stance”; “I have to be attuned to be listening and receptive in the most attentive way I can.” He finds doing this particularly challenging as he continually “shifts gears” between interactions with students, staff, faculty, and so on. He tries to be “an attentive, engaged listener,” which entails being “attentive to the needs that the other person is presenting to [him].” He explains, “Sometimes these needs are very formal, institutional needs… for standard things that people in academic life would ask… but at other times, and often in the midst of these more predictable needs, there often are things that are personal.” Some of the issues that are brought to his attention are about “the quality of who we are at UD…”; he points out, “…those are the things that… I need to be particularly attentive to; and that constitutes, at least for me… leadership.”

In everyday practice, Peter’s interior life and administrative activities are experientially inseparable; “not as if they’re indistinguishable, but they couldn’t be disconnected from one another.” He practices “leadership discernment” by maintaining a prayerful disposition amidst his current administrative role. He observes that if one has a prayerful attitude only towards difficult decisions, “then everything else becomes too automatic… [and] can easily become too bureaucratic, and then we’re just following an agenda, and then the danger is, that then begins creeping into the truly more monumental decisions.” He explains:

I try to avoid segregating the more mundane decisions from the really big, challenging, uglier ones, for fear that if I only try to deliberately enter a prayerful mode, or literally pray, when the decisions are the most ugly and difficult, I
sometimes fear that would mean, the rest is then on autopilot, the rest is then just being driven by me, and I want to deliberately avoid that, because I think that’s contrary to our faith, and I definitely think, in a Marianist institution, that’s contrary to the way we ought to operate.

In everyday practice, Peter tries to balance “reading the signs of the times” (in terms of large-scale issues) with “reading the signs of the person” (those who are around and affected). In order to illustrate this approach, which he refers to as “prayerfulness in action,” Peter recollects an experience with a student-employee who committed a minor error during a meeting between Peter and one of his colleagues. Despite their immediate reassurance, the student felt very upset about her error. After their meeting, Peter and his colleague approached the student and shared some time getting to know her, expressing how happy they were that she was at this university. He reflects, “It was an expression of love for this person, and welcome into the community, and also, a teaching moment… she will remember this.”

Peter recognizes that he has gradually improved in his ability to deal with difficult relationships. As a new administrator, he recalls being “pretty uncertain” about what he could really do to assist, even though that did not stop him from trying; “I sometimes would hesitate more than I needed to, for fear that I might just make things worse.” He reflects:

I do see now that the intervention can take multiple forms… it doesn’t have to be… a meeting face-to-face, but sometimes small things – a note, even an email, to indicate that one’s paying attention, and if the person feels the need to reach out, they now feel an invitation to do that.
During the course of a day, there are often moments when Peter experiences “a natural tension”; for example, trying to “listen to someone who seems to be speaking in ways that are clearly at odds with a sense of our mission… and what do you do then?” A typical administrative response could be to say, “Sorry, but you don’t get it, you’re not on board, you’re not one of us, you’re not part of our team.” He quickly adds, “Yet, that is not the Marianist response. The Marianist mission, while it remains directed and energized by our faith, is also open to these other voices in just a remarkable way.”

In his everyday interactions at the university, Peter finds a large proportion of committed persons. In comparison to other places he has been, he finds, “…the identification with just UD [is] really strong here.” He reflects, “…Catholic and Marianist [identity] definitely contributes to that, but much to a greater degree than I think many people appreciate.” He finds a much smaller proportion of people on the other side of the “spectrum” of commitment; he observes:

It’s rare for people to say, “I don’t think it [mission] matters that much”; it would be much more common for these people to express their alienation from the university as hypocrisy… [to say,] “We don’t really live the values we espouse; we hide behind them…” [However,] the interesting thing is that a lot of those people over time don’t leave, even when they could, as far as I can tell; that is, they’re not actively trying to leave, and so… whether they know it or not, I think they derive value from their involvement….

Peter often draws on Marianist documents and shares his personal understandings with his colleagues, continually encouraging collective reflection on mission. Recalling a recent document about the characteristics of Marianist administration, he reflects:
…the community is an instrument for mission. As important as community is for the Marianists, it is not an end in and of itself; otherwise, the community just becomes a kind of self-serving body. The community has to be inspired and motivated to serve and to lead, and this is where our faith is absolutely essential. Reflecting about what nurtures him, Peter finds that he struggles to have enough time for “reflection informed by reading and study”; he says:

I do keep a regular hand on some scholarly research, simply because I feel that’s part of who I am… even though I can’t do things quite in the way that I used to as a faculty member – that’s an understatement.

Peter finds himself being concerned that if he devotes more time to research, he will “feel less present to [his] family, immediate and extended”; however, he is quick to add, “[That is] probably just a limitation of my imagination.” He recommends, “I would encourage others to, in their development over time, find better ways than I have for that kind of disciplined study.”

Peter draws “a lot of sustenance” from the people who work closely with him; “the students who work in the offices I’ve been in, the people who clean our offices… the administrative support people, and then, my immediate colleagues.” He adds, “I try not to let [their] importance become such that they feel a burden, and I don’t think they do.” Peter finds sustenance “even in small interchanges” such as corridor conversations; “those interchanges are sustaining for me, they’re not just small talk… I feel very supported by those relationships.” When he meets people in passing, he makes the effort to notice and acknowledge them, but does not impose on their time; “I notice them, but I don’t want to intrude, I don’t want to impose, and that’s a hard balance.” Even though he
still feels like he falls “far short,” especially because of his “struggles of time and limited energy,” he continues to try to look for “ways in which [he] can be more deliberate about reaching out.”

On a lighter note, Peter confesses that a challenge of being committed is that one risks becoming “monomaniacal.” He lightheartedly exclaims, “Some of my friends outside the university, and definitely my wife, do remind me from time to time: Don’t just talk about UD all the time!” Therefore, Peter makes the effort to “try to do things outside the university,” but admits that the “temptation” to put a lot of time on work makes it challenging to live “a bit fuller life.” In this context, he observes that Marianist religious persons are “valuable models”; “in the midst of their singular commitment, they are whole persons, they have wide ranges of interests, they have full human personalities.”

Reflecting about his participation in this study, Peter expresses gratitude and hope; “your research… will inform my own reflections and searchings, undoubtedly….?” He adds, “If there were only one or two things that I’ve said that made it worthwhile, I would feel good.” He observes that persons involved in mission-related conversations are “…always looking for new insight, new material, new voices….?” He concludes, “I am, honestly, very excited about your project, and I would sincerely hope that there are pieces of this, that can then be used for our work on mission-based conversations, and in particular, leadership development.”

**Structural Description**

This section contains analyses of the underlying dimensions of Peter’s experiences related to the composite phenomenon of “exemplary lay leadership
commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity,’” which I will present in three parts: (a) personal understandings, (b) phenomenological structures, and (c) essential meanings.

**Personal understandings.**

**Commitment.** Peter’s descriptions shed light on his personal understandings related to commitment. These include: (a) Commitment and responsibility are simultaneously experienced; “a sense of responsibility… [is] implicit in commitment.” (b) Commitment and relationships are inseparable in everyday experience; “it’s difficult here to separate the external context of our relationships with others from the way we feel about our commitments.” (c) Commitment permeates one’s entire life; “I do see the life of a professor or an educational administrator as being a fairly all-consuming vocation; I take that seriously; I don’t think of it as just a [day] job, [and then,] I step away.” (d) Commitment gives a sense of trajectory to one’s “life story”; “the Marianist sense of mission, which I will think [about] to the day I die…” (e) Commitment does not exclude questioning, but informs it; “it’s better to question from a position of commitment, than to be totally uncommitted and questioning, I find that pretty frightening.” (f) Commitment is “expressed” in one’s choices. For example, thinking about his decision to apply for an administrative position, Peter says:

> My commitment expressed itself in this mode of trying to be open to the future, trying to encounter some newness in one’s life and one’s work, and in trying to be attentive in listening to others, and not just letting one’s own inner voice dominate the conversation.
Leadership. Peter’s reflections about leadership reveal several personal understandings. He describes leadership as a “kind of elusive and truly multifaceted concept and phenomenon.” Leadership involves a “conversational stance” that spans across formal titles and informal roles; it involves being “responsive, attentive, and then, within my limited abilities, influential in some way, in supporting other people in the university and the Marianist family, and in the communities we serve – I think of that as a leadership role.” He evaluates his day-to-day leadership work, not in terms of “enjoyment” or “liking” his role, but in terms of “value”; “…I enjoy it [my role], but then, to me, that’s not the most important thing… this is what comes to commitment… are you able to contribute to the creation of value?”

Peter observes shared characteristics among exemplary Marianist leaders, both Marianist religious and lay persons. “Humility” is a shared characteristic; “humility mixed with great passion and energy for the work.” “Responsibility” is another shared characteristic; “a deep sense of responsibility, not just for the immediate people that their work affects, but for the institution, and frankly, for the Marianist family and all of the work of the Marianist family.” “An active intellect” is often a third shared characteristic; “…they’ve been learned people; they’ve been people who are serious about scholarship and study.” He clarifies, “Even the non-academics… often have an active intellect as well.” Other than these few shared characteristics, he observes, exemplary leaders tend to be “…very different in personality, in temperament, [and] in personal history.”

An underlying theme in Peter’s descriptions is his openness to role models of leadership, as influencers and guides to his own experience of leadership. He often describes such persons using phrases such as “significant influences,” “valuable models,”
and “important examples,” coupled with descriptors such as “deep,” “powerful,” and “admirable.” He often expresses how these exemplary persons feature in his own experience of leadership, using phrases such as: “I try to reflect on the example of...”; “their example informs my understanding of...”; and “…that model has a great deal to do with the way in which I’ve experienced leadership.”

**Mission and identity.** Peter’s reflections about mission involve an underlying sense of wrestling with the reality that sometimes “things don’t fit.” He says, “…for me, [that] is the reality of human sin – things don’t fit; but how can we, in an ongoing way, shape ourselves and the relationships we have, so that the pieces become more whole.”

His conceptualization of the university’s mission extends into “the human family”; “…it’s a mission to achieve the wholeness of the human family and God’s, Jesus’ love.”

Peter’s reflections about institutional identity contain several personal understandings. Identity involves “a shared sense of commitment, but [also], some common ways of articulating that.” One of the unifying elements of identity is a “shared vocabulary”; “it’s not just that we share certain core values, purposes, and a certain history… but that we have a common way of feeling and speaking that to one another.”

He conceptualizes the university as more than an “academic and educational entity,” because “it has these broader intersections with communities, including the Church, of course.” At UD, he finds a “sense of educational and intellectual community”; “…that is one part of our identity as a Catholic and Marianist community.”

Two relational metaphors feature prominently in Peter’s reflections about leadership and commitment to mission and identity. First, the metaphor of “Conversation”: “…the nature of Catholic intellectual tradition as a historically extended
conversation,” “the university as a… universe of conversations,” and leadership as “a conversational stance.” Second, the metaphor of “Story”: The continuing narrative “guiding our conversations and our collective histories,” “the Christian story,” and “our story as a Marianist university,” “[which] is not only the conversation in the present as we move forward, but a conversation with who we were, who we hope to become, not only individually, but as a community.”

**Phenomenological structures.** Phenomenological theory suggests that every human phenomenon has universal structures, that is, existential themes in human experience, including: causality, temporality, spatiality, body-hood, self, and relationality. The following sub-sections emerge from considerations of these themes within Peter’s experiences.

**Causal influences.** Leadership commitment has a causal dimension, experienced as “evocation[s] of commitment.” Peter describes several experiences of being trusted, supported, and being sought out, which evoked a sense of commitment within him at critical junctures in his journey at the university. For example, looking back at his personal development, he reflects:

[In] your own personal story, there are pathways and possibilities that were previously unknown to you, and all of a sudden, they become present to your awareness, because others are bringing them to your awareness, and that’s a life-changing kind of experience; and for me, that kind of experience, and especially iterated over years, that evokes commitment….

Furthermore, Peter feels a deep sense of gratitude as he recalls the trust, support, and encouragement he has received from numerous colleagues, beginning with his early
experiences in his department, through to the present day. These feelings of gratitude, in turn, evoke an even deeper sense of long-term commitment within him. He explains:

…when people invest so much in you, how can you not feel deeply grateful… when you see that your life has been changed in multiple ways that are so enriching… it becomes so deeply part of who you are, and that wouldn’t have happened in other environments, as best you can judge; that evokes, not just gratitude, but a sense of long-term commitment.

**Experience through time.** Leadership commitment has a temporal dimension, experienced as gradual, interior growth, punctuated by events and “junctures” that express and deepen commitment. Peter observes that his understandings related to mission and identity “…evolved very gradually, sometimes probably imperceptibly… it’s been an ongoing process, and something that isn’t just external, but internal….” Reflecting about his experiences of “educational and intellectual community,” which is a dimension of the university’s Catholic and Marianist identity, he remarks, “I experienced that on so many occasions, I can’t even begin to enumerate them.” Furthermore, Peter observes that newer commitments were built upon prior ones. For example, his experiences as a Marianist Educational Associate (MEA) “clearly started a trajectory… which built on [his] previous commitments….” He clarifies, “…there was not a transformative decision right at the outset.” His experience of commitment was “gradual in some respects”; however, there were “a few junctures” at which his commitment “became more….” His sense of leadership commitment gives him a connection with the past, “a certain history through Catholic intellectual tradition, Catholic social teaching,
and the primary pillars of Marianist education,” as well as an openness to the future, “the invitation of the future,” and passing on the conversation “to future generations.”

**Spatial awareness.** Leadership commitment has a spatial dimension, which Peter expresses in terms of physical as well as mental spaces. Peter’s leadership commitment involves an awareness of the wider contexts within which the university operates. For example, he recognizes that mission-oriented conversations at the university have “broader intersections with communities,” and are part of a “national conversation” across Catholic higher education. The scope of Peter’s leadership commitment has undergone a sense of broadening, gradually becoming “…more than just a commitment to the university by way of [one’s] department and colleagues… but really a commitment to the broader aims of the university.” In relation to his life outside the university, Peter speaks of his struggles with “living a bit fuller life”; “I do try to do things outside the university, as difficult as that can be… I try to be alert to that… that life is a bit fuller than simply the university.”

**Expressions of body-hood.** Leadership commitment has a dimension of body-hood, which Peter expresses using metaphorical language. In his descriptions of leadership and commitment, he often uses imagery related to one’s being or body; for example, he uses phrases such as: “commit every ounce of [one’s] being”; an “all-consuming vocation”; “not hardening your heart”; “scales fall[ing] from our eyes”; “a heavy responsibility”; “weighs on me very heavily”; and “to the day I die.”

**Descriptions of self.** Leadership commitment is experienced in relationship with oneself, reflected in Peter’s statements containing self-descriptions. His expressions concerning himself convey several self-descriptive facets, such as being “introspective,”
“introverted,” and “an academic.” He says, “I am so heavily involved in university life because I love learning, I love teaching, I love scholarship; it’s a major part of the energy I have.” He reflects, “I’m the sort of person who, no matter what, would be giving a lot of time, [as well as] spiritual and mental, intellectual energy to my work.” When he is told that he is “too trusting… too hopeful… too forgiving, [and] accepting,” he admits, “I have to confess, those are features of me.”

Most notably, Peter’s relationship to self is marked with an undeniable sense of striving towards personal humility; being “honest and self-reflective and self-critical.” He continues to be deeply influenced by the ideals his parents “imprinted” on him; “not to be great… [or] the best, but whoever you are, to try to build upon those gifts that God has given you, in a self-aware way.” His parents’ counsel about not getting “preoccupied” with one’s accomplishments, nor “think[ing] that you’re too good,” continues to be a prominent feature in his self-assessment. For example, he is self-aware when he “falls so short, to be attentive in that moment”; he is observant that “our empathy is never perfect”; he feels “too responsible for things”; he wonders, “I’ve not done enough, I need to do more”; and he admits being “puzzled” by the compliments he receives, saying, “I don’t think that’s false humility – it’s honest. Some people say, ‘Well, you can do this,’ and I think, ‘Oh! I don’t know how I can ever do that.’”

**Relationship with others.** Leadership commitment has a relational dimension; it is experienced and expressed in relationship with others. Peter describes his experiences with leadership commitment in terms of an intimate, long-term relationship with the university; “it’s just been very easy to become so wedded to the university.” His personal sense of leadership and commitment have grown out of the feedback he has received in
community; “people saw in me, things I never ever [he chuckles] saw in myself…."
Furthermore, he finds that his interior life and his relationships are “deeply interconnected”; “my interior life is so profoundly influenced by my community setting, and the relationships I have with others, to the point at which, it’s not as if they’re indistinguishable, but they couldn’t be disconnected from one another….” He experiences leadership commitment as a continual balancing act; seeking out “way[s] to integrate attentiveness to the individual, with the values, needs, interests, shared good, and purposes of the community as a whole.”

**Essential meanings.** Several essential meanings can be derived from Peter’s descriptions in relation to the lived experience of the phenomenon in focus. Leading in a manner committed to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity involves:

1. Being guided by a “faith-filled sense of mission,” and maintaining an “active, reflective, challenging conversation about mission; both [Catholic and Marianist] mission in general and our specific mission as the University of Dayton.”
2. Approaching the future with a “sense of openness… [and] newness”; “perhaps the invitation of the future, to try to face each circumstance and every person anew.”
3. Being present and responsive to “the person in front of you”; “attentiveness to each individual, which goes far beyond respect for them, but… as a general form of seeking to love them.”
4. Embracing “some tension, some friction, some mystery, about how I can attend to and respond, as best I am able, to others, while also always maintaining a communal sensibility.”

5. Recognizing that “the community is the fundamental instrument through which we express who we are and act out our purposes.”

6. Working towards a “sense of the integration… the inclusion of all voices… every person around the table; and yet, through all of the difference that diversity and conversation represents, there is this emerging direction and purpose that’s clearly guided by our faith.”

7. Becoming “an ambassador for and advocate of the university in all of its dimensions, far outside of academic dimensions.”

8. Engaging with the Catholic intellectual tradition, which is “a historically extended conversation, or series of conversations,” within the context of the university which is “a sort of universe of conversations, intersecting conversations.”

9. Practicing “prayerfulness in action” by maintaining a “prayerful disposition” across all activities and decisions in daily academic life, not just the seemingly important or difficult ones.

10. Striving continually to maintain a sense of personal humility, “humility mixed with great passion and energy for the work.”

11. Cultivating a “deep sense of responsibility,” not just for the immediate people our work affects but also for the entire Marianist family and its work.
Sarah: A Portrait-in-words

Textual Description

This section contains descriptions of Sarah’s experiences related to the composite phenomenon of “exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity,” which I will present in three parts: (a) personal journey, (b) interior experience, and (c) everyday practice.

Personal journey. Sarah has been associated with the Marianist family for approximately forty years. She first encountered the Marianists as an undergraduate at the University of Dayton (UD), and after several years, returned to the university for her graduate studies. She then went on to work in teaching and helping professional roles in several educational institutions prior to coming back to UD – this time, to teach. She has served the university community in faculty and administrative roles across three decades. She views her current administrative role as a “great opportunity” to be a “servant leader” and practice “shared leadership” with her “group as a team.” She explains, “I see [my] role as the person who facilitates the team that has been, I like to think, placed here by the Holy Spirit….” Amidst her administrative role, she continues to teach in some capacity each term; “I just feel called as a teacher….”

Sarah grew up in the Catholic faith tradition of her family. She evokes the memory of her father and grandmother, calling them “still my heroes in terms of a lived faith.” She wells up with emotion as she recalls the influence her father had on her; “[He] so believed in me; I think he really thought that I could lead….” She recalls his example of being a man of faith and prayer; “I know he saw some really terrible things….” Every night, for his whole life, he would kneel down and say his night prayers,
and that was such a beautiful image, for your father to give that witness….“ Sarah describes her grandmother as “an amazing woman… an unbelievable woman of faith.” She remembers watching her grandmother continually pray the rosary; “she had this big rosary, and she crocheted, and I don’t know how many rosaries a day she said [she chuckles]!” Sarah recognizes that the example of her father and grandmother, not only of prayer but also “how they encountered people,” prepared her for her Marianist encounters and leadership in later years; she explains, “I feel like their witness prepared me to see the Marianist charism as this amazing resource to have, to study, and to try to live….“ She continues, “They kind of paved the way… in terms of accepting and recognizing that the Marianist charism was just something I wanted to be a part of, because I saw it as a way to nurture my soul.”

As an undergraduate and graduate student at UD, Sarah was deeply influenced by several Marianist religious persons that she encountered. As an undergraduate, she remembers one Marianist priest in particular, who was a retreat facilitator in Campus Ministry; “oh my gosh! He had this amazing calm about him and you felt so safe when you were with [him].” Her retreat experiences were “a very big influence in terms of Marianist spirituality and coming to understand [it].” As a graduate student, she remembers one of her professors, a Marianist brother, who was “very impactful”; “[his] example of just being so enthusiastic [not just about his subject area], but always with this notion that it was part of his Marianist spirituality to really be ‘infatuated’ with how people grow and learn: socially, emotionally, spiritually.”

Just before coming to teach at UD, Sarah had “worked off and on” as she was raising her young children. When a part-time teaching opportunity became available at
UD, she readily accepted it; “I was so pleased to be able to do it, and I love teaching….” She adds jokingly, “I think UD was a little desperate, but that was okay!” Reflecting about her personal commitment to UD’s mission and identity, she says, “The full commitment probably didn’t happen until I was employed….” During her early work at UD, she recalls her involvement in a lay Marianist group with other employees, which included a few Marianist religious persons too. About the beginnings of her conscious commitment, she says:

I guess I can’t pinpoint a moment, but I think it was that experience of being in a lay community, with other university employees, and feeling like the Marianists were saying, “We want you to be a part of our mission and identity personally.”

Looking back, Sarah observes several inflection points at which her commitment to mission and identity grew. Her experience of attending Marianist founder, Father Chaminade’s beatification ceremony was one such inflection point; she explains:

I suppose, professionally, that [commitment] might have come… after the journey to Rome for Chaminade’s beatification. Realizing… the global reach of the Marianists, and being there to witness that beatification, helped me to realize [that] I need to be committed to that spirituality, to that charism, and I can do that in my work at the university.

Early in her faculty work, Sarah engaged with first-year students, helping them to understand “the undergird of the university… that this university is founded by the Marianists; you [students] are a part of something really great!” She wanted students to “be welcomed to the Marianist charism [and] to a Catholic university where they could
do service.” Inviting students to a Marianist way of service deepened her own
commitment; she explains:

…this notion of a service-learning plan for our students was a way that I felt I was
committing to the spirituality and to the charism, by at least sending an invitation
to… students, [conveying to them that] this is something great; this might be
something that really touches you.

Another important inflection point in her commitment journey was the occasion
of entering into her current role. She recalls how three different university personnel
encouraged her to apply for the position. She lightheartedly exclaims, “Trinity, three –
that’s a sign, Sarah!” Upon being selected, she recalls saying to herself, “You need to
learn more… understand more about mission and identity, so that [the work] can be a
touchstone for the university….”

Sarah has “always felt really loved and cared for by the [Marianist] vowed
religious….” One leader stands out as an important influence in her life – Brother
Raymond Fitz (Brother Ray), UD’s former President. She calls him “a great role model
as a servant leader.” When she is trying to list the characteristics of exemplary Marianist
leaders, she spontaneously says, “I should think about Brother Ray….” She has learned a
lot by observing Brother Ray’s inclusive approach, “making sure everybody has a voice”;
“one of the things [he] said – and it’s not as easy for me – he will listen very intently to
those who challenge him, someone who has a very opposite view of a situation, he really
wants to hear that.”

Sarah mentions several exemplary lay leaders at UD who have influenced her
leadership. For example, she fondly remembers a lay educator who worked closely with
her—a man who was deeply committed to Catholic education; “he was such a national player in terms of research and scholarship…..” His support and influence helped Sarah view her own work with a “renewed sense of trying to play on the national stage…..” Sarah gratefully remembers another lay friend and administrator; “[she] was a real role model and somebody who influenced how I think about leadership”; “[she] is one of those people who recognized people’s talents, and then was able to put me in the role where I was able to practice some leadership skills.” Sarah adds, “…and again, her witness; she too is a person who tries to empower others by recognizing what their gifts are.”

Across several decades of her engagement with UD, Sarah has observed the forces of secularization that the university has experienced; however, she also points to the attempts to reinvigorate mission and identity. In the 1990s, she observed “sort of a reticence…” in which the culture of the university became more “secularized than what it is now.” There was a “recognition that there were fewer vowed Marianists, and that we had to make sure that Marianist spirituality and Marianist culture [were] ingrained in the life of the university.” She mentions several initiatives that have played an important role in this context, including Marianist Educational Associates (MEA) and the Common Academic Program (CAP), as well as several documents, such as “Habits of inquiry and reflection,” which clarified the university’s mission and identity. She reflects, “…it was an interesting time, and I’m grateful that many things have happened that are ingrained in the culture, that hopefully will keep us going despite fewer vowed religious than what we once had.”
Interior experience. At the time of the interview with Sarah, she was undergoing a period of crisis in her journey at the university. Recent experiences with a few lay administrators had caused her immense pain and hurt. It is in this context that Sarah reflects about her interior life and faith, and her enduring commitment to Catholic and Marianist mission and identity.

Sarah describes her interior life in relationship with God; “God and I have conversations all the time.” She adds, “I think I pay attention to it, but sometimes probably not enough.” She reflects about her present situation:

I get great comfort from speaking to my God… because I do worry, I am anxious sometimes… whether I’m doing what God is calling me to do…. When I go to my interior life right now – it feels a little conflicted; so I keep asking if I’m where God wants me to be.

Looking for “signs” and “God winks” is a key element in Sarah’s inner discernment; “if I have to make a decision and I’m just not certain about what to do, I really do try to meditate and say, ‘God please send me a sign….’” She adds, “I do believe God sends a message through someone else or just through a set of circumstances….” She approaches this discernment in conversation with God; she says:

…so I’m discerning right now what to do in my work life…. I have said to God, “If this is where you want me to be, I’ll stay, but I’m just not sure… God, can you help me to understand what it is I’m supposed to do?”

In the midst of her interior struggle, Sarah emphasizes that being grateful is a central experience in her inner life; “I think in my inner life, I try to be grateful to God, because, phew! I’ve been very blessed, very blessed”; she adds, “…[I] try to thank God
for all these amazing gifts that I have in my family, and in my friends, at work and out of
work.” Sarah finds that being grateful is the antidote to the hurt she feels; she sobs as she
says:

…so to be grateful for all encounters, even negative ones… not that I have many
negative ones, but it seems like, when I do have a negative experience with
someone, it just so cuts to my soul; I feel like my soul is so wounded when
someone hurts [me or someone I love]…. To try to restore the fullness of soul, I
have to reach out to the amazing number of blessings that I have had.

Sarah seeks strength in prayer and in her relationship with Mary. She prays the
rosary and often has a conversation with Mary; she explains:

…if I get impatient [she chuckles] in terms of having more assurance that what
I’ve done is okay, I’ll ask Blessed Mother, “Can you intercede for me, because I
know I’m being impatient, but Mary, can you help me? And if it’s just time [that
needs to pass], can you help me to rest and just wait with less anxiety?”

Sarah finds guidance in scripture; “we do look at scripture and say, well, Jesus
had it right a long time ago! So [I] try to go back there….“ Sarah also finds it helpful to
read spiritual books too, as well as daily emails with meditations, “saints of the day,” and
scripture verses. For example, recently, she kept encountering scripture passages about
“lov[ing] your enemies”; she reflects:

…and so I’m trying, I’m trying so hard [she wells up with emotion] to keep
scripture in mind, and come back to that and say… I don’t understand why
someone did what they did, [but I] try to put [my]self in their shoes… [and]
remember that they are in the first half of life…. 

156
Sarah finds that “rest” is a critical component of the interior life. After months of “just working, working, working,” she finds it helpful to have a vacation with “time to just sit and let your mind and your soul… mingle with [each other]… talk to each other.” She adds, “…sometimes my mind doesn’t talk to my soul… that’s when you get stuck, I think; you’re just thinking of it cognitively, you’re not thinking about life spiritually.”

Sarah experiences painful emotions in connection with some of her experiences with a few lay administrators. The most painful of these relates to the difficult experiences of another person, someone who Sarah cares for dearly; she is saddened by how this person, who has been deeply dedicated to the university’s mission and identity across many years, was treated with “…so little thanks.” Sarah observes that when decision makers say, “Well, I have to do this for the institution,” they put the “institution first,” instead of “people first.” She recognizes that “because [she’s] been here a long time,” she has observed that the university has gradually become “a huge place, with so many players”; and she feels, “…we’ve gotten off-track a little bit [she wells up with emotion], in some ways.” There was a time when she felt like she could say, “I don’t think we’re doing well… and that was accepted and listened to, no matter where and who you were at the university.” In contrast, she finds that “it’s much more top-down” now; “…maybe it’s because we are a larger institution than we once were, but that’s the change that I’m struggling with, because I don’t think it resonates with what my understanding of what Catholic and Marianist is.” Despite her painful experiences, she is quick to add, “The mission and identity is still here, it’s still so vibrant, and this is still a very good place…..” She reflects, “I believe many students have a very good experience… that we are open and that we listen, and love them….”
In the midst of these painful feelings, Sarah experiences hope towards healing. She says, “...sometimes, encountering those people physically, it’s hard for me to be present, to listen and to love, but maybe that’s what is being asked [by God]....” She recalls some random advice that she heard on a radio show: “You don’t have to love them like you love your family... but be cordial, be respectful, and then just move on [she chuckles]!” She expresses hope, “I will get past this, I know I will....” She reflects:

...what seemed to just be a wound that was not going to heal [she chuckles], at least not very quickly, but... at least today, I can feel already that there’s some healing, and I thank you for the interview cause it helps me to say that out loud....

Sarah finds that her commitment to mission and identity, along with her family’s love for UD, has involved the giving of a lot of personal time; she reflects:

There were times when we didn’t do things as a nuclear family because of what [we] did for UD, and it was okay; I love UD, my [family does] too; it’s because we believed it had a particular mission and identity.

Sarah prays about her work with students; she asks in prayer, “How can I be of best service to young people?” She describes herself as a person in the “second half of life... trying to be open to being an elder... trying to offer [one’s] life experience as wisdom... to share that with others.” She explains:

...because of my work with young people, I have been an elder of sorts; some of my favorite students are students who are struggling, because I can pray with them... it’s giving a glimpse to someone [into] your interior life, [saying] that prayer is important... talking to God... giving your life to God... saying that [she wells up with emotion] what you want to do is to serve God as he calls you, and
to share that little piece of interior life with someone who is distressed or feeling lost… trying to be that person for them, to walk with them, via my work of the soul, and then trying to unite with their soul….

Sarah describes herself as “a very open book….” However, there are aspects of her interior experience that are not obvious to others. For example, she says, “I am critical; more critical than, I guess, what I allow my persona to be….” For example, in the context of her interactions with students, she explains, “You can be authentic, but there are probably things you reserve because it’s a large group and you don’t want things to be misinterpreted.”

She mentions several ways in which her commitment has changed her interiorly, such as: “accepting the work that I do more heartily”; “letting some things go sometimes”; “trying to recognize the God within”; recognizing that “I don’t have to control everything – God’s the master builder, I’m the worker”; and being able to “…seek God’s help more often… pray more often, to try to rest.” She reflects, “I think the young Sarah was pretty sure that she had to control everything, and make sure that everything went exactly right; so I hope, that’s a goal anyway – to let go and let God.”

She recognizes that she has become “more accepting of suffering”; “I would say that the young Sarah… tried not to suffer in any way.” She reflects about her growing openness to “risk-taking”; “having that confidence [in] God… if there’s something out there, and you’re pretty sure you’re supposed to do it, just do it; God will protect you and provide.”

Sarah finds that suffering is “a way to grow your soul, but you have to go deeper to find what God is asking of you, to embrace suffering as an opportunity to grow.” She says, “…sometimes you have to be feeling uncertain in order to understand what God
calls you to do.” In the midst of uncertainty and hurt, Sarah experiences joy and peace; she explains:

…my inner life has been a little rocky of late [she chuckles]! Often though, I feel so blessed to be at peace, that I can go there [to my inner life], because I can find God in my soul – that notion that God is within us, God is within every person…. Sarah finds that she grows in her inner life by being present to God in others; “being open to who God is in other people enriches my soul.” She explains, “…God is within every person… so in some ways, when you’re present [to others], I think you’re being present to God – when you’re with another and can really focus on that person and listen and love.”

**Everyday practice.** Sarah’s approach towards leadership is that of “servant leadership and shared leadership.” She works closely with her colleagues, conducts regular meetings, and encourages everyone to talk about their work and support each other; “it’s just wonderful to see that interaction [between] those committed to the mission and identity… to assist each other in their efforts to have the best programs that we could possibly have.” Sarah makes an effort to empower people; she tells each person on her team, “These are the gifts that you bring to our work….” She points out that her team “…tr[ies] to do outreach too, with the broader community.” Sarah envisions their work as a “manifestation of the mission and identity of the university”; “…we hope people will see that the work [of the team]… is witness to the Marianists.” She tries to relate her work to the story of the Marianist founders; for example, she recently had a conversation with a Marianist religious sister about how the example of Marianist
founder Venerable Marie-Thérèse informs her work; “…that our work can grow and
develop and be more vibrant….”

Looking back at her journey at UD, Sarah observes that the proportion of
religious persons that have influenced her leadership has been more than that of lay
persons. However, she describes several lay leaders who nurtured her leadership through
“their witness to their commitment.” For example, she mentions one colleague whom
she admires for his devotion to the work, and another for her efforts to connect their work
with other organizations. She appreciates one of her colleagues whose Marian devotion
and attention to persons is especially admirable; “I think Blessed Mother is her best
friend… her devotion to Mary and to looking at the saints.” Sarah adds, “She has this
amazing gift to see into people’s hearts and souls…. [She] always knows exactly the gift
that is going to touch that person’s heart, because she pays so much attention to that
person…."

Sarah tries to “latch on” to exemplary leaders amidst her day-to-day work and
learn from them. For example, she draws from the exemplary leadership of one religious
sister; “[I] don’t have what she has [she laughs], but I’m blessed to work with her often,
and try to latch on sometimes….” Sarah explains:

I think it’s her sense of hope… so if something didn’t work, just learn what you
can, but be enthusiastic [and] move on…. She always talks about looking at the
possibilities… so be open, don’t worry so much about what didn’t work, just look
forward… what can you imagine… what new ideas do you have… that creativity
is something I admire.
Despite the demands of her administrative role, Sarah responds to her sense of calling as a teacher; she explains:

There have been times in this job that I thought, I just can’t do this job and do that teaching, but I just kept being called back; and as long as [the department] has a need for my work, I’ll do it, because it’s just so much of who I believe that I am.

Sarah recognizes that she takes her commitment very seriously; she jokes, “Probably too seriously!” In the context of her day-to-day work, she says; “I’m a person with the glass half full, so it’s hard for me to see the shadow side.” She observes that “the amount of time expected, or perceived to be expected, from laypeople…” could become a challenge. Reflecting about the large amount of time that she has given to her work over the years, she says, “A vowed person might be willing to work 10 or 12 hours a day – a lay person probably really shouldn’t, and that’s probably a mistake that… [I] made, and that for me is a shadow side.” She often finds herself working “too many hours,” taking time away from cultivating other aspects of her life.

Sarah sees value in social gatherings at the workplace; for example, a “Christmas party.” She asserts that occasions of “socialization” and “thanking people for the job they do” have intrinsic value, and should not be “perceived as an expense that [is] not necessary.” In the context of “cost cutting,” she reflects, “I feel like personnel are precious, they are gifts to the organization... not that you can have lavish parties, but some notion of gratitude and thanks for people coming to work.”

As an administrator, Sarah speaks up for others when she feels that they may not have been treated fairly. For example, she recalls an incident involving a policy decision to cut down on the working hours of certain employees, which affected a colleague who
was the only breadwinner in her family. Sarah recalls how she approached relevant
decision makers and, using ideas from Marianist documents, argued for the restoration of
the hours of work for her colleague. She says, “The policy did not consider that [for]
some of the lowest paid professionals… five hours a week of money was gone….” Sarah
felt that an “injustice had been done,” and after “a year of asking and fighting,” her
colleague’s working hours were restored.

Sarah recognizes that the notion of community does not mean that “everything is
sweetness and light, [and] there shouldn’t be any disagreements….” She reflects:

Family spirit doesn’t mean that we have to always be nice, [or that] we have to
always agree…. It’s okay to have conflict, it’s just how you discuss it… and
there might even be times when you just have to say, we just have to agree to
disagree, but that is as much a part of community as trying to get along with other
people.

Sarah is continually “looking out for the person who doesn’t feel included.” For
example, in the context of students in the classroom, she explains, “I always want to
say… ‘Come on! You’re important…’ A lot of times it’s a small group, so I recognize
who’s the person [feeling excluded]… trying to start a conversation that would pull that
person in….” In her interactions with people, she tries to communicate a “welcoming
warm hospitality”; she explains:

When you walk out the door and you encounter somebody, you smile, or if it’s
someone you know, you greet them, you ask them how they are; I think that
personal touch [communicates that]… you matter.
When Sarah encounters someone who disagrees with her, she tries to listen to the person, even when that is difficult to do; “listen especially to that person because it’s probably a perspective that you just don’t have, it’s not in your worldview.” Sarah’s approach to group decision making involves “being open, being a listener, waiting…” and “being respectful, being reflective”; she explains:

…you might have a good idea, but listen to others before you blurt something else… take your turn… maybe you have a good idea, but many other people have very good ideas; so [it’s] that openness to the gifts that everyone brings when a decision has to be made or policies are established.

Sarah observes that Catholic and Marianist mission and identity imply that we need to “have a very broad perspective when we think about curriculum, so that it is the integration of many disciplines [and] content areas”; she explains:

…one of the gifts of Marianist education, is that we continue to invite folks who have specific areas of expertise to speak together, to look at what is happening in the world, in our society, in our Church, and to look at ways to lift up those disciplines and see how they all come together.

Sarah tries to integrate mission and identity into the academic curriculum. For example, she recollects a conversation that she had with a colleague about including a mission and identity-related classroom activity; she recalls the incident:

It was a very good friend who said, “No, we can’t do that; that’s… proselytization, you’re pushing Catholic….” And I said, “No, we’re not; this mission and identity is what this university is about… just because they know this, we’re not saying you must be a Catholic; what [we are] saying is, this is why
this university exists, [and] this is how your education is different…."

Eventually, it was agreed, but that was a little bit of a battle.

Reflecting about her approach towards inviting others towards commitment to mission and identity, Sarah emphasizes the value of having “a little conversation,” and a “little gathering within [one’s] division”; “…being welcoming and interested in someone new to the university… sharing little bits, and if they seem interested, sharing a little bit more, and perceiving who might be open to the message.” She finds inviting others to consider becoming an MEA is particularly important; she says:

Probably the most evident way [in which] I have tried to make that invitation [to commitment] would be to ask someone if they know about the MEAs, or just tell someone about the MEAs, and then on occasion [say], “Have you considered applying?” Because I think that is a systemic means to try to invite people to the Marianist charism and the Marianist spirituality.

Sarah asserts that MEAs “should have a voice – at least be asked for their feedback….” She adds, “I am still hopeful that inviting others to become an MEA… has potential to influence the university in a deeper way based on mission and identity…."

She finds that being an MEA has been an opportunity for her to “go deeper,” reflecting about the Marianist founders, asking each other, “…what do you know about the founders? Can we have a little conversation about it?” She adds, “Sometimes there are so many wonderful opportunities that one cannot take advantage of all…."

She finds that there are several other programs that foster mission and identity at the university, including Leadership UD, hiring for mission, and especially, Marianist lay communities for students. Reflecting about student communities, she says, “…that
conversation between committed lay and religious… the older people and the students,
we need to continue that conversation, because actually, sometimes, I think the students
are the ones that then can make you question things…. ” She points to the benefits of
“recognizing the importance of students,” many of whom can help to “challenge the
systems at UD.” She explains, “Because they are a different generation, they have
different resources than someone even ten years older than they are; so why not [engage
them]… plus it enriches their experience.” Reflecting about hiring for mission, she says,
“You have to be open to the Catholic-Marianist notions of the university… ‘bulking up,’
for lack of a better word, to make sure we really are hiring for mission.” She appreciates
the session on Catholic and Marianist mission and identity in the Leadership UD
program, and encourages its participants to have “more conversation about how to better
realize mission and identity.”

Sarah appreciates Marianist documents that set the “standard” for everyone; “I
like standards in education, something you can hold on to… and then if there is a
disagreement, we can say… let’s look at the standard… let’s talk about it.” She finds that
the five characteristics of Marianist education help her to understand mission and
identity; “if I need to sort something out for myself in terms of mission and identity,
that’s where I have to go back to…. ” She finds the “commitment to community”
document helpful with students. She finds that several Marianist documents, such as
“Characteristics of Marianist education” and “Characteristics of Marianist universities,”
are helpful resources. However, she suggests that we need a little document that
specifically addresses how staff and faculty should treat each other; “something a little
more brief”; “some words [a kind of checklist] to live by as an employee of UD.”
Sarah has observed that people can encounter and grow into commitment to Catholic and Marianist mission and identity. For example, Sarah mentions one of her colleagues, whom she admires very much, who “came for a job,” but eventually became committed to Catholic and Marianist spirituality after having “studied the Marianists, [and] having encountered others that embrace the spirituality… the family spirit….” She reflects, “…as humans we often naturally seek… institutions, organizations that we can resonate with.”

Reflecting about her participation in this study, Sarah expresses gratitude for being “one of the interviewees.” She observes that this study is in line with “Chaminade’s idea that the laypeople are very important as well….” She continues, “I think your study is just so important and such a gift to something I so embrace, believe, [and] use as a guide…”; “I just look forward to reading what you write; I think this is… so important for the continuation of Marianist spirituality and charism.”

**Structural Description**

This section contains analyses of the underlying dimensions of Sarah’s experiences related to the composite phenomenon of “exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity,” which I will present in three parts: (a) personal understandings, (b) phenomenological structures, and (c) essential meanings.

**Personal understandings.**

**Commitment.** Sarah’s descriptions shed light on her personal understandings related to commitment. These include: (a) Commitment involves “offer[ing] something,” which in Sarah’s work is manifested as her desire and effort to contribute to
persons and to Catholic education; “[does] what you do today help somebody?” (b) Commitment involves “witness[ing]” to others through one’s personal example of devotion to the work. (c) Commitment involves “sending an invitation” to others, conveying that “this is something great; this might be something that really touches you.” (d) Commitment involves believing; “I guess the question is, ‘Do I believe enough in the Catholic and Marianist mission and spirituality to try to stay and be committed?’”; “I still am a believer in the mission and identity.”

**Leadership.** Sarah’s descriptions reveal her personal understandings related to leadership. She conceptualizes her leadership role as “the person who facilitates the team” and “empower[s] others” to offer some services and resources to and through the university. Practicing leadership involves a continual sense of gratitude; “…to be more grateful, for gifts and for others… remember[ing] to say thank you, because God blessed you with everything that happened today.” Practicing leadership involves a continual sense of listening; “if you are going to meet needs, and move forward in your work, you have to really listen.” She asserts that “listening [to] and loving” employees is just as important as doing so with students, because “personnel are precious, they are gifts to the organization….” She reflects:

…[the] work and status of being a [job title] is really not what counts; what really counts is… what you’ve engaged in each day, was that in line with building God’s kingdom? Was that in line with… making the world a better place?

Sarah observes that the antithesis of Marianist leadership is the “top-down model”; that is, “this is what the boss says and this is how we’re gonna go about it.” She reflects, “I don’t think [this] resonates with what my understanding of what Catholic and
Marianist is….” Her descriptions illustrate the contrast between good and bad leadership; she mentions several insights and instances of what the antithesis of Catholic and Marianist leadership looks like. These include: (a) Not considering “the consequences of… policy change[s] on individuals,” especially on “some of the lowest paid professionals in our university.” (b) Being a “boss [who is] very vindictive,” which leaves subordinates with no choice but to retire or leave. (c) Taking an extreme stance on mission and identity; for example, on social justice issues, and becoming judgmental and dismissive of “those who don’t have as deep a commitment.” (d) Creating a hostile environment wherein employees do not feel “safe” to “call out what [they] see as diversions from what mission and identity should be,” or worse, saying to those who do speak as “prophet[s],” “Well, there’s the door….” (e) Being overly fearful of litigation; “let’s fear our employees because they’re going to sue us.” (f) Focusing excessively on policies and procedures about “rules to prosecute people,” without equally emphasizing on “expectations in a positive way”; in other words, administering from a perspective of “Thou shall not… the Ten Commandments,” rather than “Jesus’ – love God and love your neighbor.”

In contrast, Sarah observes several noteworthy characteristics in individual exemplary leaders, both religious and lay persons. These include: (a) Having an “amazing calm” which makes one feel “safe when you were with [them].” (b) Being “enthusiastic” about the subject area one is teaching, in a manner that is deeply concerned with “…how people grow and learn: socially, emotionally, spiritually.” (c) “Recogniz[ing] people’s talents” and “empower[ing] others by recognizing what their gifts are,” by giving them opportunities to “practice some leadership skills.” (d)
“Witness[ing] to their commitment” and being “devoted… to the work.” (e) Having a “sense of hope” even when things do not work out; being “enthusiastic, mov[ing] on, be[ing] open” in an imaginative, creative way. (f) “See[ing] into people’s hearts and souls” by paying attention to each person. (g) “Inclusivity; making sure everybody has a voice,” including those with opposite viewpoints. (h) “Faith… and think[ing] about the example that Mary provides for us.” (i) Commitment to “adaptation and change”; “always looking and saying, what have we done, and how can we improve that.” (j) Developing the “ability to communicate your faith, and be able to inspire others through your words, but [also] through your actions, of course.” (k) “Being fully present to those you are with.”

**Mission and identity.** Sarah’s descriptions shed light on her personal understandings of Catholic and Marianist mission and identity; “mission and identity is what this university is about… this is why the university exists…..” She finds that mission and identity has institutional as well as personal implications. Institutionally, she understands a mission statement as “what it is the institution says that it intends to do in its broad organization,” and identity as that which “others see when they look at the university… and what it stands for.” Personally, Sarah finds that her commitment to this mission and identity serves as a “guide – for my faith life and my other decisions as well.” She finds that mission and identity also interacts with each member of the educational community “in a personal way”; “so that those who say [we] are part of the university [should]… when we do our work… attempt to manifest what that mission is, and try to live our work lives… within what that mission and identity says.”
In relation to articulating the mission and identity of the university, Sarah continually returns to the five characteristics; “I always harken back to the five characteristics of a Marianist education, I know those fairly well…” She emphasizes, “I like to think that our mission and identity, much of it, is to form others in faith.” She reflects about the qualitative distinctiveness of a Marianist education; “this is how your education is different… what makes this education distinctive.” She speaks of “family spirit in terms of community” and “warmth and hospitality” that feels “authentic.” She speaks of “service, justice, and peace” in terms of serving others, “try[ing] to understand issues of social justice, and then, to take action… [towards] a peaceful community, a peaceful society….” She reflects about the “need for more adaptation and more change” in a spirit of “continuous improvement.”

An implicit theme across Sarah’s descriptions of her experiences with leadership and commitment is that of “being open.” She repeatedly uses phrases that emphasize openness; for example: openness in terms of “looking for new possibilities,” “religious imagination,” and to “new ideas”; “being open, being a listener, [and] waiting”; openness to “being an elder”; “being open to who God is in other people”; openness towards students, “that we are open, and that we listen [to] and love them”; “openness to trying to understand other people”; “openness to the gifts that everyone brings”; and noticing those who are “open to the message.”

A second implicit theme in Sarah’s descriptions is that of sensitivity to the workings of the Holy Spirit. She refers to her leadership role as “placed here by the Holy Spirit.” She trusts that “the Holy Spirit works in Catholic education to prepare others to live in the world, to make it what God intends it to be.” When she is providing leadership
to her colleagues, she acknowledges, “The Holy Spirit used the gifts that I have as a leader…”; she adds, “…the Holy Spirit graces our work because of who we are to each other.” She recognizes that the Holy Spirit speaks to her through people; for example, referring to the three persons who encouraged her to apply to her current role, she says, “That was the Spirit!”

A third implicit theme in Sarah’s descriptions is that of responding to “God’s call.” She often frames her leadership commitment in terms of discerning this call; for example: “doing what God calls us to do”; “what is it God is asking of us”; “asking if I’m where God wants me to be”; and going deeper into one’s soul “to find what God is asking of you.” She envisions her own work, and that of Catholic education, in terms of making the world “what God intends it to be,” doing one’s job role in a manner that “build[s] God’s kingdom.” She feels “called as a teacher” and invites her students “to serve God as he calls you.” She is continually trying to see “the whole of it – God’s plan.” Even as she struggles in encountering those whom she feels hurt by, she thinks about God’s call to her; “it’s hard for me to be present, to listen, and to love, but maybe that’s what is being asked.”

Phenomenological structures. Phenomenological theory suggests that every human phenomenon has universal structures, that is, existential themes in human experience, including: causality, temporality, spatiality, body-hood, self, and relationality. The following sub-sections emerge from considerations of these themes within Sarah’s experiences.

Causal influences. Leadership commitment has a causal dimension. Sarah’s descriptions shed light on her awareness of several interrelated influences that seem to
have nurtured her leadership and commitment to mission and identity. These include:

(a) Parental influences, especially her “heroes” – her father and grandmother – who “paved the way” for her to recognize and accept the Marianist charism. (b) The Marianist charism itself; “an amazing resource…. I saw it as a way to nurture my soul.” (c) Marianist educators; their personal example, and their commitment to students’ growth and learning – “socially, emotionally, spiritually.” (d) Relational experiences, such as participating in a Marianist lay community, experiencing the “global reach of the Marianists” at Father Chaminade’s beatification, and challenging each other as MEAs “to go deeper.” (e) Being invited to make a personal commitment; “feeling like the Marianists were saying, ‘We want you to be a part of our mission and identity personally.’” (f) Inviting others to make a personal commitment, as a way of expressing one’s own commitment; engaging in “little conversation[s]” about the Marianist charism. (g) “Conversation[s] between committed” persons; “to assist each other in their efforts” and “support each other.”

**Experience through time.** Leadership commitment has a temporal dimension; it is experienced in relation to the passage of time. Sarah experienced a gradual movement in her leadership commitment to mission and identity; “I can’t pinpoint a moment….” However, she is aware of several inflection points in her journey, that is, significant experiences and critical junctures that induced commitment. These include: (a) her efforts to discuss the university’s mission and identity with her students, (b) her early participation in a Marianist lay community, (c) her experience of the beatification ceremony of Father Chaminade, and (d) the support she experienced in connection with applying for her present role at the university. Sarah has experienced her own aging
process in the context of her work at the university. She recognizes that she has “been here a long time”; thus, she is able to reflect about the university in terms of “what it used to be” and critique it in terms of what it has evolved into “of late.” Even in the midst of her recent struggles, she looks to the future with hope; “I will get past this, I know I will….” Even as she considers her own future at the university, she continues to express a timeless sense of commitment towards the university’s future; for example, reflecting about mission and identity-related initiatives at the university, she says, “…that hopefully will keep us going despite fewer vowed religious than what we once had.”

**Spatial awareness.** Leadership commitment has a spatial dimension, which Sarah expresses in terms of physical as well as mental spaces. She conceptualizes her work at the university “on a greater national stage,” serving constituents within the university, and having “extended outreach” too, not only locally but also “on a national level.” She experiences her own leadership commitment in relation to Catholic education as a whole, “recognizing the gift that it is to our nation, and also trying to learn from others who are obviously making wonderful contributions to Catholic education,” and “play[ing] on the national stage….” Furthermore, she expresses her leadership commitment not only in relation to Catholic education or the Catholic Church but also “for the world!” Sarah expresses awareness about the increasing size and social complexity of the university; “we are a larger institution than we once were”; “it’s a huge place, there are so many players.” She reflects about the interconnectedness between the personal and professional realms in one’s life, and observes that each person has both personal and professional gifts; however, she is quick to add, “…your personal and professional is one.”
**Expressions of body-hood.** Leadership commitment has a dimension of body-hood, which Sarah expresses in her tears, and also in her metaphorical expressions. She occasionally experiences “moments of crying” amidst her busy day. She struggles with her personal encounters with people whom she feels hurt by; “sometimes, encountering those people physically, it’s hard for me to be present, to listen and to love…. ” She tries to “latch on” to exemplary leaders that she admires; she feels blessed by her association with them. When she observes exemplary leadership characteristics in others, she tries to “drink in” and make these her own when she can. She finds that Catholic education has a role in “shaping and molding people.” She reflects about growing older, and the challenges of being adaptive amidst the many demands for “more change at a very rapid rate.” She says, “Sometimes I feel like I’m holding on with my fingernails,” even as “the world’s spinning faster, and I’m kind of getting slower.” She finds documents about Catholic and Marianist mission and identity are “something you can hold on to and say, ‘Okay, this is this.’”

**Descriptions of self.** Leadership commitment is experienced in relationship with oneself, reflected in Sarah’s statements containing self-descriptions. Her expressions convey several facets of her self-concept, including: (a) being a “servant leader”; (b) being the “person who facilitates the team”; (c) being “called as a teacher… it’s just so much of who I believe that I am”; (d) “being an elder… trying to offer your life experience as wisdom”; (e) being a “one-on-one” kind of person; (f) being a positive person “…with the glass half full”; (g) being “an open book… if you want to know something, just ask me”; and (h) being a “worker” with God as the “master builder.” Her leadership commitment involves not only communal engagement but also an individual,
interior response – making a personal effort in the context of one’s job role. Her leadership commitment is personal; she has come to realize, “I need to be committed to that spirituality, to that charism, and I can do that in my work at the university.”

**Relationship with others.** Leadership commitment has a relational dimension; it is experienced and expressed in relationship with others. Sarah’s leadership commitment is manifested in her continual engagement with others; “…trying to give what we have [and] listen to others so that Catholic education will flourish and be able to be sustained….” Her leadership commitment involves a continual conversation “between committed lay and religious… the older people and the students….” As a teacher, she wants to “walk with” her students; “…via my work of the soul, and then trying to unite with their soul, because that’s how I grow in my interior life, [by] being open to who God is in other people.” She uses the metaphor of the “crucible” to describe the unifying role of Catholic education in the world; she explains:

I like the word crucible in Catholic education because I think it does bring together many people from around the world, to try to say, what is it God is asking of us, in our lives on earth, to serve people, because that’s what I think he intends for us to do.

**Essential meanings.** Several essential meanings can be derived from Sarah’s descriptions in relation to the lived experience of the phenomenon in focus. Leading in a manner committed to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity involves:

1. Desiring “to serve God as he calls you”; continually praying, interiorly and with others, discerning what “God is asking of you”; being sensitive to the
workings of the Holy Spirit who “graces our work” of “building God’s kingdom.”

2. Recognizing and accepting the Marianist charism as “this amazing resource to have, and to study, and to try to live”; allowing it to “nurture your soul,” and incorporating Marianist spirituality and charism into one’s “work at the university.”

3. Being “open, being a listener, [and] waiting”; “making sure everybody has a voice,” even when they have opposite views; making each person feel “accepted and listened to, no matter where and who [they are] at the university.”

4. Being “fully present” to others; recognizing that “God is within every person,” and thus, “when you are present [to others], you are being present to God.”

5. Witnessing through one’s commitment; making one’s work “a witness to the Marianists,” and “a manifestation of the mission and identity of the university.”

6. Inviting others to consider commitment to mission and identity; engaging in “little conversation[s]” about the Marianist charism; showing “welcoming warm hospitality” that has a sense of “authenticity.”

7. Practicing “servant leadership and shared leadership”; “empowering all team members” by recognizing the “gifts that [each person] bring[s] to our work.”

8. Moving forward with a “sense of hope”; learning from things that did not work out; being grateful, enthusiastic, imaginative, open, and creative with new ideas and possibilities.
9. Being an elder; “trying to offer your life experience as wisdom”; walking with those one leads through one’s “work of the soul, and then trying to unite with their soul….”
Karen: A Portrait-in-words

Textural Description

This section contains descriptions of Karen’s experiences related to the composite phenomenon of “exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity,” which I will present in three parts: (a) personal journey, (b) interior experience, and (c) everyday practice.

Personal journey. Karen’s association with the Marianist family began when she joined the faculty of the University of Dayton (UD) approximately twenty years ago. She has served the university community in several teaching and administrative positions. She describes her current administrative position “as a service role,” which involves “facilitating others” to accomplish institutional as well as personal growth initiatives and goals in various “situated” contexts. She describes her work in terms of developing and implementing programs, systems, and processes that “support the initiatives of the institution.” She reflects, “I see what I do as a vocation, I do see it as a calling, and I see every single interaction as an opportunity to live that vocation. That sounds corny, but it really is the way I operate.”

Karen grew up in the Catholic faith tradition of her family. She reflects about the influence of her parents:

My dad was a very strong influence; he was an entrepreneur and so a creative thinker…. I think my mom had a strong influence [too], but when I think of times that I was influenced, my dad clearly… [had a stronger influence]. Being older than most of her siblings developed within her “a strong sense of responsibility very early on”; she explains, “I felt that my parents leaned on me a lot, and
I felt like I took a lot of responsibility on, in terms of the family dynamics, and being the go-to person to help solve problems....” She acknowledges the influence of her grandparents too, “just in terms of integrity and the right thing to do.” She recalls, “My grandmother had very strong faith; we walked to mass often at 6.30 in the morning; she went to mass every day.”

Karen describes herself as “a product of the sixties”; she recalls how the sixties, in the context of the Vietnam War, had “a huge influence” on her. Thinking about her young adulthood, she says, “After I graduated and taught for two years... I pretty much stayed home with children. So a huge influence there was just devoting full-time to being a mother”; she adds, “It’s one of the reasons I have such an affinity with Mary....”

Karen chose to come to UD mainly because of its relative proximity to where her parents resided; “it’s interesting how things work out; I wanted to continue to be the daughter that I needed to be....” She recalls her first interview with UD at a recruitment fair during a research conference; “[the interviewer] talked a little bit about the mission of the institution, but through a brief conversation, it’s hard to really fully understand how deeply ingrained the Marianist charism is throughout the institution.” She adds, “…[it] was not intentional on my part, because I didn’t know enough about the university to really have that understanding....” She observes:

There [seem to be] many people who... come to UD because of that [the Marianist charism], but I wouldn’t be honest if I said that that’s what drew me here; I grew into it, and grew to appreciate it, even beginning that very first year at UD.
Karen gradually came to realize, “UD was such a wonderful fit for me, and I such a wonderful fit for UD.” She reflects, “I had conversations with quite a few people, but I didn’t really understand [and] have a full sense of what it means to be at a Marianist institution until I began my appointment that Fall.” She recalls how several “threads” from her personal journey “found very fertile ground for development here at UD,” including three in particular: First, the marginalization she felt as a qualitative researcher; “…qualitative research as a paradigm was seeking a place of recognition when the dominant paradigm, the positivist paradigm, was clearly overshadowing. So, one of my experiences then… was about the feeling of being a member of a marginalized group….” Second, the “strong orientation to systems thinking” and “servant leadership” that she developed during her doctoral work; “from a leadership perspective… [it] shaped me as a more holistic thinker, shaped me as a systems thinker… shaped me as – from a leadership theory perspective – a servant leader.” Third, becoming “very committed to action research”; “the power of [professionals] to be leaders in doing research in their own [settings].”

Reflecting about the journey of her commitment to the Marianist charism, Karen says, “…I didn’t come already formed, it didn’t come prepackaged, and it wasn’t because I walked right into an existing faith community.” She adds, “…the essence of [the] charism, without the structure, is what drew me in.” She mentions two personal connections that she made with the Marianist charism early in her journey at UD – with social justice and with Mary.

Karen’s commitment to “educating for justice, service and peace” helped her connect with her department, which was “very committed” to that emphasis as well. A
feature of the Marianist story that especially impressed her was “commitment to the
good.” She found herself “surrounded by people” who had a “strong sense of social
justice.” Early in her journey, she recalls co-teaching a course with a Marianist brother,
wherein they took “a very critical theory bent” in terms of incorporating issues of social
justice into their course; “so there was fertile ground in the department and in the
school… the seeds were sown, and that really allowed me to continue that work, which
continues today…. ” She adds, “I feel our department… [has] moved in an even stronger
and more intentional and deliberate direction towards social justice…. ”

Another aspect of the Marianist charism that connected with Karen, in the context
of her own motherhood, was “…Mary being the foundation of the Marianist charism”;
she explains:

…”motherhood is very, very, very important to me and has shaped my decisions
throughout my whole life; and so, I think that whole notion of committing to
motherhood and the important role that Mary plays in our charism is another
place that I feel I have strong connections.

Reflecting about her experiences as a new faculty member, she says, “…I was
finding my way… within the department… the commitment to seeing that our graduating
[students] are committed to society and committed to the good of all, is a very important
mission from my perspective.” She reflects, “[I was] developing how I talk about social
justice, and how I chose readings for the students to see the connections between social
justice and their [professional] work…. ” She recalls being a member of a writing support
group with other tenure-track faculty members; “…seeing that journey within the context
of the Marianist charism was an interesting way for us to explore our emerging life as
scholars… that was a great influence on my life….” She also recalls working on a committee that had persons “who saw faculty development and teaching as transformational, and the responsibility and great influence that faculty can have on students”; she reflects, “…being a member of that committee, getting to know other people around campus… had a great influence on me.” Participating in the Leadership UD program was another “wonderful experience”; “[it] laid the foundation for me to be a more present and visible servant leader on campus.” In her administrative role, she began focusing on “…what are those structured ways that we… can facilitate what we are doing here, transformational learning, but also specifically, the Marianist charism.”

Over the years, Karen served on several working groups related to mission and identity, which helped her develop “a deeper appreciation for things Marianist.” She interacted with many persons who influenced her leadership and commitment; “I’ve had these opportunities to work with such wonderful thinkers around the Marianist charism.” She participated in several mission and identity-related initiatives too; “it’s like I can bracket each one of those and think of what each of those sustained engagements contributed to who I am today.” Reflecting about these “sustained conversations,” she says, “I think all of those were ‘big yeses,’ because they engaged me in reading and thinking and soul-searching about the Marianist charism; but I probably didn’t know that at that time, when I said yes.”

For Karen, two experiences stand out as moments of saying a “big yes”; “I think the ‘big yeses’ that I really pondered were ‘yeses’ to the service of the institution.” The first was saying yes to becoming an administrator; “I did not want to be [an administrator].” She recalls how a senior administrator convinced her that “this would be
good for the institution, good for the department….” The second was saying yes to becoming a Marianist Educational Associate (MEA); “…that was a struggle for me… I’m in a different place with faith… and I didn’t want to do something that was portraying me as something false….” She adds, “But I’m so committed to the Marianist charism that I’ve come to reconcile that… I feel I am fully committed to the charism; I’m just doing it in a way… that’s honest to myself.”

Karen mentions several leaders at UD who have influenced her over the years. She especially emphasizes the “great influence” that one lay woman leader has had on her; “she works tirelessly for the good of UD, and she does so with integrity; she listens to the voices of all, and encourages those who may not be as comfortable speaking up.”

The most prominent leader in Karen’s descriptions is Brother Raymond Fitz, S.M. (Bro. Ray), UD’s former President. She finds that Bro. Ray reminds her of a phrase that is often associated with Father Chaminade – “Pragmatist with a vision”; “Bro. Ray is able to articulate the Marianist Charism through words and through action.” She has observed several persons say that when they are faced with difficult decisions, they find themselves asking, “What would Bro. Ray do?”

Karen observes how her commitment influences others in her life. For example, in the context of her children, she says, “…they are developing in wisdom, because I hope they see me modeling that in our interactions”; “…they have grown in confidence to think for themselves and reason for themselves, and articulate decisions based on their values and commitments, because they’ve seen me do it.” She recalls her experience of receiving the Lackner Award in the presence of her family; they came to understand “…what the Marianist charism was about… hearing the stories of the Marianist charism,
interior experience. Reflecting about her personal faith journey, Karen says,  
“Faith journey is a difficult thing for me to talk about. I would say I’ve had a challenge with faith journey. There have been periods when I’ve been a very active church goer, [and] periods when I have not.” She clarifies, “I feel I’m a spiritual person, but I don’t have an active church life; I guess that may be the best way to describe it.” She explains:  
I would say I’m a spiritual person, but not a religious person, which is an interesting paradox for me at this institution, because there is such a strong commitment to faith in the Marianist charism, and I’ve struggled with… how I fit into that… [it’s] hard for me to be honest with you about that, but I’m being honest.  
She reflects, “I feel that faith is developed, faith is nurtured; but I also feel that faith is a gift.” She clarifies:  
I’m not averse to a faith life; it’s just [that] I feel like I live that out differently than other people might…. I’m being honest, but that’s not something I talk a lot about here. I know how important faith life is to many, many people here, and to the institution; and so, what I try to do is, I try to live in accordance with those principles – that’s what I strive to do.  
Karen finds that she has a “very active inner life”; “…I don’t feel like I ever turn off the thinking.” She describes herself as “action-oriented and a doer”; “…I feel like I am always working on problems, I’m always trying to sort things out, and that’s a very
cognitively dominated inner life, as opposed to opening up the door for [the] spiritual.”

She adds, “…that’s why I was stumped by [your] question about how do you listen to the divine – I’m not sure I actively listen for that, because I’m so busy with cognition and thinking of the everyday.” She adds:

…I have every intention of developing… more spiritually-oriented meditation, where I do find that peace, that inner peace… where you just turn off the cognition, because I feel like my inner life is very dominated by my mind working all the time, and that, I think, shuts out contemplation… that opportunity for the spiritual to really flow freely….

Reflecting about the nature of her spirituality and inner life, Karen says, “…I guess reflection is probably the best word that I could use to capture it….” She explains:

Well, first of all, I do talk to Mary… I’m assuming that when I’m thinking. I mean, I don’t consciously say, “Mary I’m here, I’m hearing you”; but I do think of, and [thus,] I do talk to… and some people might call that prayer, when I’m thinking about who I want to be, or one of those moments of reflection….

She clarifies, “…although reflection sounds very cognitive, but it’s also hearing and sensing and experiencing my own emotions and thoughts, and thinking, ‘What does this mean for who I am…?’” Amidst her recent readings about the inner life, she found herself reflecting, “…what does a life filled with contemplation entail?” She adds, “I’ve thought about it, [but] I just haven’t enacted on it, and I think this [next phase] would be a good space to do that… that’s an area for development for me.”

Karen describes her interior life as “a spirituality of those meaningful relationships.” She finds that her interior life is deeply connected with her family;
“…where I really have contemplation, and really try to evoke the spiritual and the inner life, is [when] I think about myself in relation to my children, in relation to my family.”

She experiences her spiritual life in relation to the people she has known. She uses metaphors such as “the angel on the shoulder” or the “spirit guides” who are “walking the journey with us, either through our relationships with them, or just those few fleeting thoughts… it’s calling forth that relationship, and calling forth those experiences, and what that relationship has meant.” She concludes, “And so I guess it’s almost like a spirituality of those meaningful relationships – and the love – I think it’s about love actually; that’s probably the best way I can explain that.”

Karen observes, “At my very core… my strongest resonance and feelings of commitment… [and] what is often most visible to others about me, is the commitment to social justice, service, peace.” She finds that her fundamental belief in “the dignity of all people” is what drives her commitment; “…[it’s] where I draw my faith, my commitment to others, and commitment to this community as a faith community…. ” She asserts, “…it really is about dignity”; she explains:

I have a strong sense of justice, and by justice I mean, not punitive justice… I mean a strong sense that all people have the right to dignity… it’s not about material goods, it’s really about the right to know that they bring goodness to the world.

She reflects, “Where I tend to fall short of that most frequently [is in]… interactions that I don’t feel are respectful of the dignity of all.” She elaborates:

I experience quite a bit of angst. There are many times during the week when [I am aware of] either my anger or my frustration or my sense of being harried or
worried that I’m not going to get something done, when my interactions with people aren’t what I would want them to be. So that is one of my areas that creates quite a bit of stress for me; [I worry] that I may not treat somebody with the dignity that they deserve, or I may be short with somebody… [and] what I’ve gotten better at… is reflecting on that.

Karen finds that her journey of commitment has changed her in many ways; “…I think I’m a much better listener. I think my commitment has become more clearly focused on understanding rather than persuading; I see that in all my spheres… with my children… with my colleagues….” She adds, “…it’s even more clear to me how engaging with others so contributes to growth, inner growth.” She reflects, “…this could be age – I just feel like I have really grown in wisdom; I really feel like I can bring wisdom and a sense of clarity around things that I didn’t have [two decades] ago….” She has found herself growing to be more “accepting”; “I’m very committed to what I think is the right thing to do, but I can also be nonjudgmental of other perspectives.” She finds that she has developed a greater capacity for reflection; “reflection on my action.”

Reflecting about her interior self-talk during the times of falling short of one’s ideals, she says:

I say that’s not who I want to be; its identity… and that is the self-talk; I’m often driving in the car, or I’m often in the shower, I’m often in those spaces when I’m not distracted, so I immediately feel the remorse, and that’s the first emotion – remorse. But then, after I have the time and space to think about it… I just say, that’s not who you want to be, and… what do you need to do to be the person you want to be, and then that helps me chart my course for my next action…. I regret
what I just did, I experience remorse first, and then [say to myself] that isn’t who you are – you’re somebody else.

Reflecting about the “cost” of commitment, Karen brings to mind “the big movements, like Martin Luther King and Jesus Christ and Mary….” She reflects, “…you see the cost of committing in very tangible ways [in their lives]; [however,] I have to say I haven’t experienced a cost; it has done nothing but enrich me.” She adds, “I think my cost of committing has been [that] I haven’t been as present for my children, and my grandchildren….” She clarifies, “I have made time for them, and… it has been good time… [and] if you were to ask them that question, I don’t think they would see it as a cost; but I have [also] missed things….” Karen speaks of the implications of commitment as a “choice,” and not a “cost.” For example, she reflects about her scholarship:

Now, I’ve made a choice, I haven’t pursued my scholarship, and there are times when I regret that. So I guess you could couch that as a cost…. There are times when I think, what if I had chosen another path, how would I feel about that? …I’m sure I would feel a sense of accomplishment. But I feel so strongly that [my commitment] has made a difference for the good of the institution, which is my fundamental value, that I don’t cast it as a cost – I cast it as a choice.

She explains:

One of the reasons it’s not cost, is that I feel that what I have contributed has been widely recognized by people, and that I appreciate, because that to me is a tangible, visible acknowledgment that it has made a difference in the institution, and that’s what I care about – that’s why I did it.
Everyday practice. Reflecting about her approach in everyday interactions, Karen says, “…in my day-to-day, it’s that matter of caring about people, and people know that.” She emphasizes the importance of being a “relationship-oriented leader”; “I think it really matters that people engage with one another in positive ways, caring ways… I think those relationships go a long way.” She clarifies, “Some people say to me, you’re so nice all the time, [but] not necessarily, not that it’s not a good thing to be….” Simultaneously, Karen emphasizes the need for balance; “tasks have to be done…”; she explains, “So in my mundane world, I try to plan out what’s going to be an effective way to accomplish this; it can’t be just relationship-oriented, because things don’t get done….” She points to the importance of process; “…I pay attention to process, I think about the steps… what has to be [done] to get this project through in all of its many steps….”

Reflecting about aspects of her day-to-day interactions in which she wants to improve, she says:

One of the things I’m working on [is]… instead of coming in with what I think should be the next step, open it with the question… inviting others to contribute before I put my thought out there… that’s one thing that I’m starting to do better….

Reflecting about her personal priorities and institutional commitments, Karen asserts that she has a “…big commitment as a mother and to [her] family, huge!” She explains:

I feel like I’ve balanced that commitment… I’m there for my children, I’m there for my grandchildren, and I’ve also been there for the institution. But I’m gonna
tip that balance a little bit now, and still feel I can be fully committed to the Marianist charism and to the institution, [while] being more available for my family.

Scholarship is another priority; connecting “themes of scholarship back with my commitment to social justice….” Reflecting about her institutional commitments, she says:

…I feel I will have opportunities, and will continue to take those opportunities, to be present, and be a contributor around how can we continue to advance the Marianist charism and the mission of the institution… what I will have to figure out is how will I do that in [new] role[s]….

Teaching continues to be a “big priority” too; she reflects:

…how can I be an influence in the department in appropriate ways, engaging others and sustaining conversations… [thinking about] where are the gaps in our curriculum in terms of social justice; are we doing what we want to be doing? Just asking the question….

In her teaching, Karen encourages her students to work towards “…chang[ing] the world to be more socially just.” She works with the “curriculum process,” and with “…processes that support students who may be experiencing challenges…” She finds that she brings “very good food for thought” to discussions about “…how can we meet the needs of all students.” She adds, “…I feel like I really hit those ideals in teaching my class, and I feel good about those.” She asks, “…how do we provide opportunities for faculty to contribute to the life of the institution, and contribute to student learning in a uniquely Marianist way.”
Reflecting about the nature of the commitment of lay vis-à-vis religious persons, Karen says:

…I could surmise that a religious leader’s first commitment is to God; [for] a lay person, it may or may not. A lay person would have the choice, I would think, and again, I’m speaking from my own [perspective]. I mean, I would say my first commitment is to my family and not to God.

She explains:

…the reason I don’t feel I can make the distinction between lay and vowed religious is that I feel that there are laypeople who have that first commitment to God, just the way the religious would. And so I don’t feel the distinction is necessarily between lay and religious; I think it’s the place that God holds in that person’s life.

Reflecting about the many mission and identity-related committees and working groups that she has served on, Karen observes:

I’ve been on many committees, and… workgroups, and I can tell you, the same people are on those workgroups. So my statement to the incoming leaders would be: Certainly offer up your services, but draw boundaries around that, so there isn’t that cost for your family, or for your other personal growth issues. I didn’t draw those boundaries.

She clarifies:

…but I have to say, there was self-interest there. I mean, I was realizing, maybe not at the time, but now… how much those contributed to me, and how much those enhanced my own growth and grounding. But I think that same thing can
be accomplished without having to go back to those same people time and time again….

Karen advises persons who are committing to mission and identity to “be honest about what your commitment could be, and don’t enter this when the cost might be at the expense of other things that are important in your lives.” Her message to current institutional leaders is:

…laypeople can certainly make a commitment and certainly be fully committed. However, I think more energy needs to be devoted to cultivating a larger group of leaders to whom the institution turns to for these major commitments of time and energy and thought…. Many of the lay leaders are balancing family, personal [aspects]… those commitments may not be the same for the religious.

Karen finds that she has “developed to be very extroverted” in her work life. Recalling her early days as a faculty member, she says, “I remember the first time that I spoke up and actually made a point… my face turning bright red… it was painful for me to do that.” She finds that people respect her for often speaking up; “I don’t think… people see me as being discordant or trying to stir the pot, but I do ask questions and bring up issues that other people may not bring out.” She adds, “So in that way, I feel I’m an extrovert, [but]… it takes a lot to put yourself out there with that.” Reflecting about her personal life, she says, “I don’t have… what one would characterize as an extroverted social life. [I have] a very strong, a very small circle of friends…. ” In relation to her family, she adds, “…I will always go out of my comfort zone to be with my family, cause that is [she emphasizes] my comfort zone…. ”
Karen reflects about a low point in her commitment journey; “it wasn’t about uncommitting, in terms of my own commitment to the charism; it was about committing to the challenges of being [an administrator].” She explains:

…[it’s about] being convicted about what’s right for students, and fairness in terms of what people contribute to the university; and faculty have the option to not serve in ways that I think people should serve. So maybe it’s my overdeveloped sense of what I think people should do for the good of the institution, and some faculty do it and some don’t….

Karen emphasizes the importance of “right relationship[s].” She reflects about her approach in difficult relationships, especially when she feels that she has fallen short of treating persons with the dignity they always deserve; she explains:

…I’m able to go back to the person and say, this is where I was, this is what happened to me, and if an apology is warranted, but at the very least, an explanation… and [then] reopening the conversation… can we revisit this and see if we can come to a better place.

She adds, “I feel that I am much better at doing that than I was previously, and that’s been something that has evolved over time….”

Karen reflects about the difficult conversations she has had, especially when acting upon her commitment to mission and identity involved an “interior struggle.” She recalls “one of those episodic memories” related to a departmental meeting in which she expressed the need for “further conversation” on an important program-related decision; however, she found that “…the questions [she] raised were not considered valid questions.” She reflects, “I couldn’t explain well enough, and [an administrator] didn’t
listen well enough….” She felt hurt and devalued; “for me it was like a lack of validation that I had the institutional good in mind, so it’s like questioning the assumptions upon which I act….” She recalls another incident wherein her working group had a difficult conversation about including a certain mission-related concept in a university document that they were creating; “I didn’t understand what it meant, [and so] I said, ‘How will other people understand this? How can we be an inclusive community? …this whole concept… could be marginalizing to some.’” She clarifies:

…it wasn’t [a] discordant conversation, but it was a difficult conversation, where I feel that the members of that group really came out on the other side of that conversation with a much deeper and richer understanding of [the mission-related concept].

She observes that there have been similar difficult conversations at the university lately, especially about “the whole notion of infusing Catholic intellectual tradition in course proposals….,” She emphasizes the need to “return to extended conversations.” She often hears people say, “Well, I can commit to Marianist, but I can’t commit to Catholic.” She observes, “Now, we’re even more clear in saying you can’t separate the two.” She reflects:

I understand why we can’t separate the two, because Marianist… is about Catholicism; but I think we have to find a way to talk about that, [in a way] that does not push people out of the circle, or push people to not revealing the[ir] interior.

Karen reflects about other persons who, like her, may be committing to mission and identity in a different manner; she says:
I suspect there are other people who feel an affinity with the Marianist charism, but yet do not have a strong faith commitment, or a strong connection with religious life [or] church…. That would be an interesting conversation to have on this campus.

She suggests, “…I think being more public about those people who can be very committed to the Marianist charism, without being committed to a specific faith tradition, I think that’s one way that would begin to open up that circle.” She reflects: I have to be honest, I don’t have a strong faith practice, and so I think finding a way for people to feel committed without feeling ashamed that they haven’t made that [faith] commitment, or somehow they betrayed people… or led people into thinking something they’re not, I think we have to figure out how to do that.

She clarifies, “…for many people, a strong faith [and] church-connected life is very good, and I don’t have any negative judgment about that, but I don’t think people who don’t have that are bad – you see what I’m saying…?” She reflects, “I don’t think going to church is the defining characteristic of a person who is committed to the dignity of all… or committed to social justice, or committed to love in relationships.” Relatedly, she observes, “…as UD is becoming more and more clear about what our mission and identity entail[s]… more and more people are coming here intentionally for that purpose.”

Karen asserts that the “lens” of our mission and identity should be “front and center in every conversation, in every deliberation” at the university; she reflects:

I think any group that comes together to talk about any issue pertaining to the institution, [including]… the academic senate… the faculty development
committee… the Chair’s Collaborative… our Congress… [etc.], I think a question front and center, ahead of and integrated with any conversation… [is] how do the characteristic[s] in the charism [apply]… what bearing do [they] have on the conversation?

She adds, “I think the Board of Trustees should be held accountable to, what does this mean for the mission and identity of the institution, in whatever they’re talking about… what implications will this have for our identity, for our charism?”

On a number of occasions during the interview, Karen emphasizes that she is being authentic and open in her articulations; “I’m being brutally honest with myself and with you here; I feel that’s the obligation in a qualitative research project….” She adds, “The questions really helped me articulate….” She expresses gratitude for her participation in this study; “it’s nice to have the opportunity to reflect back – it’s a gift, so thank you.”

**Structural Description**

This section contains analyses of the underlying dimensions of Karen’s experiences related to the composite phenomenon of “exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity,” which I will present in three parts: (a) personal understandings, (b) phenomenological structures, and (c) essential meanings.

**Personal understandings.**

**Commitment.** Karen’s descriptions shed light on her personal understandings related to commitment. These include: (a) Commitment involves a sense of “responsibility” in all interactions; “sometimes I fall short… sometimes, the outcome
isn’t what I would hope for, but that doesn’t detract me from what I feel is the responsibility, my responsibility, for those small interactions.”  (b) Commitment involves continual awareness; “it doesn’t have to be a big thing… every interaction matters, and sometimes I take more care with it than others, and I realize that, but that’s always on the back of my mind.”  (c) Commitment involves a “series of small yeses”; “every small yes makes a difference, everybody makes a difference in everything they do, every choice we make makes a difference.”  (d) Commitment involves moments of saying “big yeses” too; “you can think of a big yes in a couple of ways…”; first, “in terms of serious questioning about whether this is the right thing to do at this point in time,” and second, “in terms of looking back retrospectively [and realizing,] this really shaped who I am.”  (e) Commitment involves being honest with oneself; “I feel I am fully committed to the charism; I’m just doing it in a way… that’s honest to myself.”  (f) Commitment is primarily internal, and not about membership; “I feel commitment is internal…”; “I don’t think going to church is the defining characteristic of a person who is committed to the dignity of all….”  (g) Commitment involves “intentional action”; “I think the whole notion of intention and commitment really go hand-in-hand… and so I try to be very intentional with my contributions in those conversations, and with my actions.”  (h) Commitment involves a personal “why”; “…[making] a difference in the institution… that’s what I care about – that’s why I did it.”  (i) Commitment involves conviction; “…being convicted about what’s right for students, and fairness in terms of what people contribute to the university…” and acting with “the institutional good in mind.”

**Leadership.** Karen’s descriptions shed light on her personal understandings related to leadership. These include:  (a) Leadership involves a “service role”; “…a
theory of leadership grounded in service, servant leadership.” (b) Leadership involves participating in “conversations… leading to transformation”; “…participating in conversations that lead to action, that enhance the mission of the institution.” (c) Leadership involves “understanding the gifts that people bring to this institution”; “…that really has been a frame for how I interact here, is to see and appreciate the gifts that people bring in, and consider how can I, through interactions, magnify, reflect, exemplify the gifts of others….” (d) Leadership involves listening and openness; “…inviting others to contribute before I put my thought out there….” (e) Leadership involves fostering an “inclusive community,” and having every interaction with a “strong feeling for the good of all” and “yield[ing] something good for the good of all.” (f) Leadership involves taking the opportunities “to be present, and be a contributor” in a manner that advances the mission of the institution. (g) Leadership involves acting within your “sphere of influence”; “…by influence I don’t mean coercion; I just mean, we have an opportunity to voice [and]… act on what you believe is fundamentally the right thing to do.” (h) Leadership involves relationship-orientation; “I think relation-oriented leaders are very effective; people appreciate that you care about their world, and I think that’s important for leaders to acknowledge.” (i) Leadership involves balancing relationships and tasks; “…it’s that matter of caring about people… but also balanc[ing] that with – tasks have to get done.”

Karen observes two sets of interrelated characteristics in exemplary lay Marianist leaders. First, personal selflessness, coupled with commitment to the common good; she reflects:
[They are] selfless. They are not for their own agenda... they are not acting out of the need to draw attention to themselves, or for accolades.... It is a commitment to... the good of the institution, and ultimately the way I see it -- because I feel the Marianists contribute to the good of the world -- to the good of the world.

Second, deep thinking, coupled with an openness to each individual; she explains, “…the lay leaders that... I have admiration and respect [for]... that have influenced me... they think deeply, they are open to the thoughts of others... that includes respecting others....” She summarizes, “I think the characterization of servant leadership actually embraces [and] embodies those qualities that I find... very strong and effective in Marianist lay leaders.”

**Mission and identity.** Karen’s descriptions shed light on her personal understandings of Catholic and Marianist mission and identity. She reflects, “I see the mission of the institution as transforming lives, both students and faculty and staff; [and] so I see my participation in those [day-to-day] conversations as really leading to transformation.” She often frames and articulates the mission of the institution “around the characteristics of Marianist education”: “…education for formation in faith, educating the whole person, family spirit, integrated learning, and... justice, service, and peace.” She points out, “…the important role that Mary plays in our charism is another place that I feel I have strong connections.” She reflects, “…there is such a strong commitment to faith in the Marianist charism”; “…com[ing] together... around a table, talking about who are we... and what is our mission, is very Marianist.” She asserts,
“…I feel that those conversations should be a part of the day-to-day conversations of the institution; what implications will this have for our identity, for our charism?”

**Phenomenological structures.** Phenomenological theory suggests that every human phenomenon has universal structures, that is, existential themes in human experience, including: causality, temporality, spatiality, body-hood, self, and relationality. The following sub-sections emerge from considerations of these themes within Karen’s experiences.

**Causal influences.** Leadership commitment has a causal dimension. Karen’s descriptions shed light on her awareness of several interrelated influences that seem to have nurtured her leadership and commitment to mission and identity. These include: (a) Early connections and continuity between personal life themes and the university’s mission and identity; her experiences “even beginning that very first year at UD,” wherein she found “fertile ground in the department and in the school… allow[ing] her to continue that work [of social justice]….” (b) The resonance between fundamental personal commitments and specific aspects of the Marianist charism; for example, her commitment to “motherhood” and its resonance with “the important role that Mary plays in our charism,” as well as the mutual commitment to “social justice, service, and peace.” (c) The growing attraction of the Marianist charism; “…the essence of [the] charism, without the structure, is what drew me in.” She recalls engaging in “reading and thinking and soul-searching about the Marianist charism,” and having “opportunities to work with such wonderful thinkers around the Marianist charism.” (d) The experience of engaging in “sustained conversations” around mission and identity; “I feel even more convinced
that finding those spaces for sustained conversations is where change and commitment develop….” She elaborates:

It’s how commitment develops, because when you’re voicing something, and when you’re engaged in thinking about deep issues with others, that’s how you begin to form that commitment; it isn’t just interior work – it’s the work… it’s the work with others, and hearing others’ voice[s]… their commitment to the Marianist charism or… their work… their family, or whatever.

Furthermore, critical events and experiences evoked and strengthened Karen’s sense of commitment; for example: (a) Being invited to take on an administrative role, for the “good [of] the institution, good [of] the department.” (b) Being an MEA; “…I’ve been profoundly influenced by being an MEA, because I feel that responsibility [in university conversations]….” (c) Being appreciated for her contributions reinforced her commitment; “…I feel that what I have contributed has been widely recognized… and that I appreciate… [it’s] a tangible visible acknowledgment that it has made a difference in the institution… that’s what I care about – that’s why I did it.”

**Experience through time.** Leadership commitment has a temporal dimension; it is experienced in relation to the passage of time. Karen observes gradual growth in relation to her leadership commitment to mission and identity; “I grew into it, and grew to appreciate it, even beginning that very first year at UD.” She often highlights the continuity of her interior journey; she points out several “strands” or “threads” from her life prior to coming to UD, which found “connections” with the Marianist charism; especially, motherhood and Mary, social justice, and servant leadership. She finds that “…the seeds were sown, and that really allowed [her] to continue that work, which
continues today.” She finds that several “intersections” came together, in terms of experiences and relationships, which gradually grew, sustained, and nurtured her commitment; these included a “series of small yeses,” and also some moments of saying a “big yes.” Looking back, she recognizes that her engagements and conversations around mission and identity were nurturing her commitment, “but [she] probably didn’t know that at that time”; that is, she was not necessarily conscious of it in the moment. She reflects about her leadership and commitment in relation her own aging process; “…and this could be age… I really feel like I can bring wisdom and a sense of clarity around things… [and] I think wisdom comes from experience.” She observes a transformation within her; “a huge change from where I was [decades] ago.” In the next phase of her journey, she wants to give a “bigger chunk of her life” to her children and family. Amidst difficult conversations and relationships, she recognizes the value of allowing for “time and space to think about it…..” Her conceptualization of mission and identity-related conversations also has a long-term dimension; she articulates these as “sustained conversations,” “extended conversations,” “sustained engagements,” and “relationships [that] go a long way."

**Spatial awareness.** Leadership commitment has a spatial dimension, which Karen expresses in terms of both physical and conceptual spaces. Her experience of entering the university community was that of finding “fertile ground for development.” She observes that her leadership and commitment permeate the different “spheres” in her life; “I see that [change] in all my spheres; I see that with my children; I see that with my colleagues…..” She speaks of her journey as a committed leader in terms of broadening “sphere[s] of influence.” She reflects about her university-related roles over the years in
the context of “the broader institution,” beginning with her early activities within her department, and then, gradually “beginning to broaden that through committees on campus.” She emphasizes the importance of “finding those spaces for sustained conversations” in order to allow commitment and change to develop. She refers to these conceptual spaces using terms such as “around a table,” “closed circle[s],” and “open[ing] up that circle.” She often points to the importance of “little” everyday opportunities and conversations, which are like “the pebble in the pond, where that really does have a ripple effect across the whole community…” She adds, “…things that are damaging, ripple across the whole community, just as things that are nourishing do that.” She reaches out to those she is experiencing a difficult conversation or relationship with; “…see[ing] if we can come to a better space [together].” She describes her family as her “comfort zone” and her non-professional social life as a “very small circle” of friends.

Expressions of body-hood. Leadership commitment has a dimension of body-hood, which Karen expresses using several metaphorical expressions in her descriptions. Reflecting about her journey of commitment, she points out that she did not “come already formed,” and that her commitment “didn’t come prepackaged”; it was not that she “walked right into an existing faith community.” Instead, she finds that the “essence” of the charism is what “drew” her in. She finds that her experiences have “shaped” her. In the context of her “cognitively dominated inner life,” she expresses the desire for “opening up the door for [the] spiritual.” She “draws” faith and commitment from her belief in the dignity of all people. Her work with mission and identity-related committees and working groups engaged her in “soul-searching” about the Marianist charism. In work-related groups, she has experienced “seeing… through the Marianist charism lens.”
She encourages everyone to keep that lens “front and center in every conversation, in every deliberation.” She finds that her experiences “laid the foundation” for her to “be a more present and visible servant leader on campus.”

**Descriptions of self.** Leadership commitment is experienced in relationship with oneself, reflected in Karen’s statements containing self-descriptions. Her descriptions contain two overarching themes related to self: (a) The personal theme of being a mother; “big commitment as a mother and to my family, huge!” (b) The professional/educational theme of being committed to social justice “at my very core.” Furthermore, her descriptions also shed light on several facets of her self-concept in relation to two interrelated dimensions – personal attributes and educational leadership: (a) Personal attributes: being “a product of the 60s”; being “truthful” and “honest to myself”; “being a spiritual person, but not a religious person”; being “different” in terms of “where I am at this point on my [faith] journey”; being “extroverted in my work life” and “introvert[ed] on the social scene”; having a “cognitively dominated inner life”; and being “action-oriented and a doer.” (b) Educational leadership: having a “vocation” and a “calling” towards teaching; being “a researcher and a scholar”; being “a holistic thinker” and “a systems thinker”; being a “present and visible servant leader on campus”; being a “faculty member” as well as an “administrator [who is] a party to those conversations with leadership that can influence the direction we take”; being “convicted” about what’s right and fair; and being known as “somebody who can get things done, who understands process.”

**Relationship with others.** Leadership commitment has a relational dimension; it is experienced and expressed in relationship with others. Karen appreciates
“relationship-oriented leaders” who are “genuinely interested in people, and… genuinely care about people.” She describes her interior life as “a spirituality of… meaningful relationships.” She spontaneously adds, “…and the love – I think it’s about love actually; that’s probably the best way I can explain that.” She reflects:

The way I think about my spiritual life is, I think about those relationships that… are meaningful to me… and it brings a smile or nostalgia or a sense of how this made [me] who I am, and how can I contribute – that to me is how I engage spiritually.

Her approach is that of “see[ing] and appreciat[ing] the gifts that people bring in”; “…understanding the gifts that people bring to this institution, and that really has been a frame for how I interact here….”. Her experiences with leadership commitment involve an emphasis on being in “right relationship[s]”; “I believe in the dignity of all people in that my relationship with them has to be a right relationship; that’s another Marianist term, being in right relationship with people, that really matters to me.” She reflects, “…it’s not about what I think it should be; it’s about how can we understand this, and come to a place where we can all move forward together on something.”

**Essential meanings.** Several essential meanings can be derived from Karen’s descriptions in relation to the lived experience of the phenomenon in focus. Leading in a manner committed to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity involves:

1. Being fully committed to the charism in a way that’s honest to oneself;
   knowing why one does what one does and who one is at the core; reading, thinking, and soul-searching about the Marianist charism; being honest about what one’s commitment could be.
2. Living a spirituality of meaningful relationships; evoking past experiences and meaningful relationships in everyday life; recognizing that it is all, actually, about love.

3. Being relationship-oriented, while also focusing on getting tasks done; genuinely caring about people, and being interested in what they are going through; engaging in deep thinking, but with a sense of openness to others.

4. Having a strong sense of justice, the dignity of persons, and the common good; seeing and appreciating the gifts that each person brings; being inclusive with a strong feeling for the good of all; listening to others first, seeking to understand rather than to persuade.

5. Being in right relationships; treating each person with dignity and respect; reaching out to those with whom one is experiencing a difficult conversation or relationship, and trying to come to a better space together.

6. Engaging in sustained conversations around things Marianist; coming around the table and nurturing conversations that lead to transformation; keeping the lens of the Marianist charism front and center, ahead of and integrated with, all conversations.

7. Being selfless, not acting out of a personal agenda, nor drawing attention to oneself, nor seeking accolades; being continually aware of one’s commitment and responsibility towards mission and identity; being intentional about one’s contributions.

8. Practicing servant leadership; engaging in opportunities to be present, to be a contributor towards advancing the Marianist charism and the mission of the
institution; accepting new roles and responsibilities with the good of the institution in mind.
Noel: A Portrait-in-words

Textural Description

This section contains descriptions of Noel’s experiences related to the composite phenomenon of “exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity,” which I will present in three parts: (a) personal journey, (b) interior experience, and (c) everyday practice.

Personal journey. Noel’s association with the Marianist family began approximately thirty years ago, when he came to the University of Dayton (UD) as a graduate student. A few years after graduating, he returned to UD as an employee. He has served the UD community in several administrative capacities, working closely with students, and teaching some courses. As an educator, he tries to help students “…make connections between their faith and action for justice.”

Noel grew up in a Catholic family and social environment. Reflecting about his earliest memories of making a conscious faith commitment, he recalls the parable of the “fish… who doesn’t realize that it’s swimming in the water”; “…[similarly,] I’ve always been swimming in the water[s] of this faith community, of the Church….” He clarifies: …it’s not like I’ve taken it for granted, I don’t think [so]; I’ve always been sort of aware of it… even from a young age, I’ve been aware of my own desire to make a free choice, even as a child, to be a part of it.

For example, he recalls an incident from his Catholic grade school, when his class was asked to help out in the rectory; “we got to be the ones who put the labels on some mailings that were gonna go out to every parishioner… and everybody was all excited because we got to… get out of class [he chuckles]!” He recalls his excitement to do the
work quickly, while his classmates were “goofing around” and saying to him, “Noel, slow down, cause we need to take our time; you’re working too fast!” He reflects, “…I just wanted to serve and I wanted to make a difference….” Looking back, he finds: …I realized that there was something really weird about me [he says jokingly], that I’ve always wanted to help, and had a commitment to the Church in some way, shape, or form, and that it’s always given me great joy.

Bringing to mind his undergraduate years, Noel says, “My faith life went through a pretty strong growth period in my senior year particularly…. I was wondering maybe God was calling me to priesthood or religious life”; “…I didn’t feel that I could ignore the call from God [he chuckles]; if God is calling, God’s gonna win every time.” He recalls some important early experiences as a young educator that led him to “really think about what God was calling [him] to do”; “I will never forget this young man [a student], who knew how to push all my buttons… he was gonna get the class off-track… and the other students were gonna think he was funny….” Noel recalls getting “more and more frustrated” about this situation, and talking about it in his small faith community; “I told [the facilitator] the whole story, and he said, ‘Well, have you prayed about it?’ And I said, ‘Oh! [he gasps]… well, no, I guess I haven’t….’” Noel’s initial reaction was to explain himself saying, “…God’s got really big things to worry about…”; however, he quickly realized, “I know that’s really stupid; God can handle everything, and God probably wants to handle everything….” Thus, Noel prayed for God to help him in dealing with this student; he recalls, “…the next day I went in to teach, and [the student] was fine; he didn’t try to get us off-track… [he] was never a problem for me the rest of the semester.” Noel reflects:
Did God pull off some miracle with this young man? Did God pull off a miracle inside me, and make me more tolerant of him? I don’t know. Was it just a coincidence? Perhaps, [but] I don’t believe that. I do think that God played some role in answering my prayer. And the fact that I recognize that God answers prayers, and that God loves me so much, that he cares about me, even my stupid little minor things, was really kinda life changing… that’s what sort of began to increase my sense of putting faith as my number one thing.

Noel eventually decided to enter a graduate program at UD, especially because it was a Catholic institution; it was his intention to continue to “do some serious discernment about what God is calling [him] to do….” Recalling his early experiences at UD, he says, “So I just sort of came here… to study [subject] and, very quickly, got to meet some vowed Marianists and some lay Marianists….” Soon after, he was invited to join a Marianist lay group; “I joined that group… and I’m still very close with a lot of the folks… so that’s kinda, I guess, how I got started.”

After graduating from UD, Noel took up a teaching role elsewhere for a few years, before coming back to UD as an employee; “…my wife and I were going to have a baby, and… I started to look for a job that had more flexible hours, and that’s how I ended up here….” He reflects:

…coming to UD and finding this family of people who also were committed to justice, committed to community, and had great joy in that – it was like I found my tribe… I think that’s how I did make that connection and… commitment.

Reflecting about how he engaged with the Marianist story, eventually saying a deeper “yes,” Noel says, “I think that’s another example of it being sort of gradual… it
was there, and I picked up little pieces of it all along the way.” Being part of a cohort of Marianist Educational Associates [MEAs] was an important formative experience; “…we had this week of formation… it involved a lot of reading, and a lot of studying of things that I’d gotten pieces of before, but putting it all together, [I] really got the story.” He recalls an “a-ha moment” when he watched a “boring historical video” that showed a reenactment of the use of the guillotine during the French revolution, when priests and religious persons had the choice of either “disavow[ing] from Rome” or “getting their heads chopped off at the guillotine.” He recalls, “…and I was like, oh! oh! So this really was dangerous, and really courageous for Father Chaminade to not sign the clergy constitution… that he really was in hiding, really running for his life…” He reflects:

Okay, I understand why… he [Father Chaminade] had to run off to Saragossa, but then, to come back and say, I am so committed to making sure that people of my country that I love, [who] are now losing their faith… I’m gonna come back here, and try to re-energize this faith by forming these small groups of laypeople – wow!

He asserts, “…all of a sudden in that moment, and I was like, oh! Now I get the passion and the drive, and why Father Chaminade did what he did…” It was in this moment that Noel said to himself, “…oh! yeah, I need to really commit to this on a deeper level.” Reflecting about his formative experiences at UD, he asserts, “Nothing is as strong as the… experiences that I’ve had with the MEAs… and particularly that weeklong formation [retreat]; that was really very powerful.” He adds, “And that gets reinforced all the time… there’s so many little things all the time, and not just MEA things, but [also]
just working with students, and the kinds of things that I learn from them are really
great….”

Noel also emphasizes the impact of “being around” several Marianist religious
persons; “…just so many really great people who’ve been important influences on my
life.” He reflects about the influence of Brother Raymond Fitz, S.M., UD’s former
President, saying:

Brother Ray Fitz has really influenced me because of his vision; he has great
vision, for mission, for what we’re about, or what we should be about…. In many
ways, [he has] given me the courage, I think [that’s] probably the right word, to
be willing to talk about my Marianist identity… and not to hide it under a bushel,
but to be really open about it.

Noel reflects about the influence of another Marianist religious brother; he says, “…I
don’t know that anybody lives their faith as strongly as [he]; I see it… in so many little
things that he does all the time; he’s constantly living how a Christian probably should
live.” Noel also recalls other influential persons in his life, such as a religious sister who
taught him about “shared leadership”; “…this egalitarian approach to things, [she] really
modeled that for me, and I hope I do that half as well as she did….”

**Interior experience.** Noel finds that his ministry as an educator gives him a
unique opportunity; “…it allows me to make my interior life, exterior; I think that’s a
really great blessing…. Thus, he says, “I don’t make much of the division… between
my interior life and my exterior life – they are usually one and the same.” He observes
the interconnectedness of his interior and exterior life; “I think I’m a pretty optimistic and
positive person exteriorly, that’s because interiorly I am as well. I mean, I’m just really,
really grateful to God for everything….” His interior prayer life is permeated with this sense of gratitude; he says:

…a lot of my inner life has to do with being grateful. I’m just really overwhelmed a lot, at how good God has been to me. Most of my prayer is thanks… like 90% of my prayer is thanks, and probably most of the other 10% is, I’m sorry [he laughs], and then, thanks for the mercy….

Noel finds that his interior life is not really “hidden” from those around him; he reflects:

…I think I’m pretty open… I hope that what [my colleagues] see is that I trust them, that I really do value their gifts… I don’t know that anything is hidden. I think what you see is what you get.

He adds, “…I think I’ve always just been pretty open.” For example, he says, “…if I’m discerning something serious… I’m not gonna necessarily tell my students, but my coworkers, yeah, I’ll share with them, if there’s something important that I’m discerning….”

Reflecting about inner discernment and self-talk during decision making, Noel says, “There’s so much! I can hardly keep up with it, all of the self-talk…. There are really different ways I make different decisions; there’s not… one singular style; I think it depends on the situation.” He adds, “I think I do a pretty good job of giving appropriate amounts of time to appropriate kinds of decisions, and giving appropriate amounts of self-talk to what’s going on.”

On the introversion-extroversion spectrum, Noel finds himself to be “smack dab in the middle.” His general tendency is towards introversion, and then, based on the
need, he pushes himself towards extroversion; “I force myself to be more extroverted than I actually am, but I [also] know that I need some time of quiet, just to process things.”

Creativity and imagination are central facets of Noel’s interior experience; “I just really love being creative… I really like to imagine possibilities… the imaginary side of my brain is always working, and would work even more if I let it.” However, he recognizes the need to balance imagination with practicality; “…I’m practical enough that I have to put some boundaries on it, and some limits, and say okay, we have to get this damn budget thing done now [he chuckles]!” He adds:

…I recognize that I’m not paid in my job, to be imaginary all the time; there [are] some elements… of my work… [where] I can and should use my imagination, and those are my favorite parts, but I also recognize that I have to get the other stuff done. But the imagina[tion] part of my day is definitely the most fun.

Noel finds that he’s “not the kind of person that dwells on [the] negative energy” that stems from difficult relationships, opposition, or misunderstandings; he explains:

I mean, I recognize it [the negative energy], and I acknowledge it, and if it needs to be worked through, I spend a little bit of time working through it; but I’m not usually one to sit around with it for very long, I don’t think I ever really have been… I’ll wrestle with it, I’ll deal with it… [and then] it’s time to let it go and move on to the next thing.

Noel has not experienced really “low lows” along his faith journey. He recalls a conversation he had with a Marianist religious brother who told him, “…if you know that your faith journey is a roller coaster ride, [that] there are going to be highs and there are
going to be lows… just knowing that makes the lows not so low.” He asserts, “…I think he’s absolutely right; I totally resonated with him when he said that.” Noel explains:

…you have dry periods in your faith… and that’s okay, knowing that there are going to be dry periods… on my Marianist journey. I don’t know that I’ve had really low lows. Maybe it’s because I’ve accepted they’re gonna be there, and that tomorrow will be better, [and] so I’ve never really had any really bad lows.…

Reflecting about the “costs” of commitment, Noel points out that there are “good cost[s]” as well as costs that could “take a toll” on one’s family, causing one to “miss a few things.” Referring to good costs, he says, “…I think one of the costs is the loss of ego, and I think, that’s a good cost, a cost I’m more than happy to pay.” Reflecting about the costs that could “take a toll,” he says, “I think the biggest cost is time…..” Noel does not regret the long hours that he has put into his job over the years; he says:

…more or less, I’m doing what I want to do; I really do love what I’m doing…. 50 hours is probably a short week for me… and when I was younger and had more energy, it was easily 60-70 hours on average… but I don’t regret [that].

However, Noel has sometimes worried that his long hours have “taken a toll on [his] family, and from time to time they’ll say stuff about it…..” He adds, “…even though I might have spent a lot of time here [at UD]… I don’t think that took away from me having energy to devote to my family and being there.” He reflects:

…finding that balance has always been something I’ve been conscious of, and had to work to make sure that I didn’t take my family for granted, or take advantage of them, and yeah, were there weeks when that was difficult to pull off, yeah!
Reflecting about how his commitment has changed him interiorly, Noel says, “I think I’m more aware of how I make decisions; I think that’s a good thing. I hope I’m more mature [he chuckles]!” He adds, “I think these days, I don’t take myself anyway near as seriously as I used to.” He reflects, “…I’ve always believed in my heart and I’ve always sort of said this to myself… [that] it’s not about me, but… I really believe that more strongly now… I try to live it now more than I did before.” He clarifies: …it’s not necessarily taking myself less seriously; it’s recognizing that it doesn’t have to be me who is responsible or gets the credit for when things go well… and I think that that happens a lot in [my area of work]…. As a young professional, he recalls feeling, “…I’m the young guy… I really want to be the cool guy… that students will think, ‘Oh, I have a problem, I should definitely go see Noel….’ I really, really wanted to be that person.” However, after more than two decades of working with students, Noel now says: …if I’m the right person for them to come and talk to, okay, but if I’m not, no skin off my nose; I don’t really care if I’m not the right person, but I do want to make sure that they are having somebody that can be the person that they talk to… if it’s somebody else on the team, if it’s some other student, I don’t care who it is…. He reflects, “I just want to make sure that Jesus is working through somebody, so that they will get to know the love of God… so it doesn’t need to be me….” Noel has come to realize, “…more often than not, it’s not me… God’s working through lots of other people….” He reflects, “…so it’s just less and less ego… I think [this] has happened…
in part due to my commitment to this Marianist charism of community, cause I kept seeing it happen.”

Reflecting about the Marian dimension of the Marianist charism, Noel says, “Mary is somebody I’ve always wanted to know more, and I keep getting little pieces of Mary all the time, but she’s still a little distant from me.” He clarifies, “She’s somebody I know a lot about, and yet really don’t quite know yet, but somebody I’m sure I will continue to get to know better as time goes on.” He did not quite relate to “Marian piety” as he was growing up; “…you know, the statues and praying the rosary all the time....” That Marian image seemed “very statuesque… kind of cold and hard and made of clay....” He adds:

…but I know that there’s a Mary out there who is much more real… and I’ve kind of gotten to know a little bit of that Mary, who is [in] Father Chaminade’s favorite story, the wedding at Cana.... Even though Jesus says, Mother, it’s not my time yet… she [says], yes it is [he chuckles], go change that water into wine...! She’s a take-charge kind of woman, [and] this is not the Mary that I was raised... to get to know.

He finds that the Mary at the wedding at Cana is “a different Mary”; “…and I like this other Mary, this Mary who brings Jesus into the world, who is the source of the incarnation of God.”

Everyday practice. Reflecting about his personal approach towards leading in a manner that is committed to mission and identity, Noel emphasizes a “collaborative, servant leadership, egalitarian approach to things.” He says, “…I hope I’ve tried really hard to help people to discover and use their own gifts and talents to make the world a
better place.” His approach is “not to micromanage,” but instead, “empower others to make decisions collaboratively.” He tries “to go to bat for” the people that he supervises; “…if there are demands or critiques of them, I think they know that I have their backs – I hope they do….”

The “normal way” for him to deal with difficult decisions involves “trying to hear everybody’s voices and lead collaboratively.” Reflecting about his approach towards making difficult decisions, he says, “Sometimes, hard decisions have to be made; but I think people are okay with the hard decisions if they feel that they’ve been listened to, that their opinion has been really taken into consideration.” He adds, “…people make decisions that I disagree with from time to time… that’s okay, as long as I feel like my voice has been heard.”

Sometimes, Noel finds it “a little frustrating” to work with some people who seem to spend “too much time trying to make [the] smallest of decisions”; for example, he says, “…just pick a word [he chuckles]! There [are] people like that, [who] have to spend a lot of time to decide what the right word is… in a sentence [he chuckles], for Pete’s sake!” However, he quickly adds, “…but I’ll be patient and put up with that, because I recognize that everybody’s different, and I love everybody.” In contrast, he observes, “…there are other people, who just are so spontaneous… and don’t really give much thought, from my perspective, about the important things. I think I’m kind of in the middle, and I like that, I’m comfortable with that.”

In his work with students, Noel tries to facilitate “…one-shot service opportunities, [as well as] longer-term opportunities for service and advocacy for social justice… raising awareness of important social justice issues and how they connect with
Church teaching.” He finds that he has “really great relationships with students – quite a few actually”; “[I] get to work with some really great student leaders and learn a lot from them, get energized by them, and hopefully they learn stuff from me too.”

Reflecting about the everyday challenges of being an educator, Noel recalls a difficult experience with one student; “so if there was any low to my work experience… that was probably the most difficult one.” The student-leaders of a group had approached Noel complaining about a student; they said, “…he is creepy… weird… socially inappropriate on a lot of levels, and we’re afraid of him… we’ve never had to tell anybody that they can’t be in the group; how do we deal with this?” In order to understand the situation better, Noel attended some meetings with this group; he recalls, “…and I was afraid of him [too]; I didn’t know how to deal with him, and I don’t know that I dealt with him well….” Ultimately, he “…had to confront him, [and] tell him that his behaviors are just so odd that he really can’t be a part of this group anymore.” Noel said to himself:

I need to protect these students, so I took the heat, [saying,] I’m gonna be the bad guy, I’m gonna be the one who has to say, look, I made the decision… and I think I tried to do it with as much listening… [and] as collaboratively as possible….

Noel recalls a series of experiences with organizing student events, which shed light on his interior growth in terms of “less and less ego” and “recognizing that it doesn’t have to be me…..” He recalls his attempts at organizing some student events, which he hoped would be attended by large numbers of students. He recalls, “…[at] times, I’ve met with a lot of resistance [such as]… it’s gonna be a lot of money; what if nobody comes….” As he worked towards organizing these events, Noel felt that he was putting
“a little bit of [his] reputation on the line….” The first event was attended by very few students; “…I was really disappointed, [and said to myself,] I’m not going to ask again for a while [he chuckles]!” A few years later, he tried to organize another student event, which did not have a high turnout either. A few years later, a group of students approached him; they wanted to organize a similar event; “…they actually did most of the work” and a few hundred students showed up at the event. Seeing this success, several of Noel’s colleagues got interested in the idea; they brought together several students to organize a bigger event that resulted in a massive turnout; “it was a great event… a fantastic event.” Noel reflects:

…me, 15, 20 years ago, would have been kind of upset that I hadn’t been the one who organized it… but me today, I’m so excited that this happened… and don’t care the least bit that it wasn’t me that organized it…. I think that’s not just a personal maturity… [that] happened just because I’m getting older, but it’s something that I think happened because it’s Marianist, because it’s in the Marianist world – it’s not about me, it’s all about us, it’s all about community.

Reflecting about “anchor relationships” at UD that support and nurture his faith and commitment, Noel says, “Gosh! There are so many of them.” He finds that he has “learned a lot from” his supervisor who is “…really great at helping to deal with conflict… ha[ving] no fear of approaching conflict head on, but doing so in a tactful way…..” He adds, “[My supervisor] sometimes trusts me as, sort of, a confidant, which I find empowering…..” Noel finds that he has “really very positive relationships with everybody on [his] staff”; “I really love working with my staff, they’re really great
folks… we get a lot of energy from each other, and a lot of creativity, and we get things done, and we start new things, and it’s really great.”

Noel resonates with “the ideas of Personalism,” which is “a philosophy/theology that places strong emphasis on the human person,” valuing “human freedom and responsibility,” as well as “the spirituality of the human person.” He reflects about the personalist approach of Marianist founders; “…[what] Father Chaminade and Mother Adèle and Marie-Thérèse were promoting very strongly, as a way to re-Christianize France after the French Revolution”; “…it’s about using your leadership gifts, and it’s about relationships, it’s about people… it’s something that I am just strongly committed to….” He reflects, “…I think Father Chaminade was strongly, and I think rightfully, influenced in a positive way by the French revolution, despite the fact that they were trying to kill him!” He adds, “[Father Chaminade] recognized that égalité, fraternité, liberté… the French revolution’s three [dogmas]… were right!” He asks, “But how do you do that within the context of Church? How does it apply to leadership?” He reflects, “…all those things are really, really important: fraternity and brotherhood and equality and freedom… and I think when you put them together – that’s ‘personalist’….” He adds, “…[and] you also end up with, kind of, a servant leadership… so I think all of those things combine very strongly.”

Reflecting about his approach towards inviting others to commitment, Noel says, “It’s gentle.” He recalls an experience of “doing a little bit of research” about Jesus’ invitations to persons in the Gospel narratives, and being “really struck by the number of times Jesus just said ‘come and see’…”; “…that phrase is just so inviting in a gentle way… it’s not like, you have to [he emphasizes] believe! …it’s just… ‘come and see,’
see for yourself.” He reflects, “…that really appeals to me, that sort of gentle invitation… it resonates, I hope, with the approach that I’ve tried to take with really everything….” He adds, “…but it [also] takes kind of a reaching out; and sometimes, I’m not a strong evangelizer, but I’m more and more recognizing the call to be that….” Noel finds that the Marianist way of invitation to commitment is about “…inviting people to the table and to community, and I think that’s really very Marianist.” He reflects:

…the more I research Father Chaminade, the more I see… not a conflict, but a tension between this call to be missionary, this call to be evangelizing, this call to be what he called a spectacle, something that draws attention, but at the same time, a humility and a sense of just quiet, humble, practical… invitation; and I really like that… that style that sits somewhere in that tension….

Noel observes that the “most significant faith growth happens” when persons are younger; this is a reason why he “like[s] working with college students so much….”. He reflects, “I’ve wondered about working more with faculty and staff… [however,] I’d rather work with younger people because the ground is more fertile; there’s more opportunity to see the bigger changes… the younger the person is….”

Noel finds that leaders who are committed to mission and identity had “seeds” planted in them, much before they came to work at UD; “I mean they come here as adults, and I think the vast majority of that work is done in younger ages.” He reflects:

When I think of the lay leaders on this campus that I admire most, I think they had most of it by the time they got here; and/or, they got here as students, that’s actually probably even more common… [either] as a high school student [or] as a
UD student… that’s where [they were] formed; and since being here, it’s just continued to grow and develop, you know, like me….

Reflecting about what lies ahead in his journey, Noel says, “…it’s always a surprise where God is leading me on this spiritual journey. So I’m always open to that….” He reflects, “…in all of my spiritual life, I’ve been really open to whatever is next, and that’s fun to me, to see where God is going to lead me in the next chapter in my spiritual journey.”

Reflecting about his participation in this research study, Noel expresses gratitude and encouragement. He says jokingly, “I hope you enjoy it [the interview analysis process]; I would find it tedious [he laughs]!” In conclusion, he says, “More power to you; I’m glad that you have that gift of taking the time to do that… so I just pray many blessings for you in this research and for everything else.”

**Structural Description**

This section contains analyses of the underlying dimensions of Noel’s experiences related to the composite phenomenon of “exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity,” which I will present in three parts: (a) personal understandings, (b) phenomenological structures, and (c) essential meanings.

**Personal understandings.** Noel finds that leadership, commitment, and mission and identity are “pretty well related.” He considers the “Marianist and Catholic way of looking at leadership” to be “special and unique and different”; “…because I think it’s about servant leadership, rather than a kind of a hierarchical, product-oriented kind of leadership that the rest of the world throws at us.”
**Commitment.** Noel’s descriptions shed light on his personal understandings related to commitment. Commitment involves: (a) A desire to serve: “I just wanted to serve and I wanted to make a difference…. I’ve always wanted to help and had a commitment to the Church in some way, shape, or form, and that’s always given me great joy.” (b) Living one’s faith: “I don’t know that anybody lives their faith as strongly… I see it… in so many little things that he does all the time; he’s constantly living how a Christian probably should live.” (c) Revealing one’s identity: “…courage… to be willing to talk about my Marianist identity… and not to hide it under a bushel, but to be really open about it”; “mak[ing] my interior life, exterior.” (d) A communal connection: “…coming to UD and finding this family of people who also were committed… that’s how I did make that connection….” (e) A sense of comfort: “So that’s especially cool [servant leadership, rather than hierarchical leadership], and that is clearly something that… I feel comfortable in, and something that I’m really strongly committed to…. ” (f) Taking a risk: “He [Father Chaminade] had to run off to Saragossa, but then to come back and say I am so committed… that I’m gonna come back… and try to re-energize this faith….” (g) Self-transformation: “…it’s just less and less ego… I think [this] has happened… in part due to my commitment to this Marianist charism of community…. ”

**Leadership.** Noel’s descriptions shed light on his personal understandings of a Marianist way of leading, which is “[a] collaborative, servant leadership, egalitarian approach to things.” Leading in a Marianist way involves: (a) Servant leadership: “…everything… falls around this sense of servant leadership, which is relationship-based – it’s very relational, it’s about love.” (b) Building God’s Kingdom: “…it’s about what Jesus calls us all to be and to do, I think that’s where the kingdom of God is; it’s about
loving others and serving others, and being willing to be served, and using your gifts.”

(c) A personalist approach: “I’ve recognized that I really resonate with the ideas of

Personalism… I think it’s about leadership, it’s about using your leadership gifts, and it’s

about relationships, it’s about people…”; “…it’s also at the heart of the Catholic Church,

[and] I think it’s certainly at the heart of what the Marianists are all about….”

(d) Leading collaboratively and consultatively: “bring[ing] people to the table”; “trying to

hear everybody’s voices.”

(e) Giving the credit and taking the heat: “…recognizing that

it doesn’t have to be me who is responsible or gets the credit for when things go well…”;

“…I need[ed] to protect these students, so I took the heat… I took the decision….”

(f) Leading out of a creative tension: Finding a sense of balance in the call “to be

evangelizing” and being “a spectacle… that draws attention,” while simultaneously

maintaining “a sense of quiet, humble, practical… invitation….”

(g) Being a role model:

“…this egalitarian approach to things, [she] really modeled that for me, and I hope I do

that half as well as she did…” Noel asks, “So what does it [Marianist leadership] look

like?” He answers, “I think it looks like how Brother Ray led this university…”; “[it’s]

the way you empower other people… you bring people to the table… you have open and

honest discussions. And when you disagree, you can disagree, and that’s okay;

[however,] at some point a decision needs to be made.”

(h) Visioning for mission: “…he

[Brother Ray] has great vision, for mission, for what we’re about, or what we should be

about….”

Noel observes several common characteristics among exemplary lay leaders;

“…things that I admire in the way they live their lives.” These include: (a) “…a deep

faith [and] a positive outlook on the world…”; (b) the word “incarnation” comes to mind;
“…there’s a sense of God incarnate in the world today… that’s very Mary-like…”; (c)
“…there’s a joyfulness about those lay leaders that I admire, and creativity”; (d) a
“…constant desire to make the world a better place – to build the kingdom of God, to use the Church’s language….” He reflects:

…as I say this [about exemplary leaders that I have observed], I’m thinking, these are things that I try to do [too], that I’m pretty conscious about trying to do; I don’t know if I’m successful, but these are things that I’ve tried to do as well…

Noel’s descriptions contain references to several historical and current exemplary Marianist leaders; however, the most central person in his descriptions is Jesus. This is highlighted in several phrases that Noel uses; for example: “…it’s about what Jesus calls us all to be and to do…”; “I was just really struck by the number of times Jesus just said…”; “I just want to make sure that Jesus is working through somebody….”

Another underlying theme in Noel’s descriptions is about the “gifts” of each person. He emphasizes the idea of “using your leadership gifts,” and observes that an important aspect of servant leadership is about “using your gifts.” Reflecting about his co-workers, he says, “…I really do value their gifts…”; “…I’ve tried really hard to help people to discover and use their own gifts and talents….” In reference to some of his own talents and abilities that are not formally related to his job role, he says, “…[it’s] not part of my job, but it’s certainly my avocation, and I feel called to use those gifts in some way, shape, or form….”

Mission and identity. Noel also reflects about his personal understandings of UD’s Catholic and Marianist mission and identity. He says:
It really is about building communities of people who will build other communities… not just community for community sake, but faith communities. Education is a means to get there, because people want and need education. But it really is about those faith communities; I think that’s the core mission of why the University of Dayton exists.

**Phenomenological structures.** Phenomenological theory suggests that every human phenomenon has universal structures, that is, existential themes in human experience, including: causality, temporality, spatiality, body-hood, self, and relationality. The following sub-sections emerge from considerations of these themes within Noel’s experiences.

**Causal influences.** Leadership commitment has a causal dimension. Noel’s descriptions shed light on his awareness of several interrelated influences that seem to have nurtured his leadership and commitment to mission and identity. These include:  

(a) Early development: “…I think the vast majority of that work is done in younger ages”; “…that’s really where the most significant faith growth happens….”  

(b) God’s calling: “…I didn’t feel that I could ignore the call from God… if God is calling, God’s gonna win every time.”  

(c) Finding others who share one’s commitment: “…coming to UD and finding this family of people who also were committed to justice, committed to community, and had great joy in that – it was like I found my tribe….”  

(d) Formational experiences: “Nothing is as strong as the [multiple] years of experiences that I’ve had with the MEAs… and particularly that weeklong formation [retreat]; that was really very powerful.”  

(e) Experiences that continually reinforce commitment: “And that gets
reinforced all the time… there’s so many little things all the time, and not just MEA things, but [also] just working with students…..”

**Experience through time.** Leadership commitment has a temporal dimension; it is experienced in relation to the passage of time. Noel’s descriptions point repeatedly to the gradual development of his leadership commitment to mission and identity; “…I think that’s another example of it being sort of gradual… it was there, and I picked up little pieces of it all along the way.” However, amidst numerous formative experiences, Noel also describes specific “moment[s]” that prompted “deeper level[s]” of commitment; “…all of a sudden in that moment, and I was like, oh! Now I get the passion and the drive, and why Father Chaminade did what he did….” It is in such moments that Noel found himself saying, “…oh! yeah, I need to really commit to this on a deeper level.” Noel reflects about how being committed has involved the giving of one’s personal time; “I think the biggest cost is time…. I don’t work a 40 hour week; 50 hours is probably a short week for me….” Another noteworthy aspect of Noel’s descriptions is his meaning making about interrelated events that occurred over many years, and recognizing his interior growth over time in relation to them; “…me, 15, 20 years ago, would have been kind of upset… but me today, I’m so excited….”

**Spatial awareness.** Leadership commitment has a spatial dimension, which Noel expresses in terms of social and metaphorical spaces. He expresses his awareness of continually being in “the Marianist world” and being in a “faith community.” He finds that he has “always been swimming in the water[s] of this faith community, of the Church.” He emphasizes the interrelatedness of these faith communities; “…building communities of people who will build other communities….” His descriptions shed light
on the intermingling of his personal relationships and social spaces; “…my wife and I are still very close with a lot of people in that lay Marianist community….” An important metaphorical space in Noel’s descriptions is the Marianist “table”; “inviting people to the table and to community… I think that’s really very Marianist”; “bring[ing] people to the table, and… hav[ing] open and honest discussions….”

**Expressions of body- hood.** Leadership commitment has a dimension of body- hood, which Noel expresses using physical and metaphorical expressions in his descriptions. He differentiates between the personal maturing of “just… getting older,” and that which comes from being in “the Marianist world”; “I think that’s not just a personal maturity… [that] happened just because I’m getting older, but it’s something that I think happened because it’s Marianist, because it’s in the Marianist world….” He makes several references to his own aging process in the context of his journey of leadership commitment; for example, “…even from a young age, I’ve been aware of my own desire to make a free choice, even as a child, to be a part of it [the faith community]”; “…when I was a young [professional], I felt like, all right, I’m the young guy, I’m the cool guy…”; “…when I was younger and had more energy… I don’t have that kind of energy anymore….” The metaphorical “heart” is another recurring expression in Noel’s descriptions; for example, “I think God has put on my heart, over the last many years…”; “I’ve always believed in my heart…”, “at the heart of the Catholic Church… at the heart of what the Marianists are all about….”

**Descriptions of self.** Leadership commitment is experienced in relationship with oneself, reflected in Noel’s statements containing self-descriptions. He expresses a deep sense of being personally loved by God; it was “life changing” for him to realize, “…God
answers prayers… God loves me so much, that he cares about me, even my stupid little minor things….” He finds that talking about his own sense of Marianist identity is an important expression of his leadership commitment. He recognizes his growth in courage “…to be willing to talk about [his] Marianist identity… to be really open about it.” He describes himself as a “pretty optimistic and positive person,” both exteriorly and interiorly; “I’m not usually one to sit around with [negativity] for very long; I don’t think I ever really have been….” He describes himself as someone who is “really, really grateful to God” and “always just [a] pretty open” person. He loves “being creative” and “really like[s] to imagine possibilities,” while simultaneously being “practical enough” to “put some boundaries on it.” An important theme in his self-reflections is the importance of not taking himself too seriously; “…I’ve always believed in my heart and I’ve always sort of said this to myself… [that] it’s not about me….”

**Relationship with others.** Leadership commitment has a relational dimension; it is experienced and expressed in relationship with others. Noel’s sense of personal self is interrelated with his sense of community; “…it’s not about me, it’s all about us, it’s all about community.” He uses the phrase “I found my tribe” as he describes his early experiences of encountering “this family of people” who had commitments similar to his own. His sense of interconnectedness extends to the entire world; he appreciates the “…constant desire to make the world a better place – to build the kingdom of God…”; “…it’s about loving others and serving others, and being willing to be served, and using your gifts.” He recognizes that “God’s working through lots of other people….” His use of the metaphor of “inviting people to the table” also expresses these interrelationships; “I think a Marianist way of doing leadership is very collaborative, consultative, done in
the context of the community, and ensuring that positive relationships continue to exist even when decisions are made that people aren’t necessarily in agreement with.”

**Essential meanings.** Several essential meanings can be derived from Noel’s descriptions in relation to the lived experience of the phenomenon in focus. Leading in a manner committed to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity involves:

1. **Being a servant leader:** Loving others, being willing to be served, and using one’s gifts to serve; helping others to discover and use their own gifts; leading in a collaborative, consultative, and egalitarian manner; bringing people to the table to have open and honest discussions; empowering others to make decisions collaboratively; ensuring that positive relationships continue to exist even when everybody is not necessarily in agreement.

2. **Building faith communities:** Finding your tribe, this family of people who share in your commitments; recognizing that it’s about people, it’s about relationships, it’s about love, it’s not about me, it’s all about us, it’s all about community.

3. **Less ego, more Jesus:** Having a personal relationship with God, with Jesus; recognizing that God loves and cares about each person, and answers personal prayers; responding to what Jesus calls us to be and to do; recognizing that God works through many other persons; desiring only that each person will know the love of God, that Jesus is working through somebody, even if that somebody is not oneself.

4. **Having great vision for mission:** Building faith communities of people who will build other faith communities, and education as a means to get there;
taking risks for the sake of preserving faith; desiring to make a difference in the world, to make the world a better place, to build God’s kingdom; studying and connecting with the passion and drive of the Marianist founders; recognizing the moments that call one to deeper levels of commitment.

5. Living one’s faith: Being a role model; developing a Mary-like, incarnational attitude; being grateful, optimistic, creative, imaginative, and open to where God may be leading, with a deep faith, joyfulness, and a positive outlook on the world.

6. Making one’s interior life exterior: Being open about one’s Marianist identity; gently inviting others to commitment; responding to the call to evangelize and be a spectacle that draws attention, but doing so in a quiet, humble, and practical manner.
Textural Description

This section contains descriptions of Dana’s experiences related to the composite phenomenon of “exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity,” which I will present in three parts: (a) personal journey, (b) interior experience, and (c) everyday practice.

**Personal journey.** Dana’s association with the Marianist family began when she joined the faculty of the University of Dayton (UD) approximately thirty years ago; however, she places her “real connection” approximately twenty years ago. She has served the university community in several teaching and administrative positions. Reflecting about her current administrative role, she says, “…at its basic, I think my role is to build community.” She finds that her work with students and faculty gives her “…a vantage point about the whole, which is pretty exciting…” She makes meaning of her work in “multiple settings” and “a lot of different things” by saying, “…I think in every case, it’s trying to bring people together and move the university forward.”

Dana grew up in a Christian faith tradition; she says, “When I was a child we regularly attended church, but it wasn’t the centerpiece of our family life. I was confirmed at the usual age and so forth, but it was never a dominant force in my life.” She clarifies, “Spirituality, yes; formal religious education, not really.” She finds that her “faith journey has evolved as [her] understanding of Catholicism has evolved…”; “I tend to focus on the similarities between [my Christian denomination] and Catholicism….” She remarks jokingly, “…I’m sure any Catholic scholar would be thinking, ‘You don’t
know what you’re talking about lady!” But to my simple mind, there are more similarities than there are differences.”

Reflecting about her graduate education, Dana says, “I think I was a product of my times.” She calls this period “an era of tumult in some ways”; “Kent State had happened… the women’s movement was starting – it was a great time to be coming of age.” During her graduate studies, she chose to take courses that were related to her interests in “public policy” and “social issues.” During some of her early graduate classes, she remembers saying to herself, “I didn’t want to devote my life to telling people what kind of toothpaste to use; it didn’t seem like it would be really making a difference in the world.”

Dana’s decision to join UD was based on personal considerations; “…frankly, I took the job… because my husband was taking a job [nearby]”; “I didn’t want to be at a public institution… I didn’t want to be in an R-1 [university]; I wanted to teach and do research somewhere where students mattered, where teaching mattered – that’s what really interested me.” She expected to work at UD for two years or so, and eventually, return to her previous place of residence. She points out, “In truth, I wasn’t drawn to UD because it was Catholic, because I didn’t even know the University of Dayton was Catholic until I came here to interview.” She adds, “…I [also] really didn’t know that UD was Marianist.” Looking back at her job search, she observes that the schools she was most attracted to were Catholic; she explains:

There was an ethos that I saw, that focused upon caring about the world, making a difference in the world… worry[ing] about ethics… pursuing [subject] activities
that make the world a better place. So, that seemed to be a pretty good fit with my values even though I’m not Catholic.

Dana recalls her early interactions with several religious Marianists; “…they didn’t say, ‘Hi, I’m a Marianist’; I saw the crucifixes around, I saw the chapel obviously, and I had a sense of ethos about it….” She reflects, “The fact that I am at UD was dumb luck. I could’ve wound up at a different institution, with a different set of values, and missed out on the gifts inherent at UD.” She adds, “What a blessing that I wound up at one of the only three Marianist institutions!”

Dana connects the beginnings of her commitment to her work with students; “…I did feel an affinity to the students primarily, actually when I think about it.” She recalls, “…I’d go to dinners, and students who would’ve received a scholarship would be talking about how wonderful this was, and I always had a sense of envy that these students had such a powerful undergraduate experience…..” She recognized the difference because, in contrast, her own undergraduate experience was that of “getting the degree, meeting good friends… but not walking away with anything really significant”; “I got a degree but not a sense of belonging at my undergraduate institution.” She recalls, “In reflecting on this [contrast], my attitude changed over time. I moved from envying UD graduates to realizing that I have been [she emphasizes] educated in a Marianist institution – this institution – because I’ve been here for so long.” She explains, “It [UD] shaped me, like water over the rock, and so it’s hard to pick when was the moment of change…..” She gradually discovered that Marianist principles were in tune with her own sensibilities; she explains:
…it’s funny… for the longest time, when I started to be a little more aware of some of these [Marianist] principles, I remember thinking… isn’t that a coincidence, that I believe that also; isn’t that a coincidence that my values match what the university stands for. And then one day I realized, it’s not a coincidence [she laughs]… the match is because I have been shaped by this institution!

Reflecting about her experiences at UD, Dana says, “I’ve always felt valued here… I rarely feel left out….“ She explains, “I’ve known several [Marianist] brothers and fathers over the years, and I never felt like they were not interested in me as an individual, and did not care about my thoughts, even though I wasn’t Catholic.”

Reflecting about the themes in the Marianist charism that attracted her initially, she says, “I think [it was] the egalitarianism; I’ve never been particularly interested in the trappings that come with authority.” Thus, she came to appreciate the relationship between Marianist brothers and priests; “instead of priests holding themselves above brothers, the fact that they are equals is very important to me.”

Dana mentions several lay and religious persons at UD who influenced her; the most prominent among these was a lay faculty member who was “the first mentor [she] ever had.” She adds, “…it’s kind of embarrassing to admit I was well into my 40s until I had a mentor.” She recalls, “He was a gifted leader, and really good at developing leaders….“ She describes one experience of “some of the pettiness that possessed [her],” when her expectations about whom she was going to be reporting to were not met. She recalls how her mentor “taught [her] the importance of cultivating the ability to see from multiple perspectives, and not tak[ing] things personally”; “…he helped me reframe the situation” and see it as a “sign of confidence” that one can operate independently. She
reflects, “…his mentorship was so valuable to me that I wanted to be a part of creating [programs] that would give other people an opportunity at mentorship. I also wanted to pay [him] back by ‘paying forward’ and helping others.” Dana reflects about the experience of talking about leadership and leading change alongside her mentor; she says, “We led the process that made some significant structural changes to the [subject] program, and it was such a wonderful experience to see change happen.” She adds, “The experience was so valuable to me that I [eventually] applied for an [administrative] job that called for leading change.”

Another lay leader that had an important influence on Dana was a supervisor that she reported to in an administrative capacity at UD; “[he] was a true gift…. I felt very empowered by him at a time that was very critical, because that was really my first official role…..” She adds, “I learned a lot from [him] because he was always so understanding and caring about my big gaps in knowledge and know-how.” She recalls the experience of approaching this supervisor with an idea for a developmental program for faculty; “he said [to me], ‘Well, that’s great, but you need to understand – this is UD; it would need to be for faculty and staff, because Marianists care about egalitarianism.’ It hadn’t occurred to me, but his idea made sense.” Looking back, she exclaims, “Thank heavens we did that… bringing faculty and staff together is one of the biggest gifts… and it came from our Marianist roots…!” From this supervisor, she learned, “You always hire people who you think are better than you are, so that they’ll propel the institution forward.” She explains, “…to be willing to have other people come and find a better way of doing things is a quality I really admire.” She recalls a team meeting in which her supervisor said, “I want Dana to undo everything I’ve done, to make it better; I know she
can do it; she has my permission to undo it.” She reflects, “I learned an important lesson there: It’s not ‘preserve everything the way people before you have created it’; but rather, ‘blow it up and create anew’ – if that is what is best for the university….” She reflects:

It resonated with me on some level because some of those lessons I [had] learned from another influence – my mom. My mother is an artist. Artists blow things up and start over again; artists don’t paint the same thing twice; artists try things anew all the time.

Receiving the Lackner Award was “in some ways, a turning point” for Dana. She admits, “…even today when I look at the people who’ve received it, I think, ‘Oh! I cannot believe I was ever selected…’” Being invited to be a Lackner Award recipient made her “reflect deeply about UD and our Catholic and Marianist traditions and charism…”; “…I grew into thinking reflectively about the responsibility it entails, and the honor in knowing that people think that you’re doing something that really advances the mission and identity of this institution.”

**Interior experience.** In the context of reflecting about her inner life, Dana recalls a book in which the author spent three weeks on an island, “reflecting and gaining a sense of herself”; “[that] seems like living the interior life to me. I have not made that significant a commitment to it [she chuckles]!” She describes herself as “a reflective person,” as well as “a person who fills her life up with busyness”; “sometimes I wonder if I’m trying to avoid having a significant interior life by being so busy… my interior life is not as rich as I know it could be.” She admits, “I sometimes don’t devote enough time to
reflecting about the future… because even though I’m an introvert, I’m people-oriented, and so there’s always a lot going on in the today.”

Dana describes herself as “an intuitive person”; “so I think sensing other people, being sensitive to other people’s energies, most times is a good thing, although sometimes it’s a distraction.” The advantage is “…being able to draw people out, and knowing that everybody has something to give….” The challenge is “…trying to get them not to overshare… trying to make sure that all voices are heard if they want to be.”

Empathy is another important dimension of Dana’s interior life; “I have my share of empathy.” For example, when she is in a meeting, she tends to “read the room… read people… sense if somebody’s off.” She observes that this aspect of her interior life sometimes gets in the way of leading; “…I’m busy worrying about the energy I sense in the room, [and thinking,] ‘This person looks grumpy over here, and what’s going on with that person over there….’ Sometimes, that can be distracting; there’s a lot of noise going on….”

Dana reflects about the interior dimensions of her prayer life; “appreciating things is an interior prayer to God… when I see the beauty in nature or in my herb garden or all around, in people, I think that’s a form of prayer.” She reflects, “When things are going well and people are getting along… as a leader… in those moments when things are clicking, and you sit back amazed and grateful that they’re happening – there’s a prayer in that.” In times of conflicts in relationships, she finds herself “praying for help in getting through these very tense times.” She observes, “It’s easier to be praying in a moment of gratitude than it is to be praying in a moment of need, in some sense….” She
adds, “…ironically, it’s not uncommon to really go to prayer when you are in a moment of need.”

Reflecting about aspects of her interior life that are not obvious to those around her, Dana says, “I think some people would not be aware that I doubt myself as much as I do.” She explains, “I mean, to them I seem calm… negotiating things well… and they probably don’t know that inside, I’m going, ‘Oh my God! Gee! Can I do this?’” She reflects about the challenge of living up to the high ideals of Marianist leadership, and sometimes falling short of them; she points out:

I think leading is very difficult and people hold you to very high standards, and so, I would rather hold myself to even higher standards than to low standards, because people expect more, to the point where sometimes, you’re a little exhausted and you want to say, “I’m human too, come on!”

She acknowledges, “It helps having had the opportunity to hear other people, whom I respect greatly, talk about the fact that they [too] fall short of their ideals”; “I am sometimes astonished to hear other people struggle [too], since my perception of them is of a self-assured and confident leader with no struggles.” She reflects, “I don’t know if it’s ‘misery loves company,’ but it’s comforting to hear other people, whom I hold in the very highest regard, talking about their struggles.” Reflecting about her self-talk when she finds herself falling short, she says, “…I’m trying to avoid the downward spiral, [which] in my smallest and most insecure moments can happen pretty quickly, where you can go from ‘I didn’t like the way this turned out’ to ‘I’ve never done anything right!’” She asserts, “That kind of thinking is not a productive pathway at all.” Referring to the
role of emotions, she says, “…there’s crying to let off steam; you don’t want to be that emotional, but being cold and thoughtless is not a good extreme either!”

Reflecting about her experiences with interpersonal conflicts in difficult relationships, Dana says, “My first reaction is to want to protect myself, and my first urge is to shut down and retreat; [however,] I quickly realize I need to try to see the issue from the other person’s perspective.” She recalls her mentor’s advice, “…be careful what you think of people because they quickly become what you’re thinking they are.” During these low points, she finds motivation in the thank-you notes that people have given her over time; “…I keep these gems in a folder – medication to counteract the rough times [she chuckles]… if things get really bad, I can always whip out the folder and read a few attagirls [she laughs]!” She clarifies, “Actually, it’s funny because I never [really] do that, but I know that they’re there if I need it – like having a tank of oxygen at the ready.” On really bad days, she recalls another piece of advice from her mentor, “…if you’re having a bad day, stay in the car!” She explains, “…some days you just say, ‘That’s it! I’ve had it! Should I go home?’ I never do, but knowing in my mind that it is always an option is helpful.”

Dana has never considered “uncommitting” to mission and identity, even during the low points in her journey. She clarifies, “…I haven’t [considered uncommitting], but I think that’s a timing issue also.” The persons to whom she has officially reported have been important influences on her decision to continue at UD. For example, when she experienced some uncertainty about whom she would be reporting to, she thought to herself, “…if the person appointed is somebody whom I do not respect, or feel that I could not honestly serve and do my best work, I will step away from my role.” She
reflects, “Having that speculative conversation with myself gave me a sense of freedom…” She asserts:

I would never want to commit myself to working for somebody whom I did not feel I could be authentic with, or give my best work to. I would never want to sit in a position and go through the motions. And that didn’t come to pass because… [the person I began reporting to next] is just a wonderful leader; so I consider myself lucky yet again.

Reflecting about the “price” of commitment, Dana says, “The one cost of my deep commitment to the Catholic and Marianist mission and identity has been less time with my family…. ” She reflects about being a working mother:

I sometimes wonder if my commitment and my drive have affected my kids [she wells up with emotion]…. I don’t think so. My daughter is in [a professional] school, she learned to become an independent woman; but my mom stayed at home, so there’s a conflicted part of me… but both of my children are great kids, so what am I worried about? Other than this, I can’t think of another price. She clarifies, “So I don’t know if it’s [a] price…. I mean I think it’s been a blessing to be here…. I don’t think it’s a price because it’s just who I am.”

Dana finds that her commitment has changed her interiorly over time. Early in her journey, she was “engaged in a lot of activity but not a lot of centering, and certainly not a lot of intentional alignment with the larger purposes of the institution.” In contrast, she finds that her “…work is more centered and centering now, than it has been in the past.” In relation to her teaching, she says, “I have been transformed from thinking about whether my students can effectively conduct a [subject] analysis, to thinking about what
we can be doing to ensure our students change the world for the better.” She reflects, “...we’re transforming the world one student at a time... moving people from being materialistic consumers to world transformers is really important; I’m not sure I would’ve understood that 15 years ago, but I do now.” She finds that she has a greater “sense of purpose” and “urgency about the institution and its future.”

Dana makes meaning of the Marian dimension of Marianist identity in relation to reflecting about womanhood and leadership; she explains:

…not being Catholic, Mary has never been a central force in my faith tradition... but her faith and her courage, and just having a woman being a symbol of an extraordinary leader, is very powerful for me as a woman leader.... I see her as a strong woman who is still a woman, someone who has courage and conviction, someone who had to do the unthinkable in giving up her son.

Dana finds inspiration in the story of the Marianist founders; “…what I find very powerful [is]... okay, Father Chaminade was the founder, but he could not have done it without these other two women; so Marie-Thérèse and Adèle were just as important....” She reflects, “…it was the collaboration, which to me is inspirational; in saying, here’s a group that gets together, and there’s wisdom in having more than one person.” She recognizes that the Marianist founders lived in “perilous times,” doing what they did “in the face of great adversity.” She relates their work to the present-day challenges faced by leaders at UD; “…they [Marianist founders] had the courage to stand up for what they believed in, and [in doing so] kept the Church alive. In the same way, we need to keep higher education alive, we need to keep UD alive.” She points out:
…one of my favorite quotes from Father Chaminade is about the brook… I find great comfort in it. [She reads,] “I am like a brook that makes no effort to overcome obstacles in its way. All the obstacles can do is hold me up for a while, as a brook is held up; but during that time it grows broader and deeper, and after a while it overflows the obstruction and flows along again. That is how I am going to work.”

**Everyday practice.** Reflecting about her leadership approach in everyday interactions, Dana says, “I try to care about people… I try never to hold myself above other people. That’s what I admire in people too.” A religious Marianist that has had an important influence on Dana is Brother Raymond Fitz, S.M. [Brother Ray], UD’s former President. She reflects, “I think about Brother Ray and his humility, which is so inspiring, or Mother Teresa or Nelson Mandela, you know, there’s a long list of leaders who didn’t take themselves too seriously.” She adds, “I try to be respectful, and I try to create an environment in which people can bring their best selves forward.” She strives to “give credit openly to people for the good work they do”; “I don’t have to be the person with the idea – I give credit where credit is due.” She emphasizes, “I don’t want to ask people to do anything I wouldn’t do, and sometimes I execute this to a fault.” For example, she recalls an incident wherein her team had moved into a temporary office space and she chose to join them rather than ask for a private office. She reflects:

I don’t think I got anything done during those few days because everybody who walked by would see me, and walk in and have a conversation…. But I hope it sent the message that I don’t… want things that other people don’t have, and I
think, generally, not holding yourself above people is the right thing to do; I think it’s what Brother Ray would do.

Dana describes herself as a passionate person and observes the “need to control passion when leading.” She recalls a particular conversation with her mentor; “I remember saying to him… ‘I wish I weren’t so passionate about things,’ and he said, ‘Don’t ever wish not being so passionate, but learn how to control your passion.’” She reflects:

Things that work in the classroom – positive high energy and the theatrics that go with teaching… these things might not work as well in a meeting. I don’t think I do that as much when I lead, because I don’t want to scare people.

She finds that “it would be very unhealthy for [her] to be surrounded by very negative people”; “…I fear that I could absorb too much of it and become that way.” She reflects, “I try not to spend a lot of time with really obnoxious people, and I try to surround myself with positive people, because I don’t want to be sucked down by peoples’ negative energy.”

Dana recalls two contrasting difficult relationships in her administrative practice, wherein “there really was no apparent and easy resolution.” Both involved letting go of an underperforming employee; “in one case, the conflict was resolved; in the other, it wasn’t.” She reflects, “One of the most difficult things a leader has to do is to let somebody go. The process involves a lot of interior conflict….” She adds, “Nothing about being a faculty member prepares you for this… at worst, you give a student an F [grade]; it doesn’t cut off a source of income for the student and his/her family.” Both persons were “vastly underperforming and not taking their unit where we needed to go.”
She recalls, “I remember agonizing over this and realizing that by not moving them out, it was harming a lot of other people, including students, [but] in ways that were less definable than them not having a job, but also real.” She consulted several persons and tried to respond “in the most humane way possible”; she informed each person of the situation, helped them to get the services of a career consultant, and gave them special projects in the interim period. One of these individuals availed of these opportunities and “went through a career change after leaving UD,” and later, thanked her for it. She recalls:

[He] called me up out of the blue, several years later, and told me that he had won an award for what he was doing, and thanked me for having created the opportunity for him to confront himself and his gifts, and to find a new pathway.

The case of the second relationship was “a totally different experience and outcome, and a relationship tension that never got resolved”; “[she] resisted the offer for a career advisor, didn’t believe she really would be let go, [and] continued to come and say things like, ‘I haven’t found another job; you aren’t really going to let me go, are you?’” Dana recalls, “I had to become extremely blunt about my intentions.” Eventually, this person found another job in a different capacity and left. Dana reflects about the contrast, “…I offered the same thing with both of them, but there were two very different outcomes… it was two different results because it’s really about the relationship.”

Dana describes another significant low point, wherein she experienced the stress of working with an abusive senior administrator; “…[this] resulted in physical manifestations that made me fear [that] I was having a heart attack.” She reflects, “In retrospect, I realize that [this administrator’s] notion of collaborating was… outward
facing… for appearance’s sake.... [In reality,] she wanted to make all the decisions and call all the shots, which she did.” When things did not work out to her liking, this administrator became “more and more abusive.” Dana recalls, “…after [receiving] repeated tongue lashing[s]… I checked into an emergency room thinking I was [literally] having a heart attack.” She reflects, “…it’s not worth going to the emergency room and thinking you’re having a heart attack – it really isn’t. You can only be a punching bag for so long….” From this experience, Dana learned, “…you have to communicate in a way that each person can hear. It is the receiver who has power in the relationship, because what they hear determines whether a communication is received.”

Dana’s practical approach towards decision making involves both interior and interpersonal work. She finds that decision making “does involve an interior life....” She finds that having time is helpful, and “split-second decision[s]” are often [the] ones that she “regret[s] afterwards.” She has learned to avoid being impulsive; “…and I think that’s God’s grace too [she chuckles] – not being impulsive.” She reflects, “When possible and appropriate, I think decision making that is shared, leads to better decisions…”; “being able to put whatever the issue is in the middle of the room and see it from multiple perspectives... being able to see from different perspective[s] is very helpful.” Dana prefers consensus building rather than autocratic decision making; “…I try to rarely be the one who makes an autocratic decision. We engage in a lot of consensus building.” She admits, “It takes time, but I think the decisions are better.” She clarifies, “Having said this, I know there is room for improvement on my part. I know there are times when people would just like me to go ahead and make a decision so we can move on.” Dana is grateful to have “a few very close confidants” whom she can
approach when she is struggling with a difficult decision or conundrum; “…depending on the topic, I will share it with one or two of those divine gifts… these are people who are willing to not say what they think I want to hear, [and] reflect a different perspective.”

She refers to the people who give her these gifts as “angels”; “God has sent me these angels to teach me….”

Dana tries to learn from her experiences, especially her mistakes; “I remember and feel humbled by some early mistakes I’ve made in taking sides, where I’ve taken a stand and then regretted it after.” She recalls an experience wherein she was quick to admonish one group of students based on a complaint from another. She soon received a visit from a colleague who inquired if she had asked the accused group to explain “what had happened from their [she emphasizes] perspective”; “at that moment, I realized what a big mistake I had made, in never giving them a chance to share their perspective!” She called them back and apologized for “having been reckless and not a good listener.” She reflects, “In retrospect, that was such a gift from [my colleague], because every time there are similar situations, I remember this situation and [remind myself] not to be so quick to judge.” Dana calls this experience “a learning gift from a colleague.” Thus, her approach is to “…try to remember to listen, try not to pre-judge, and when I do, be willing to apologize and admit I made a mistake.” She reminds herself of the quote: “Always make new mistakes”; “…I try to live by those words; as a leader, there are always new mistakes to make, and misunderstandings to set right.”

When she is trying to discern the appropriate Marianist response to a specific issue, Dana brings to mind the example of the Marianist founders, and also Marianist persons whom she has experienced closely. For example, she observes, “…in the past…
there’ve been moments when people have equated Marianists with being mediocre, and then, if you were truly Marianist, you would not hold people accountable….” She reflects, “…that is dangerous, because we cannot afford to be that, and that’s certainly not what Chaminade stood for, and it’s certainly not what Brother Ray stood for….”

Reflecting about her most important commitments, Dana says, “I’m committed to my family, I’m committed to making a difference… I’m committed to this institution, I have a sense of urgency at this point in my career….” She asks herself if she has developed enough leaders around her; “…that when I step away, the people will come forward and be able to do the work that I’ve been doing, five times better than I have.” Thus, “leadership development has become real”; “…there’s a commitment to making sure that people are ready to step into ever growing roles of importance, and that they are, in turn, developing other people who are ready to take on roles when they move on….”

Dana is always very surprised when people thank her for being a mentor; “…because I never think of myself as being a mentor; [however,] so many people say that to me… [that] I’m thinking, well, maybe I am one, because people are saying that, but I don’t think of myself as one.” She clarifies, “I don’t want to think about it because I’m worried that if I think that way, I’ll become conceited and no longer of use to people….”

Dana emphasizes that Marianist Educational Associates (MEA) and Leadership UD are “very important programs”; “I think that one of the reasons each works is, it gives people from different walks of UD-life, a chance to work with each other on something, and get to know, respect, and care about each other….” Reflecting about the MEAs, she says:
I think we are equipping people to understand more about the institution, but what is unclear is *how* [she emphasizes]… because it’s so relatively early, and because people are being equipped, but they don’t really, totally, know – *what for* [she emphasizes].

She suggests that a “natural next step” could be for the MEAs to “…continue to sponsor more and more opportunities for everybody on campus to learn more about the Marianists – our histories and traditions, and the gifts that will help this institution move forward.”

Dana emphasizes, “I think that this university can and should make good on the promise of collaboration, in ways that [other] universities typically cannot.” She expresses a sense of conviction that UD should “educate students who can transform the world through their caring attention to dialogue, through engagement in the communities in which they live and work, in their sense of egalitarianism.” She reflects, “…we [may] not [be] making big discoveries, but we’re transforming the world one student at a time – that’s important.” She asserts, “…sure we care about people’s research, but we also care about teaching, we care about our students, we’re private, we’re Catholic.” She asserts that UD needs “…faculty who will care not only about their own vitae, their own research, and coming and going as they please; but rather, really working to help transform students to make a difference in the world.” She adds, “…it’s about valuing human beings… helping them to graduate from here, not just with a degree, but with… a sense that one person can make a difference in helping to shape the world to be a better place.”
Dana explains why it is important to understand what it means to lead “in a Marianist way.” Referring to a recent “academic climate survey” at the university, she points out, “…one of the statements that had low agreement was… UD’s leaders lead in a Marianist way.” She reflects:

…I think that some of that could be that people are not behaving in a humble way, or in an inclusive and transparent way; [however,] it could also be that people need to understand what it means to lead in the Marianist tradition better….

She expresses gratitude for her participation in this research study; “…thank you for inviting me.” She reflects, “…you’ve given me a chance to think about these things.”

**Structural Description**

This section contains analyses of the underlying dimensions of Dana’s experiences related to the composite phenomenon of “exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity,” which I will present in three parts: (a) personal understandings, (b) phenomenological structures, and (c) essential meanings.

**Personal understandings.**

**Commitment.** Dana’s descriptions shed light on her personal understandings related to commitment. She says, “Commitment is really hard for me to define; I mean, to me commitment is really caring about something and throwing your whole self into it, with abandon, if you want to call it that way.” Dana describes various aspects of living one’s commitment, including: (a) Stepping forward: “We all need to step forward; ensuring UD’s future is not a job exclusively for the Provost and the President; we all have to embrace the values and the traditions that make this place special.” (b) Doing
what is best for the institution: “It’s not ‘preserve everything the way people before you have created it’; but rather, ‘blow it up and create anew’ – if that is what is best for the university....” (c) A sense of conviction: “The university’s mission and identity and charism have developed in me a conviction that we have something special to offer higher education and the world.” (d) Being authentic: “I would never want to commit myself to working for somebody whom I did not feel I could be authentic with, or give my best work to....” (e) Doing your best work: “…treating people with dignity and grace, and expecting them to bring their A-game to their work.”

**Leadership.** Dana’s descriptions shed light on her personal understandings related to leadership. She says, “To me, leadership is working with and through others, to achieve things that any individual could not necessarily do on their own.” Two artistic metaphors are prominent themes in Dana’s descriptions. First, the metaphor of the orchestra; “…we need to orchestrate a connectedness, and the whole is greater than the sum of parts – like an orchestra; each instrument by itself is beautiful, but together, you make wonderful music; that’s to me, the essence of Marianist.” Second, the metaphor of the artist; she says:

> I think at the heart of leading is a willingness to take a chance and to allow other people to contribute and not be totally controlling things, in the same way that I think that an artist has to step back and let God enter, and let other forces enter, and not try to totally control everything to the point where there’s nothing creative happening.

Dana describes several aspects of her personal experience of leadership, including: (a) Prayer: “…when things come together, and you say, ‘Oh my gosh! I can’t believe that
we were capable of this,’ and you sit back amazed and grateful – and that’s the prayer.”

(b) Egalitarianism: “…never to hold myself above other people,” nor “to ask people to do anything I wouldn’t do,” nor to “want things that other people don’t have.”

(c) A balanced organizational perspective: “Preserving the core and stimulating progress…[the] yin and yang, and both are important.”

(d) High ideals: “I think leading is very difficult and people hold you to very high standards, and so I would rather hold myself to even higher standards than to low standards…."

(e) Willingness to make “new mistakes”: “As a leader, there are always new mistakes to make, and misunderstandings to set right.”

(f) Respecting persons: “I try to be respectful, and I try to create an environment in which people can bring their best selves forward.”

(g) Personal calling: “I think I have been called to do the work I am doing now, working with others at the university to make the university a better place.”

Dana has observed exemplary leaders who demonstrated “graciousness,” “authenticity,” “humility,” and “egalitarianism”; leaders who were “really good at developing leaders,” empowering others by being “understanding and caring about [their] big gaps in knowledge and know-how,” and having the “willing[ness] to have other people come and find a better way of doing things….”

Dana observes several common characteristics in exemplary lay leaders:

They don’t hold themselves above people. On their exterior, they seem calm, and I don’t mean not passionate, but they seem approachable. They have a sense of humor, and there’s a deep caring for people. I think that the leaders that I’m thinking about… have a warmth about them – that is attractive, and they’re not
out to try to impress you with all they know by spouting facts and figures, and so forth.

Dana shares some observations about what the opposite of exemplary leadership looks like; these undesirable aspects of leadership include: (a) Being “filled with hubris”; “to me a frightening and unattractive quality is to be filled with hubris.” (b) Being passionate without a cause; “…not passionate for the cause, just passionate.” (c) “Chastis[ing]” persons at public meetings. (d) “Not behaving in a humble way, or in an inclusive and transparent way,” and thus, not “walking the talk” about “lead[ing] in a Marianist way.” (e) “Equat[ing] Marianists with being mediocre,” and saying, “…if you were truly Marianist, you would not hold people accountable.”

Dana observes several attitudes and mindsets that can become barriers to good leadership and leadership development. These include: (a) Not seeing the value in talking about leadership; “it doesn’t occur to people that it [leadership] could be fun, fulfilling, exciting, and very growthful – they just think of it as administrivia.” (b) Confusing leadership with management; “we tend to conflate leading with managing and with positional authority, instead of all the other ways in which it doesn’t necessarily have to be [about] position.” (c) Not identifying everyday academic work as leadership; “I think that higher education does not make it easy… for potential academic leaders to step forward, because we don’t think of ourselves as leaders; we’re not attracted to that….” She clarifies, “…although we lead in the classroom, we lead research projects – we do lead – but we don’t think of it as leadership.” (d) “Protect[ing] people” from leadership experiences by not setting up “conditions that lead to those opportunities enough”; “if we protect people from these experiences, I believe we could be stunting
their growth as leaders, and the institution is missing out on promising contributors.” She explains:

…when we say we are going to ‘protect’ people while they’re junior faculty, [and] we’re not going to give them any responsibilities beyond their research and teaching until they get tenure… we are creating conditions under which they do not grow an attachment to the institution. We don’t allow them to cultivate some of these seeds that grow leadership potential, that grow connection to the institution.

Dana’s descriptions also shed light on her personal understandings related to leadership development. She does not believe that many people are “born leaders”; “I think that you get opportunities, and you learn from them, and that your leadership skills grow over time; and if we don’t give people those opportunities, it’s a shame.” She asserts, “I think calling out and talking about leadership as a worthy use of one’s time is important…. We need talent leading our academic mission; we need to make it more attractive, and more accessible.” Dana emphasizes various aspects of what leadership development entails, including: (a) “Giv[ing] people a reason, a sense of place in the university… giving them a reason to care about UD and to know about UD, and to think about themselves and their own gifts.” (b) “Paying forward” through mentoring; “…he mentored me, now what could [I] do to mentor other people, and at its roots [this is] very Marianist.” (c) Learning through both direct and indirect means; “I know my mentor has influenced me for sure, and reading about leadership continues to influence me.” (d) “…giv[ing] people from different walks of UD-life, a chance to work with each other on something and get to know, respect, and care about each other”; “…anything that gives
people a chance to rally, and in the right scale, to be able to get to know each other, is an important investment in the future of this institution.” (e) Having “a sense of urgency in getting people to understand and embrace the ways in which UD is so special”; “…it [leader development] seems more important than ever to do this work.” (f) “…clarifying what it means to be Marianist and to operate according to Marianist principles… to understand what it means to lead in the Marianist tradition better.” (g) Developing those who work closest with you; “…I’ve developed enough leaders around me that when I step away, the people will come forward and be able to do the work that I’ve been doing…” (h) Recognizing that leadership development is a “process”; “…having a pipeline full of people who want to step forward and lead something – that pipeline is really important.” (i) “Giving people opportunities and helping them see that [educational work involves] leading, and to experience the positives that come with shared success, is important.” (j) Sponsoring “…opportunities for everybody on campus to learn more about the Marianists – our histories and traditions, and the gifts that will help this institution move forward.”

**Mission and identity.** Dana’s descriptions shed light on her personal understandings of UD’s mission and identity; “…to me the mission and identity is what’s truly core to the university, what is the defining aspect of this university, what makes it different from any other place….” She thinks about “the core” of the university, “why it exists”; “…lately, I’ve been realizing… that fewer things are core then we think. Because if you stifle change by labeling everything as core, there’s no room for progress.” While interviewing prospective faculty members, she explains, “…becoming a professor [here] is different from being at [other institutions] because, at our very core,
there is a commitment to the whole person, a commitment to social justice.” She adds, “[We have a] certain set of commitments that define how we should be teaching about [subject]; it’s not ‘dog eat dog’; it’s not ‘make whatever money you can’… [what matters is] the impact on other people….” She emphasizes that UD’s mission and identity “…calls for a different way of going about your work.” Most importantly, this includes, “…caring about community, not in a vapid, ‘kum ba yah’ sense, but that we’re all in this together, and that we need to pull together….” Dana finds that UD’s “mission of educating to transform the world” is critically important; “…if ever there was a time when we need this more – it’s now.” She reflects, “In a world full of strife and tension, having people who graduate and aren’t just consumed by materialism and vapid values is really important, and I think that’s what UD and our roots can do….”

**Phenomenological structures.** Phenomenological theory suggests that every human phenomenon has universal structures, that is, existential themes in human experience, including: causality, temporality, spatiality, body-hood, self, and relationality. The following sub-sections emerge from considerations of these themes within Dana’s experiences.

**Causal influences.** Leadership commitment has a causal dimension. Dana’s descriptions shed light on her awareness of several interrelated influences that seem to have nurtured her leadership and commitment to mission and identity. These include:

(a) Early resonance between personal and institutional values, coupled with the experience of a caring community; “I wanted to be at a place that valued [subject] ethics, I wanted to be in a place like that, but ultimately, [it was] the caring about community…..” (b) Divine providence and happenstance; “the fact that I am at UD was
dumb luck. I could’ve wound up at a different institution, with a different set of values, and missed out on the gifts inherent at UD.” (c) Gravitating towards commitment through one’s work with students; “…I did feel an affinity to the students primarily, actually when I think about it.” (d) Gradually realizing, “…it’s not a coincidence that my values happen to coincide with the university’s – the match is because I have been shaped by this institution!” (e) Seeing change happen through one’s leadership work; “I remember… it wasn’t until I chaired [a departmental] committee and had the opportunity to try to change the program in significant ways, did I get a sense of the possibility of working with others toward a common end.” (f) Experiencing genuine mentorship, and gradually developing the desire for “paying forward” by mentoring and helping others. (g) Feeling personally valued; “I’ve always felt valued here… I rarely feel left out… I never felt like they [Marianists] were not interested in me as an individual…..” (h) Being appreciated; “…[the award] made me reflect deeply about UD and our Catholic and Marianist traditions and charism…. I grew into thinking reflectively about the responsibility it entails…..”

**Experience through time.** Leadership commitment has a temporal dimension; it is experienced in relation to the passage of time. Dana reflects about the development of her commitment; “[the university] shaped me, like water over the rock, and so it’s hard to pick when was the moment of change….” She gradually came to realize that she has been “…educated in a Marianist institution – this institution – because I’ve been here for so long.” She recognizes that the university has longstanding “…values and traditions that make this place special.” She observes the decline in the number of religious Marianist persons over time; “there are fewer Marianists around now, and there will be
fewer in 10 years, and fewer more in 20 years.” She finds that “things have changed so much” as compared to earlier times when the “Provost was a Marianist, the President was a Marianist, the Vice President for Finance and Administration was a Marianist, to now – when none of those roles is held by a Marianist.” In relation to the present, she speaks of “praying in a moment of gratitude” and in “a moment of need.” She finds that her work is “more centered and centering now than it has been in the past.” She feels that she does not “devote enough time to reflecting about the future… there’s always a lot going on in the today.” She observes the “hard times” that many faith-based institutions have experienced; “what got us at UD through the last 165 years is not likely to get us through the next 165 years.” She experiences a “sense of urgency about the institution and its future.” She recognizes that leadership development has a temporal dimension too; “…you get opportunities, and you learn from them, and… your leadership skills grow over time….” She expresses concern for the future of the work; “the last thing on earth I’d like to see have happen is when I step away… this work ends.” She has “…a sense of urgency,” especially at this point in her career; “…that when I step away, the people will come forward and be able to do the work that I’ve been doing….”

Spatial awareness. Leadership commitment has a spatial dimension, which Dana expresses in terms of both physical and conceptual spaces. She finds that her work gives her “a vantage point about the whole,” which has enabled her to “see things from a different perspective.” She finds that her commitment is “so much to the entire institution…..” She emphasizes that workspaces, such as “separate offices,” “cubicles,” and “classrooms,” need to be aligned with the larger institution, which in turn is interrelated with the entire world. She says, “We need to give people a reason, a sense of
place in the university, so that it isn’t a series of cubicles for faculty members who are really devoted to their profession, but not to the institution.” She encourages academic leaders to go “beyond their own bubble” and “care about the institution and each other, not just about their discipline, and their own classrooms, their own research.” She finds that university-wide development programs such as MEA and Leadership UD are “worthy of our focus” because they “break down the barriers at [this] relatively big institution with 2000 [employees]….” She considers herself fortunate to have “be[en] around people, wise people…”; she recognizes that “being around negative people… [is] not a healthy place” for her. She recommends that leaders should have an “inner circle” of supportive relationships. She finds that “higher education is in rough waters.” Her conceptualization of the mission extends to the entire world; graduating students “with a sense of concern for the world, and a sense that one person can make a difference in helping to shape the world to be a better place.”

**Expressions of body-hood.** Leadership commitment has a dimension of body-hood, which Dana expresses using metaphorical expressions, and also some physical descriptions. Her metaphorical expressions of body-hood include: “throwing your whole self into it, with abandon…”; making decisions that come “from our Marianist roots”; “bringing people together, orchestrating things…”; “…cultivating the ability to see from multiple perspectives, and not tak[ing] things personally”; being around “wise people who could share things,” and being “blessed to have a good set of ears to listen”; feeling like a “punching bag” in the midst of a difficult relationship, and eventually, “heav[ing] a sigh of relief and gain[ing] some equilibrium” at the conclusion of the conflict; having a collection of thank you notes, which serve as “medication to counteract the rough times,”
“like having a tank of oxygen at the ready”; and recognizing that “[the university] shaped me, like water over the rock….”

Dana observes that her leadership experiences also have a physical dimension, literally. For example, in relation to emotions, she experiences “crying to let off steam.” In the midst of one particularly difficult relationship, she experienced “going to the emergency room” thinking she was “having a heart attack [literally].” She says, “I can always tell when I’ve overdone it, because I start to worry about my health… that means I need to let up a little.” Dana also speaks of the university and the Church in terms of a metaphorical body-hood; for example, she finds that the Marianist founders “had the courage to stand up for what they believed in, and [in doing so] kept the Church alive.” Similarly, she exclaims, “This institution… it’s got to survive”; “…we need to keep higher education alive, we need to keep UD alive.” She feels “…bad for all the faith-based institutions that have fallen upon hard times and have not been able to survive.” She envisions developing a “pipeline full of people who want to step forward and lead something….”

**Descriptions of self.** Leadership commitment is experienced in relationship with oneself, reflected in Dana’s statements containing self-descriptions. She finds that her commitment is part of her sense of self; “…it’s just who I am.” Her descriptions shed light on several facets of her self-concept, including: (a) Being “a reflective person,” but also “fill[ing] [one’s] life up with busy-ness.” (b) Being an “introvert,” and yet, “people-oriented”; “…I try to rarely be the one who makes an autocratic decision.” (c) Being “authentic” and “giv[ing] [one’s] best work”; “I would never want to sit in a position and go through the motions.” (d) Being “passionate,” especially in the context of the
“positive high energy and the theatrics that go with teaching.”  (e) Recognizing some tendency towards “Type A behavior”; “…but at least now I can feel like it’s energy applied for a purpose… I want to be making a difference.”  (f) Being a mentor, while not really thinking of oneself as a mentor; “…I never think of myself as being a mentor; [however,] so many people say that to me… [that] I’m thinking, well, maybe I am one….”  (g) Not being personally Catholic; “…that seemed to be a pretty good fit with my values even though I’m not Catholic”; “…I never felt like they were not interested in me… even though I wasn’t Catholic.”  However, Dana expresses her collective sense of self in terms of being Catholic; “…we’re private, we’re Catholic”; “…our Catholic and Marianist traditions and charism….”  (h) Being a working mother; “…my mom stayed at home, so there’s a conflicted part of me….”  (i) Being “a woman leader,” and drawing inspiration from Mary who is “…a strong woman… someone who has courage and conviction…”; “…just having a woman being a symbol of an extraordinary leader, is very powerful for me as a woman leader….”

**Relationship with others.** Leadership commitment has a relational dimension; it is experienced and expressed in relationship with others. Dana says, “…at its basic, I think my role is to build community.”  She aims to generate synergy; “the whole is greater than the sum of parts…”; “I don’t think I do anything other than try to promote community, bringing people together, orchestrating things, and doing things for the good of this institution….”  She reflects, “I think there’s a natural human impulse towards making a difference; and I think that with leading, being with other people, there’s a sense of accomplishment that you can get… that you couldn’t necessarily get with solo accomplishments.”  She recognizes her “share of empathy” and having the “sense to
listen”; “I tend to read the room, I read people, I can sense if somebody’s off…”;
“…sensing other people, being sensitive to other people’s energies…”; “I don’t want to
ask people to do anything I wouldn’t do…” She advises, “Anybody leading… really
should have an inner circle of others who can help.” She expresses a sense of calling
towards collaboration; “I think I have been called to do the work I am doing now,
working with others at the university to make the university a better place”; “…I think in
every case, it’s trying to bring people together and move the university forward,” and
doing so with a sense of “egalitarianism.”

**Essential meanings.** Several essential meanings can be derived from Dana’s
descriptions in relation to the lived experience of the phenomenon in focus. Leading in a
manner committed to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity involves:

1. **Being authentic:** Giving one’s best work; throwing oneself into it, with
   abandon; holding oneself to high standards; not asking others to do something
   one would not do; being approachable and empathetic.

2. **Fostering egalitarianism:** Not holding oneself above others; deeply caring
   about people; treating each person with dignity, grace, and respect; bringing
   faculty and staff together; giving preference to shared decision making;
   creating an environment in which people can bring their best selves forward.

3. **Orchestrating a connectedness:** Making good on the promise of collaboration;
   building community; bringing people together to move the university forward;
   drawing people out and recognizing that everybody has gifts to offer;
   recognizing that one is being continually educated within the university
   community.
4. Recognizing that educational work is leadership: Educating the whole person; educating students to make a difference in the world; caring about ethics and social justice; recognizing that our mission, identity, and charism have something special to offer to higher education and the world.

5. Preserving the core, while stimulating change: Embracing the values and traditions that make this place special; realizing that fewer things are core than one initially appreciates; always making new mistakes; allowing others to contribute, without controlling everything; doing what’s best for the institution, even if that means blowing things up and creating something anew.

6. Developing leaders: Paying it forward by mentoring others; having a sense of purpose and urgency about the institution and its future; creating opportunities for everyone on campus to learn more about the Marianists, our histories and traditions; working towards building a pipeline of people who want to step forward and lead something.
Jude: A Portrait-in-words

Textural Description

This section contains descriptions of Jude’s experiences related to the composite phenomenon of “exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity,” which I will present in three parts: (a) personal journey, (b) interior experience, and (c) everyday practice.

Personal journey. Jude’s association with the Marianist family began when he joined the faculty of the University of Dayton (UD) approximately twenty-five years ago. He has served in several faculty and administrative roles over the years. He describes his current role as that of a “traditional faculty member,” teaching courses and working on research; “I largely see myself as a teacher, and I would say – I’m a [professional] who right now is teaching; I see myself more that way.” He reflects, “…[my] role gives me a kind of a lever… I can build a lot of [professionals] who can see things the way I think [professionals] should see them…. His commitment to mission draws him towards activities that are “sort of outside of teaching, but related to it”; “…I am at a Catholic and Marianist [university], and I believe in that mission; so some of what I do… is also in support of the overall mission of the university.”

Reflecting about his personal faith journey, Jude says, “It’s not anything to be particularly proud of; it’s just simply by chance…. I was born into a Catholic family… and went to Catholic schools…. He wonders, “…if [I] had things going differently, maybe it would be different.” Jude describes his family as “very values-oriented,” but not particularly pious “in terms of religiosity or ritual practice…. He is moved with emotion as he speaks of his parents; “…my parents, from day one [showed me] – that’s
the way… you live life this way, and that aligns [and]… just matches for me, with a Catholic and Marianist nature.” Recalling his earliest memories of saying “yes” to faith, he says, “I think so much of it was just by default… that’s not a good story, but that’s really the truth, I mean, I was placed in that….” He adds, “I guess I never rebelled against it. I… had periods, in adolescence and young adulthood, of not particularly engaging in it, but I never had a rebellious side to it.” He recalls going through “all the sacraments in a traditional way,” and later in life, finding that becoming a father “reinforce[d] that for [him]….” He had several “[role] models all along… vowed people… extended family…”; “I’d say – that’s right, that’s how you live life, like that guy lives life….”

Jude describes the circumstances that led him to come to UD. He was working with a company when he thought to himself, “It’ll be fun to teach college once.” Soon, he started teaching part-time; “…I wasn’t looking for any connection with the overall university.” He did not consider a full-time position because his current employer was an integral part of his personal history. He recalls, “I knew UD as a Catholic institution; I really didn’t know Marianist….” As he went through his interview process, he was “very eager to learn about how the Catholic piece fits in….” To his astonishment, “…it never came up. I wanted it to come up, I wanted to know about it, I wanted to find how I could connect to it, and it never came.” He reflects, “So these folks [today] who say – we used to have something and we’ve lost it, I’m not sure that’s exactly right. So, in the interview process at least, the university dropped the ball.” He points out that there were “subtle things” and “symbols” that were observable, such as some Marianist religious persons.
Disappointed, he thought to himself, “…well, it must not be that big a deal, but I still like the idea of being at a Catholic, I like the idea of teaching, so I took the job.”

Recalling his early experiences at UD, and the beginnings of his commitment to mission and identity, Jude says, “The way I’m oriented, I’m gonna find out what to get involved in and do things.” Soon, he got involved in faculty development; “…that still really didn’t have a religious connection at all.” He also got involved in various groups and processes related to faculty governance; “I never felt particularly connected or happy about it… it didn’t turn me on to be discussing [faculty-related] rules…” As time went on, he found and took advantage of the opportunities that were more religious in nature. He reflects, “Little things… [such as] opening mass, attend[ing] not just graduation, but [also] the baccalaureate mass, things like that.” He chuckles, “There was not a great story in terms of a eureka or a-ha! moment. I, maybe by osmosis, grew into it.”

Reflecting about how he got involved in Marianist conversations at the university, he says, “I don’t know how, but I must have showed up at enough different things that were related to Marianist, that I got invited to a [Marianist meeting].” He says, “So it was… gradually, by my own election into real low-risk small things [that] built up to [me] being identified as a person who does these things.” Soon, he found himself at “more and more events, and working on more and more tasks that related to the overall mission at UD.”

He reflects:

This gave me a chance, over time, to get comfortable with the way the Catholic nature of UD plays out at a university. It also put me in touch with other like-minded folks who were at varying levels of their own development with regard to mission at UD.
Jude encountered the Marianist charism in two phases: “First… I think it’s just me observing people. Just seeing, and there’s a lot of great Marianist characters [both religious and lay] who were around here.” Second, he began to reflect more deeply about Mary and the Marianist story; he started asking himself, “Okay, what did Father Chaminade do?” He reflects, “I’m sure at the time of the French Revolution, there were many different kinds of needs.” He finds that Father Chaminade did not go about “convert[ing] a bunch of people to Catholicism” or “enforc[ing] canon law”; instead, he worked to form sodalities; “…and again, I could be totally wrong, but I think that these sodalities largely attended to the needs of those people.” In the same way, he asserts, “…I think our need is – we have an educational mission; that has to be tops!” He finds that Father Chaminade had to deal with “…many different needs, probably safety, security, food – kinda Maslow’s [hierarchy]… [But], I think he did it with a religious side; he did it through a religious lens; he did it with a Christian aspect.” Father Chaminade did not do it by “building a hierarchy and a structure; he didn’t do it by enforcement; he did it by getting a lot of people involved, the vowed and not vowed, which I think probably was a little more dramatic back then.” He finds that Father Chaminade “busted” the idea that “if you’re clergy you’re in, [and] if you’re not clergy you’re not really in.” He adds, “The fact that he had women involved and laypeople involved, I just connect to that history, at least the way I’ve got it built in my mind [he chuckles]!” He notes that Father Chaminade had a practical side to him:

…and this is just all my view, right or not; I see him as being not hierarchical, not enforcement-oriented, not authority-oriented, but with strong conviction, not
apologizing for what it is, with a religious perspective to it, involving a lot of people organically….

Jude mentions several Marianist religious persons who influenced him. For example, he recalls observing a Marianist religious brother “…taking care of finances to four decimal places”; “and yet, I know he [was] a vowed Brother!” Among all the religious Marianist persons who have influenced Jude, Brother Raymond Fitz, S.M. (Bro. Ray), UD’s former President, is most prominent in his descriptions; “the way that he approached things was just powerful for me.” Jude observed:

…this man [Bro. Ray] has to deal with running a budget; he’s got to deal with state law; he’s got to deal with building codes; he’s got to deal with lawsuits…. And yet… those things that you think as being… separate from this religious thing, he did all those things with just a little bit of guidance from these principles that he vowed to…. For me, that was powerful.

Jude finds that Bro. Ray had to deal with the “practicalities of things,” and yet “he found a way to not keep them compartmentalized.” He explains:

He [Bro. Ray] didn’t do it just in a separate [way, saying:] Now I’m going to go to mass, and now I’m going to behave completely differently because now I got this legal issue. He had a way, I could see, of viewing things through a different glass….

Jude reflects, “…for me, if someone was completely just religious, and kum ba yah, okay, people can do that; or if someone is just dealing with the temporalities, dealing with the practical issues, okay.” However, based on his observations of Bro. Ray, Jude found, “…there’s a way to blend those things, and that’s what I needed.”
Jude mentions several lay leaders who were “[role] models” to him during day-to-day work; “…for me, it was not as developmental to attend a retreat or a Mass or something that was explicitly religious. Those things are very easy to compartmentalize.” He points out, “…seeing [exemplary Marianist leaders] in the day-to-day practical issues of running a university, working their jobs in a Marianist way, this was formational for me, and took place in a great number of settings….” For example, he recalls an incident wherein he sought the advice of a committed senior lay administrator on a mission-related decision, saying “…I think we really need to go this route simply because of the Catholic and Marianist piece; everything else pulls in the other way… I wonder if I should be making decisions that way; should I be like that?” The striking response he received was, “If you and I don’t do that, then it’s over – we’ve got to be like that….”

**Interior experience.** Jude describes his understanding of the interior life in the following manner: “…it’s my innermost thoughts, my individual motivations, my prayer life, my self-identity, and then, the way I see myself fitting into the world.” He adds, “…the closer you get to me, the closer you can be to that interior life… in terms of a really intimate – what makes [me] tick – kind of [way].”

Referring to his approach to prayer amidst academic life, Jude says, “…maybe couple of times a month, I would go to noon mass, and I just found that refreshing….” He adds, “…whether or not I paid attention to mass, I don’t know; sometimes though, it was just a refuge… a way to have an hour….” During his years in administration, he recalls praying about work-related matters outside office hours; “…at home, or on the weekends, or driving into work….” He explains:
I would be the decision maker, and there would be two or three alternatives, and… no matter what I pick, I know I’m disappointing some people…. [Thus.] I would just try to ask [God]… kinda the serenity prayer… just [asking] for strength….

Reflecting about his self-talk amidst everyday leadership activities, Jude speaks of “…asking the Holy Spirit,” and sometimes, thinking about his late father; “I’ll think of him, and what would he do….” He highlights his concern for “…taking [the] time to say, ‘What’s the right thing here…?’” He adds, “For me, God is the ultimate right… what would God say about this?” He emphasizes the importance of being “self-aware” during tense times, and saying to God, “This is a trigger point for me [he chuckles], and I need to not do something that is gonna be the wrong thing.” He clarifies that his self-talk is not always “particularly religious,” but it is “moral and ethical… also rational….” In order to highlight the importance of “thinking about the big perspective,” he narrates an incident. He was concerned about the amount of money that was being allocated to a particular mission-related project; “…I didn’t want to commit that amount of resources to this thing; I didn’t think it was right.” He shared his concerns with a senior administrator, a Marianist priest, who gave Jude a “very practical” response. Jude recalls, “He didn’t quote scripture… [instead,] he said, ‘Jude, UD’s been since 1850 and we’re probably gonna get by!’” Jude reflects:

…his way was actually even more practical than mine – we’re gonna be fine.

You can’t do this every day, but maybe I’ll let this one go, maybe this is one you can… maybe [I] was being too emotional, too dramatic about something that, in the big picture, maybe really didn’t matter that much.
Jude finds that a lot of leadership is “hidden,” and therefore, not obviously noticeable by those around. In his role in senior administration, the phrase “pregnant with secrets” really came to mean something to him. He reflects, “That is so difficult for me. I was absolutely stuffed in my head with secrets, and secrets that I didn’t want to keep… if people knew this, oh my gosh! They could see then where I’m heading.” For example, the need to provide privacy to a recovering alcoholic, or the need to be discreet about the reasons for firing an employee; “…so much of leadership needs to remain internal, and that is difficult for me.” A supervisor once said to Jude, “…he will never know to thank you for that”; “…and [that] happened a lot.” Very often, Jude “went to bat” for a colleague and made “a big win”; however, he would also be the one to “deliver the news and [say], here [are] the alternatives,” and the other person would never know all that Jude did to make those alternatives possible. Jude reflects:

I’ve always got to entertain the possibility [that] they’re right, and sometimes they are [he chuckles]…. But I always did what I thought was right, and most of the time, I really think I was right, but people don’t know it.

He acknowledges, “Transparency is great, [but]… you really can’t have perfect transparency because there are confidentialities… things that people shouldn’t know, and there’s a lot of that.” He adds:

…when you’re not in a leadership role, you look at something from the outside, and [say], X happened and Y happened and then they did Z…. [But] no, maybe A through Y happened [he chuckles], and [then] they did Z, and they can’t tell you all those other ones.
Jude often shared some of his work-related dilemmas with his wife; “…my wife didn’t want to hear everything, and [that] wouldn’t be appropriate… but you had to have someone to process, I needed someone to process this…..” He reflects, “I can’t just process that with God internally; I needed to… [talk to] somebody who is completely [neutral]… [someone who doesn’t] know any of the players.”

Reflecting about the role of emotions in everyday practice, Jude says, “I used to think that emotions shouldn’t have a role, [but] I’ve evolved on that.” He advises others to “insert some space, some time, between getting data and reacting to it.” He finds that he “sometimes fall(s) short” of doing this himself, recognizing his impulse to “react in a way where the emotion would negatively guide [him].” He points out, “[I] always try to insert space in there, to make sure the emotions aren’t guiding me, the negative emotions… frustration, anger, disappointment.” He emphasizes that emotions have “some kind of a role” and “everything should not be just a spreadsheet and weigh[ing] the alternatives [he chuckles]!” He finds that he has gradually become better at “…recognizing that everybody involved has emotions, and [there is a] need to tend to those.” He finds that he is “not a big hunch or intuition person,” but rather, someone who has a tendency towards “quick judgment.” He reflects, “…so maybe, you either think I’m a quick read[er] of people or I’m just too judgmental to begin with; I think that’s true for a lot of people….” When he notices that he is making a judgment too quickly, he “…generally tr[ies] to insert some time and evaluate that.”

Jude approaches decision making with a sense of empathy; “I think what empathy means is… looking at things from [the] other’s perspective… I’ve always been able to really work at that.” For example, while discerning alternatives, Jude tries to “view it
through others’ eyes”; he asks, “…what’s this gonna feel like to them… from their reality… what conclusion would they draw… will they conclude that they are insignificant or unwanted… [or] we don’t believe them… [or that] this is not the right place for them…?” He adds, “…I’m sure I can’t do it perfectly, but I would work toward that.” Reflecting about his approach towards discernment, he says, “I’m not a big ‘Spirit guide me now’ kind of a guy.” He adds, “…that’d probably sound better if I were, but that’s not who I am.” However, he often notices “a connection”; “…places where the Holy Spirit has looked out for me; times when I look back and think, ‘Oh! The Holy Spirit guided me there.’”

As he moved into “more visible leadership position[s],” Jude came to a realization that two basic emphases were important in the practice of leadership; he explains:

One is: Do the right thing, and I used to kinda think that was the only thing that was important. And I have come to a realization later, for myself at least, that do[ing] the right thing is the first priority. [However,] another priority is: Have people think you did the right thing. I used to put no stock into that second one, and… I think more about that now….

He clarifies, “Now, the real danger there, of course, is switching the two. People who want… you to decide to do what other people will think is the right thing.” He adds:

I can’t say that I got deeply prayerful about those [administrative] decisions; I probably should, but… I didn’t have an overly religious approach…. I would pray for overall guidance, and I would always look to things through a moral and ethical lens….
Reflecting about the “cost” of commitment, Jude says, “Overall… it’s been very much a positive for me.” He adds, “I do think that being… overtly committed to the mission does at times, in today’s world, have maybe a little bit of a cost of it – not one that I’m concerned about.” Jude exclaims, “…tending to… mission[-related] things, cuts into my time constraints; it does, it does….” He reflects, “So part of that is just dealing with Catholic guilt [he chuckles] of saying no to things.” He explains, “I mean there is so much on campus… it’s constant; and so I say no to a lot of it, and I say yes to some of it….”

In the context of the cost of commitment, Jude reflects about his experiences of speaking up for Catholic matters on campus. Referring to “hot button Roman Catholic issue[s],” he says, “…I don’t find myself as a defender of everything in the Roman Catholic tradition… I never want to be the Catholic police, I don’t think that’s what commitment to mission is….” However, he is quick to add, “…but… it is Catholic, it’s not just Marianist – it’s Catholic….” For example, he recalls taking a stand on the importance of Christmas celebrations on campus; “…feast days mean something, you can’t just move it around, [and] it’s not just Santa Claus and stuff….” At the same time, Jude cares about not “alienat[ing] the people who aren’t Catholic…” and says to himself, “…if I went to a Jewish university, and they weren’t being Jewish… I would have less connection to them…. I don’t think we need to apologize for being Catholic….” For example, he recalls an experience of planning for a mass before an important administrative meeting; “…so-and-so is Muslim or so-and-so is against the Catholic Church because of… some hot button issue… I totally respect that… but… let’s have mass, you know what I mean?” Jude emphasizes the need to speak up for Catholic issues
even “…when the main group or the main popular thought is going another way…”; he says:

…it’s uncomfortable, but I don’t care too much [he chuckles]…. I try not to say it in a way that’s self-righteous or pious or exclusive…. I never felt victimized by it…. If you say them [Catholic ideas] right, I think people respect them more.

Reflecting about the times when his faith and commitment felt strained or tested, Jude says, “In my interior life, I certainly go through phases of [wondering] – this is really just the opiate of the masses… it just makes us feel good…..” He acknowledges, “I question the actual religious faith part of it with some regularity. But you know what… that doesn’t really change the principles that I think guide what we do…..” He adds, “I don’t think… gosh! Does UD matter? Does the way we do education matter? …for some reason, that doesn’t dip…. ” He reflects:

…whether all the doctrine turns out to be true, and there’s a creator at all… doesn’t change that this is the right way to run the world, the way UD believes that students and employees – all stakeholders – should be treated and should organize….

He clarifies, “Now, how much time I should spend in prayer, at mass, reflecting – that wavers for me; but the principles and the mission that come from that, for some reason, don’t.” Referring to his occasional questioning about faith, he says, “…I’m so rational and so science-based, it’s that imbalance that causes me to [question].”

Reflecting about the times when he finds himself falling short of living up to Catholic and Marianist ideals, Jude recalls the advice of a Marianist priest, “We should
not let the idea that your prayer life is inadequate keep you from working at your prayer life.” He reflects:

I found that somewhat liberating; here’s a priest telling me, everyone feels inadequate in their prayer life… that just means – [you] gotta keep working at it…. It shouldn’t have been [a] great, powerful insight, but for me, it really helped….

He explains, “…you deal with this guilt… through those phases… [when] my faith life dips, it helps to get through….” In terms of time constraints, Jude finds it helpful to occasionally go through a “No phase”; he explains:

…I do have the guilt, I do have a feeling that what I do is inadequate, but [I] try to work through that, and what I do is, when I need to say no, I just say no for a while, and then, things I can say yes to, I say yes to. And I realize a lot of people who are doing a lot better than me with it, but that’s what I do…. The older I get, the less I worry about that.

Reflecting about how his commitment has changed him over the years, Jude finds that early in his career he was more about “the Xs and Os of [professional] education – the details… [a] more rigid, more strict view of what student behavior shall be, how the university should be run.” However, over time, he has come to realize, “There’s more gray than I thought there was… there’s not [a]… singular right decision….” He clarifies that some decisions are “still wrong… but I have a broader tolerance for what I think might be the right answer.” He reflects:
…having been a dad… coming to realize more the struggles of life, and more the idea that UD will be fine, it’s not mine to defend. So I think… in some ways, I’ve gotten – ‘softer’ doesn’t sound right – I’ve allowed for more ambiguity.

He adds, “At the same time… I’m more convinced that we have got to not just produce [professionals]… we’ve got to get this other [mission] stuff into these graduates, and into our own employees, and really truly reinforce it here…."

**Everyday practice.** Reflecting about what it means to live one’s commitment practically, Jude shares a joke: “When you got a bacon and egg breakfast, the chicken contributed to the meal – the pig committed [laughter]! It’s a dumb joke, but yeah, the pig’s all in!” He reflects:

It’s all good [the mission]; no one would be against it, right? And yet, I don’t think everyone’s committed to it, and I think… when you can tell is when there’s a trade-off to be made… when there’s a sacrifice… [a] harder road [he chuckles]; that’s when you say, “Okay, now who’s committed?”

Jude emphasizes that commitment becomes evident when “…everything else heads me down [that] path, but that doggone Catholic and Marianist thing means I gotta do this!” He finds that many people think “there is one right Catholic and Marianist answer”; “…it drives me crazy, I find it so naïve…” For example, someone may ask, “Should you give this student an F or a C [grade]… which is more Marianist?” He reflects, “Wouldn’t it be more Marianist to pass [a student]? No, I don’t think so… [he chuckles]; there could be a lot of factors here that we need to discuss.”
Jude finds that the “little tools” that he has received from several Marianist persons are helpful in daily life; for example, he recalls a conversation with a Marianist priest:

…he got this big jug of water, and if you just put a drop of blue food coloring in it, just a tiny drop, the whole jug turns this beautiful blue…. [Similarly,] you don’t have to apologize; you don’t have to feel guilty about just being that little drop; just be the drop… cause if you don’t put that drop in, sure the jug is almost the same, but that drop makes all the difference!

He adds, “…I like those simple little tools… it makes me feel okay about doing my little tiny bit.”

In his day-to-day life at the university, Jude emphasizes the importance of having fun; “I think this doesn’t have to be a story of sacrifice and suffering… I think God kinda wants us to have a good time and enjoy. I like to have fun, you know, I enjoy humor!” He tries to make his environment “a pleasant place”; “I can do some of that through good [professional work]… [and] by being a good brother… father… colleague, or walking across and saying the right thing to somebody that I don’t even know.”

Reflecting about his day-to-day teaching activities, Jude says, “…when [I’m] teaching [specific subject topics]… [I] don’t have as much opportunity to talk about Catholic and Marianist as if I were teaching philosophy, right? But I don’t have to be teaching it every day.” He reflects, “If they [students] see a [subject] professor, every now and then, mention something halfway related [to Catholic-Marianist principles], it gets their attention – it has more credibility!” Jude finds it powerful when students notice unlikely persons caring about mission; “…then you go, oh wait a minute, we’ve got
people in Purchasing who care about this, and you see somebody in Parking Services who cares….” In the context of grading student work, he says, “I look at it from that [student’s] perspective, and then evaluate it from that perspective… are those valid issues? And if they are, I really have to consider those….”

Jude recognizes that “heck of a lot of things do play into the big picture”; “…whether it’s making a hire, whether it’s issuing a grade, whether it’s an interaction… I always try to say, ‘Okay, what’s my guiding principle here…?’” For example, Jude describes a dilemma that he is facing with a current student, a young lady who “struggles with [subject] concepts…” As a child, this student had experienced serious illness and surgery that was related to mental capacities. Jude says, “I was just struggling with this last night…”; “…I can’t pass someone through who’s not competent in [subject], right?” However, “…I think, oh my gosh! If that were my daughter… how proud would I be that she’s getting through a [subject] program….” He reflects, “…this course will end… and she will pass or she will fail. I wrestle with, and maybe pray about [it]; maybe not overtly say a prayer, but I do kind of say, ‘What’s going to be the right thing?’” Jude offers both challenge and encouragement to this student, he recalls:

I told her… how disappointed I was that she didn’t come prepared… [and] the next day, I said… “I believe in you, you can do this….” Maybe I’m confusing the heck out of the poor kid [he chuckles], but I’m conflicted myself. He adds, “…those kinda things bother me… we have to have a [department] with integrity, but maybe some things can be bent a little….”

Jude practices “external” prayer in the context of administrative meetings; “in other words… I [would] prepare a prayer, typically to start a meeting, or maybe for a
gathering or a dinner….” He reflects about his approach to leading prayer during official meetings; “…I’m not one to go to a book to get a prayer; I would always try to construct a prayer that would just give us perspective on what we’re doing, [and] remind us of our higher mission here.” He adds, “[I] always tried to do a prayer that was inclusive, recognizing everyone isn’t from Catholic or Christian faith; but I was also never one who would want to apologize for being Catholic or Christian.” He finds that people are attracted to an institution that consistently practices its identity; he explains, “…I could see myself working at a very good Jewish university, because I align with the main values… and I would respect them for being strongly Jewish.”

Reflecting about strategic planning and hiring for mission, Jude recalls a colleague who said to a working committee, “We’ve got to make sure that we write the Catholic and Marianist mission in this [strategic plan] early on… we can’t wait… we’ve got to get it in early on….” He recalls a conversation about “…a candidate who, by all academic measures, was top-flight, [but] ended up not making the hire… based on mission issues.” He reflects, “…maybe [it’s] not as much as I’d like to, but we really actually do make trade-offs for mission – that’s how you can tell if they’re serious about it….” He finds that there are other persons in his department who are committed to mission too; “so I don’t feel like an outlier, but I do think it’s a minority….”

Reflecting about how his commitment may have influenced those he works with, Jude says, “…I think they can sometimes see in what I do and how I do it that that is a part of who I am, and I can’t help but think that’s a little bit contagious.” He explains, “…if I’m in a room as an administrator… budget controller… hiring or firing decision maker… [or] faculty member, I do think that people know, this [mission and identity]
matters to Jude, this is a part of Jude....” He clarifies, “...I don’t think it’s my top label, but people know [this] about me; they know that what I’m doing will be informed by that....” He explains how influence works:

I hope they see [me] and say, “Oh! Jude is kinda into that Catholic and Marianist thing... maybe that’s a part of what he’s doing.” And I can’t help but think... that if they see that, they either consider behaving that way, or they respect that that’s being done....

He asserts, “...you gotta have some simple... tangible samples... and I do think that, at work, I am a tangible sample of someone who cares about that [mission]....” He explains, “...I am very data-based and very rational, and so I think if they see that someone like [me] has that side to him... gosh!”

In terms of decision making in groups, Jude emphasizes the need to differentiate between “consensus” and “unanimity.” He explains, “...it seems like here [at UD], there’s such an aversion to debate... [and] consensus isn’t good enough, it has to be unanimity... oh my gosh!” Jude illustrates this dilemma with a hypothetical example: “...so you’re deciding, is it gonna be chocolate or vanilla...? If there’re 27 other people who say chocolate, and I say vanilla, I’m perfectly good to go with chocolate... unless I express otherwise.” He reflects, “Sometimes, I hold back just because I know [that] if I express an opinion [that is] counter to what people are thinking, everybody feels like they need to bring me along... to find a way to make me happy.” He asserts:

...It is a part of the Marianist thing to have pretty extended dialogue and debate, listening to a lot of sides, but then... someone needs to own it and make a
decision and stand for it, and recognize that you’re not going to make everybody happy.…

Reflecting about his experiences of dealing with difficult relationships, Jude says, “…I can’t convince everybody – that was the right thing; so the relationships get damaged then. I just try to take the high road and do the best I can.” Jude recalls a particularly difficult relationship involving a firing decision. He describes an interaction with the concerned employee, a chance meeting in a public place, which Jude’s young son happened to witness. He recalls:

He [my son] happened to be standing right next to me when [the employee] walked by…. I smiled and said, “How’re you doing?” And she stopped, made both visual and vocal [contact] that made absolutely clear, the level of disdain that she had for me.

Jude decided to talk to his son about what had happened; he said, “…that’s a lady who is very upset with me, and doesn’t think highly of me; it’s from work…. I can totally understand why she feels that way… I had to make a decision that she was very upset with….’’ Jude reflects, “I know she feels that way, [but] I still think it’s my job to smile, be pleasant to some extent, maybe to act like I don’t know how much she despises me.” He adds:

…she won’t forgive me… I understand that… but I also… slept fine at night. I hurt for [her], I wish it weren’t that way, but… I did what was right… she’s not happy with me, probably always will be… it’s kinda my job to fly above that, and not worry… [and] try to [do] anything I can to help [the] person not hurt….
Reflecting about his approach in dealing with persons who are agnostic or antagonistic towards mission and identity, Jude says, “What I try to convey to people is that there is room for disagreement; you don’t have to align in every way with what we do.” He adds, “[However,] there are people who essentially are looking for a platform with a counter view, and I say this isn’t the right place for you then.” He explains, “Yes, we’re open… yes, there’s a lot of acceptance of a lot of different views; but if you feel like you need a platform for something counter to what we’re doing, that’s where we can draw the line…. ” Jude offers the following comparison to illustrate his point: “If you think Coca-Cola is the worst thing that ever happened, [and] it should be Pepsi, then don’t work at Coca-Cola, that doesn’t make sense, you shouldn’t be here.” However, he is quick to clarify, “…you don’t have to be living everything Coca-Cola… we have plenty of room for those who are neutral.” He asserts, “We can have a lot of neutral people. We don’t have much room for people who run counter to it…. ” He quickly adds:

…and we better keep a critical mass of people who are fully on board with it…. The ones who are against you are against you – work on the undecideds. We gotta have enough people working at this in varying ways, to make it continue to fly…. If we have a great researcher in [a professional field], and mission might not be [her/his] thing, we can have that…. [However,] we need to keep a bunch of people, in all different levels, and in all different areas at the university, who really are here for the mission.

Jude finds that many who come to UD have “a thirst for this [mission],” and that “we sometimes shy away from [talking about] that in a way that we shouldn’t.” He
asserts, “In other words, if we have time to explain [our mission] to a candidate for a full-time position here, or even [to] a student… it’s very attractive, regardless of religious background.” He reflects:

I think there’s thirsting in today’s world, for our mission, the way that we do it…. [Therefore,] if we have just a little bit of time, maybe a little more than an elevator speech… people would be attracted to it, and I don’t care about what their faith is.

Reflecting about the leadership responsibilities of the university’s Board of Trustees, Jude says, “I think, one of the things I do like is that at the Board level, we have mission and identity paid attention to… that there is a mission and identity [committee] is key, and I like that.” He reflects:

…when I see us want[ing] to grow and build more buildings… I don’t want to stand in the way of those things; but I hope that we’re not just headed down a road of [only saying], “Let’s be a more recognized university.”

He emphasizes, “I think in the future, we’re gonna need to keep giving it [mission] emphasis; it should be as high as academics and financials; it should be higher than athletics…. Let [mission] drive facilities… academics… finances.” He adds, “I do think [that the] presence of clergy is important; I mean that’s gonna go down [in numbers], but we should continue to try to recruit where we can, and have clergy be visible.”

Jude finds that the Rector’s office is important; he appreciates the fact that the Rector’s office is alongside that of the President. However, he points out:
…I don’t think we can rely on that one, because it could just be… we checked the box and there’s this person over there, but the President doesn’t really need to listen to him. So I think the Rector is not as important as the Board….

He adds, “Campus Ministry is absolutely critical, and I hope that it doesn’t fit neatly in any place.” He appreciates the many programs that have “…young people in leadership roles” and finds them “tremendously effective.”

Referring to the Marianist Educational Associates [MEA] program, he says, “One aspect of the MEA thing that I don’t like is… then you can point and go, ‘Those are the MEA people… we have them, so we’re ok.”’ He clarifies, “I like the MEA program, but in no way can it or should it carry the mission of the university [by itself].” He reflects:

I think the MEA program is very good, [but] I probably wouldn’t put it as high on the list as a lot of people…. I wouldn’t hitch the wagon solely to that though. I think there’s a danger that people… count on it more than it should be counted on.

Reflecting about the commitment of Marianist religious persons as compared to lay persons, Jude finds that there is a “distinction.” Referring to Marianist religious persons, he says, “Their life is that way, so I think there is a distinction, I mean [in terms of] their prayer life….” He adds:

However, I think that laypeople can carry the mission quite admirably, but I think we gotta work at it…. It’s easier to slip away from a lay person, but I think it could be admirably carried by laypeople. And in some ways, it’s better if the person who is carrying it is not somebody you’d expect to carry it.

He recalls what his lay supervisor once told him, “Now if we don’t carry it, the clergy can’t do this – it will die!” He asserts, “…if the faculty don’t do it, [and] it’s something
that [only] Campus Ministry does, it’s over!” He emphasizes that mission can be carried “from lay person to lay person…. Don’t wait on them [campus ministry] to do it; don’t feel inadequate about it; you’re perfectly qualified and credible, and God will welcome your service as well as the [religious person’s] service.”

Reflecting about his participation in this research, Jude appreciates the interior aspects that this study explores; “…taking this work life and mixing it with this interior life is the interesting thing for me…..” He finds that if he were just doing a professional job, it would be “…different than this job that has this mission, and I love that.” He jokes about his “great wisdom” and makes light of his insights; “I hope I’m being anything helpful at all, but we’ll see!” He often expresses encouragement and affirmation; “you are hitting it right on the head…”; “I think you’ve got a sense of what this is.” In conclusion, he expresses gratitude; “I think it’s been very helpful to me, to think about these things…."

Structural Description

This section contains analyses of the underlying dimensions of Jude’s experiences related to the composite phenomenon of “exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity,” which I will present in three parts: (a) personal understandings, (b) phenomenological structures, and (c) essential meanings.

Personal understandings.

Commitment. Jude’s descriptions shed light on his personal understandings related to commitment. These include: (a) Commitment involves making trade-offs and difficult choices; “when there’s a sacrifice… [a] harder road; that’s when you say, ‘Okay, now who’s committed?’” (b) Commitment involves self-giving; “when you got a bacon
and egg breakfast, the chicken contributed to the meal – the pig committed! It’s a dumb joke, but yeah, the pig’s all in!” (c) Commitment involves deliberate choice; “look to find it [the mission] and it’s there. Looking to avoid it, and that can be done as well.” (d) Commitment involves the urge to act upon one’s convictions; “I care deeply about mission at UD. If I were not at UD, I would live a good moral work life, but I would have to channel my passion for Catholic values in some other way.” (e) Commitment involves continual integration with practice; “…working [our] jobs in a Marianist way… weav[ing] this idea of mission meaningfully into my everyday job.”

**Leadership.** Jude’s descriptions shed light on his personal understandings related to leadership. These include: (a) Leadership involves influence, not necessarily authority; “leadership is influence on the outcome… I had a lot of influence on the outcome… I had zero line authority, and yet, I had a lot of influence.” (b) Leadership involves being guided by a core set of principles; “top priority for me, do the right thing; second priority, try to help people see that it was the right thing.” (c) Leadership involves being publicly observed for who one truly is; “I think they can sometimes see in what I do and how I do it that that is a part of who I am.” (d) Leadership has many forms; “…leadership from the standpoint of running the university [administratively]… leadership in terms of being a professor over students… that’s another kind of leadership.” (e) Formal leadership involves taking responsibility in decision making; “you can’t… sh[y] away from it or den[y] that [you] have authority, or say, it’s whatever everybody else decides – the buck has to stop someplace.”

Jude observes several interrelated characteristics in exemplary Marianist leaders. These include: (a) Being practical and holistic; integrating religious and practical
dimensions, and finding “…a way to not keep them compartmentalized.” (b) Being rational, and yet, guided by the Spirit; “[she] always gives me perspective… a lot of times, she will show me that, you can do this practical rational stuff, and [simultaneously] be guided by the Spirit.” (c) Being a bearer of the mission; “if you and I don’t do that [consider the mission in administrative decision making], then it’s over – we’ve got to be like that… and that was the way that I think he worked….” (d) Putting the mission first; “we’ve got to make sure that we write the Catholic and Marianist mission in this early on [in our planning]… we can’t wait… we’ve got to get it in early on…. (e) Being principle-centered, regardless of one’s religious connection; “[he] was really not, and still isn’t, a religious person; but I think he connected to UD from the principled view, and he did [it] without any religiosity…. I don’t think it was a God connection for him.”

Reflecting about what is a distinctively Marianist way of leading, Jude ponders Father Chaminade’s approach; “to me… he didn’t say, clergy shall do this, and this shall be the structure that shall pass this down; I think Marianist leadership aligns with those very roots.” He points out:

When I think of [Father Chaminade] involving a lot of people, being open and welcoming… clergy and non-clergy, men and women, and dealing with the practicalities of the day… and mixing that in, to me, that’s what we need to build here.

Jude finds it helpful to think in contrast too; the “opposite of that [Marianist approach to leadership]” is to “solely chase prestige,” “chase dollars,” and “chase other things and try to be someone who we’re not.” Being distinctively Marianist is about being “beyond ethical”; he explains:
Nobody says, “We’re not [ethical]”; [other universities] produce ethical 
[graduates]. [But,] to be beyond ethical, to be beyond just what’s right and what’s good and what’s nice… to be a step closer to God… we need to work toward it at UD.…

**Mission and identity.** Jude’s descriptions shed light on his personal understandings related to educating for mission. These include: (a) The primacy of being an educational institution: “First, we’re a university. Our job is to do a tremendous job with education. So if we are putting out accountants… teachers… sociologists… engineers… we’ve got to put out the best possible ones.” (b) Mission is multifaceted, and yet, distinguishable: “Our mission is complex, in that, we’re not a church, we’re not Catholic social services, but we’re also not just a technical institution, we’re not just an accountant factory, or a sociologist mill.” (c) Differentiating how we do what we do: “Now, there’s a lot of schools who would do that [educate well], who have nothing to do with any kind of a religious mission…. So, I think it’s that we do it a little bit differently.” (d) Developing a holistic outlook: “So, we want a [student]… who is broadly educated, [who] doesn’t see one’s [professional] life as separate from the rest of one’s life.” (e) Educating for both “competence” and “personal commitment to bettering human life”: “We have to have students… who begin with competence in their field, and then add an additional element this world so sorely needs.” (f) Helping students to integrate faith and work: “I don’t want them to just say, ‘Oh! I’m going to go be Catholic when I’m at church… or when I raise my kids’; you be Catholic when you’re in the [professional] field.…”
Jude’s descriptions shed light on his insights related to Catholic and Marianist mission and identity. He shares six interrelated reflections: (a) Mission and identity should remain ubiquitous and uncontained; “first thing I’ll say is, if we try to contain this thing neatly, in some named entity or structure, I think it’ll be a mistake. I think the idea that it’s messy and everywhere is good.” We need more “markers” of mission; that is, “…people who are behaving that way; the more it becomes [visible]… it stays real….” (b) Mission and identity continue to be present at UD; “the mission is still there. People can connect to it. It didn’t leave with the decline in clergy.” (c) It is possible, and even easy, to connect with mission and identity; “whether I’m professor… administrator… or in any role… I’ll easily see the tie to mission and work that aspect of the job. I think it’s easy to find that tie to mission with any role at UD.” Conversely, for people wanting to do the opposite, “it’s easy to rationalize that there is no tie to mission, and folks can relieve themselves of that obligation by rationalizing in that way.” (d) Mission and identity do not “just happen”; they require educating differently; “I want our UD [subject] grad to have both the competence and confidence to challenge ethical/moral/socio-economic aspects of a [professional] project.” Jude asserts, “This does not just happen, but instead, takes a different kind of education. I believe that a Catholic-Marianist education is the best way to produce this kind of a graduate.” (e) Mission and identity give deeper meaning to the act of teaching. Jude finds that if he were “just teaching,” he would have “been bored quite some time ago…..” He adds, “…but this idea that you get students who might really make a difference, not from just being a competent [professional], but being a great person on top of that, guided by
God… I wanna be a part of that.…” (f) Mission and identity can be an employee engagement and retention factor. Jude explains:

If UD went away and there wasn’t another Catholic and Marianist place, I’d go be a [professional]…. I’m here because it’s a Catholic and Marianist university; I’m absolutely certain that I would have moved on by now if it wasn’t this… higher purpose… this mission.…

An underlying emphasis in Jude’s descriptions is his central concern for “being true” and “do[ing] the right thing.” He often uses phrases that express his concern for being authentic; for example, “being true to that,” “be[ing] true to what I think is right,” and “being true to myself.” He often expresses his motivation in terms of doing what is “right”; “for me, the most important thing is that I’ve been true to what I think is right.” He reflects, “I think I know what the right principles [are], I know what the right values are, I know what God wants, if you want to say it that way, in religious [terms].” He explains, “For me, it’s being true to that; it’s what you are gonna do that you could be proud of, that you’re not gonna be ashamed of… if everybody knew everything, and you laid out everything.…” Jude often engages in self-examination; he asks himself:

How often did you not do the right thing for some selfish means? How often did you have emotion take over? How often did selfishness or my own ego block me from doing this? I think I can evaluate and say, “Okay, fell short here… did the right thing here.”

Another underlying emphasis in Jude’s descriptions is the power of unlikely bearers of mission; “…in some ways, it’s better if the person who is carrying it [mission] is not somebody you’d expect to carry it.” He finds that when students observe
professional experts practice and express commitment to mission and identity, “…it gets their attention – it has more credibility!” For example, “…gosh! If a [technical field] professor mentions something about social responsibilities, it gets noticed… more so than if somebody in [a faith/justice-related field] would… and I think that is important.” Reflecting about UD’s past, he says, “I think they [the university community] largely relied on some big symbols, [such as]… Brother Ray… [and other religious persons]…. “ Reflecting about UD’s present, he says, “…it’s more infused now, and less housed in symbols… and I think in some ways, that’s better, it’s more like the blue water… it’s more like [my colleague] telling me, we’re actually making hiring decisions based on this.”

**Phenomenological structures.** Phenomenological theory suggests that every human phenomenon has universal structures, that is, existential themes in human experience, including: causality, temporality, spatiality, body-hood, self, and relationality. The following sub-sections emerge from considerations of these themes within Jude’s experiences.

**Causal influences.** Leadership commitment has a causal dimension. Jude’s descriptions shed light on his awareness of several interrelated influences that seem to have nurtured his leadership and commitment to mission and identity. These include: (a) Finding “a personal match” between his personal/family values, and the university’s mission and identity; “…[it] just matches for me, with a Catholic and Marianist nature.” (b) Proactively participating in “little things” related to the religious nature of the university; initially starting with “low-risk small things, [and gradually] build[ing] up to being identified as a person who does these things.” (c) Being invited to Marianist
conversations; “…critical to my connection and subsequent commitment to mission was being invited into events outside of my regular job assignment that allowed me to see the Marianist facet of the university.” (d) “The impact of models”; “I, maybe by osmosis, grew into it”; “…seeing [exemplary Marianist leaders] in the day-to-day practical issues of running a university, working their jobs in a Marianist way, this was formational for me, and took place in a great number of settings…. …” (e) Observing committed lay persons who are both “rational” and “guided by the Spirit”; “…I like that [balance], because she’s a Ph.D., a [professional], you know what I mean? …so for me, that’s a better connection.”

*Experience through time.* Leadership commitment has a temporal dimension; it is experienced in relation to the passage of time. Jude’s descriptions reveal three temporal themes: gradualness in development, slow place of collective progress, and self-giving of one’s (life) time. (a) Gradualness in development: Reflecting about the growth of his interior commitment, Jude says, “[It was] kind of a gradual, almost by default, kind of a thing, for me.” He often uses expressions that imply ongoingness; for example, “Seeing those models really showed me, over time, how I could…”; “this gave me a chance, over time, to get comfortable with….” (b) Slow pace of collective progress: Jude compares the slow process of “messy democracy” in academic administration to “…the brook running by, that takes a little time….” In the context of explaining how he has practiced his leadership commitment amidst myriad academic and administrative activities, he exclaims, “…you can’t cram it all in; you’ve got to spread it over time; it has to be a commitment over a period of time.” He finds that practicing his commitment often results in “time constraints,” and that the Marianist approach to leadership can be
particularly time-consuming; “it is more messy, it takes more time, but [it is] the style of leadership that I think works…” He practices leadership commitment with a slow and steady pace; “taking [the] time to say, ‘What’s the right thing here…?’”; “…insert[ing] some space, some time, between getting data and reacting to it…” (c) Self-giving of one’s (life) time: Jude points out that the Marianist founders lived in far more “troubled times” as compared to the present; “…people say whatever time you’re in is most troubled, right? But… those were troubled times…. We’ve got budget constraints, and we’ve got issues with various things, but they could get their heads chopped off… line[d] up on the guillotine!” He appreciates the lifetime commitment that religious Marianists make; “…he’s a [religious] Brother, so you know he’s committed his life to it.” He distinguishes religious and lay commitment in terms of time; “…laypeople can carry the mission quite admirably, but… we gotta work at it; it’s not gonna be as natural if I didn’t commit my whole life to it, my 24-hour day – my time on earth – life to it.” He finds that practicing commitment requires the giving of time; “I do invest more time into….” Likewise, he finds that communicating the mission requires appropriate time; “…if we have just a little bit of time [to talk about mission], maybe a little more than an elevator speech… people would be attracted to it….”

**Spatial awareness.** Leadership commitment has a spatial dimension, which Jude expresses in terms of interrelated physical, metaphorical, and interior spaces: (a) Physically speaking, he expresses a continual sense of awareness that he is “at a university,” and moreover, a different kind of university; “I am part of a university… I am at a Catholic and Marianist [university]…..” (b) Metaphorically speaking, he finds that mission-based choices will often lead to the “harder road.” He exclaims, “…just be
the [blue] drop… cause if you don’t put that drop in, sure the jug [of water] is almost the same, but that drop makes all the difference!” (c) Interiorly speaking, he finds, “At UD, my inner life and my work life get blurred.” He finds this intermingling is “a blessing and much good comes from it”; at other times, “it is a bit of a burden that feels constraining.” In the final analysis, however, “it is a wonderful and somewhat unique opportunity that I’ve enjoyed for many years, and [it] allows for a more whole and consistent life, without the need to compartmentalize.” He emphasizes, “I really do believe that if I worked in a typical for-profit commercial enterprise, or simply in public higher education, I would have to totally separate this aspect of my humanity from my work.”

**Expressions of body-hood.** Leadership commitment has a dimension of body-hood, which Jude expresses using several corporeal expressions in his descriptions. These include: (a) Referring to mission as a living being: “Now if we don’t carry it, the clergy can’t do this – it will die!” (b) Using bodily expressions to describe mission-commitment: “It rests on our shoulders…”; “…when vocations come back, and that would be wonderful, but [until then,…] laypeople gotta carry this thing.” (c) Using one’s voice for mission: “…if you’re a vocal minority… I do think it [the mission] will fade away….” (d) A sense of doing labor or physical exercise: “We need to work toward it [the mission] at UD, [or] it can slip away; we gotta work at it”; “you can choose not to do it… it’s sort of like you can choose physical activity, staying in shape…..” (e) Pondering in light of one’s own aging: “The older I get, the less I worry about that [falling short].” In the context of reaching out to students about mission and identity, he says, “So I’m [age] years old… but it’s not like talking to a 23-year-old who really believes in it, you
know. Old people, okay, they get all this… [but] having young people in leadership roles… that’s incredibly, incredibly important.”

**Descriptions of self.** Leadership commitment is experienced in relationship with oneself, reflected in Jude’s statements containing descriptions of his sense of self, his personality, and his role at the university: (a) In reference to his sense of self, Jude describes himself as “a simple guy raised by good, moral ethical people.” He refers to himself as someone who “believes in the mission,” and expresses awareness that he is often “…identified as a person who does these [mission and identity-related] things.” His commitment to mission and identity is integral to his sense of self; “…in what I do and how I do it… that is a part of who I am.” He also expresses awareness of the fact that he is in the “majority in almost every way at the university,” notably in terms of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and academic role. (b) In reference to his personality, Jude finds himself to be “more on that rational side, as opposed to the more just touchy-feely.” He describes himself as “pretty open,” “pretty clear,” “pretty direct,” “not shy,” and “more on the extroverted side.” He says, “…in my leadership, I did not have to overcome an innate introvertedness.” (c) In reference to his role at the university, Jude recognizes that he represents the university in his official role; “…for the student, I am the university… or if it’s a faculty member [who]… has a contentious case, I am the university….” Being an educator is central to his role identity; “I largely see myself as a teacher… I’m a [professional] who right now is teaching; I see myself more that way.” In the context of other committed leaders at the university, he says, “I don’t think I’d be in the very top tier; I think there are other people [who] are more identified with it [than me]….”
**Relationship with others.** Leadership commitment has a relational dimension; it is experienced and expressed in relationship with others. Jude expresses this relationality in various ways: (a) A collective sense of responsibility: “We are the ones who own this thing….” (b) Extended conversations: “…more time for messy democracy, more time for all that collegial talk, everybody coming to a good realization [together]…..” (c) Seeking counsel from others: “I can’t just process that with God internally; I needed to talk to… somebody who is completely [neutral]… [someone who doesn’t] know any of the players.” (d) Mission-orientation in group decision making: “…a lot of dialogue… debate… present[ing] an opposing view… a lot of feedback… listening, true listening… and then, look at principles, and someone owns the decision and you move on; that’s kinda my deal.” (e) A sense of mutuality in consensus building: “…bringing people along and realizing they need to come up to speed, and they have to sometimes accept things that they weren’t happy with, and they may in fact be right and I might be wrong.” (f) Persuasion, not power: “I think that is somehow built into the Marianist thing, where you do it by persuasion, you do it by influence, you don’t do it by hierarchy and edict….” (g) A sense of empathy: “…looking at things from [the] other’s perspective… what’s this gonna feel like to them… from their reality…?” (h) Dealing with emotions: “…trying to contain my own, and then… trying to help and understand that we all have emotional reactions, and let me be prepared for other people’s emotional reactions.” (i) Being a relatable example: “…you gotta have some simple… tangible samples… and I do think that, at work, I am a tangible sample of someone who cares about that [mission]….” (j) Building and maintaining a critical mass of committed persons: “…we
need to keep a bunch of people, in all different levels, and in all different areas at the university, who really are here for the mission.”

**Essential meanings.** Several essential meanings can be derived from Jude’s descriptions in relation to the lived experience of the phenomenon in focus. Leading in a manner committed to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity involves:

1. Working one’s job “in a Marianist way”: “Weav[ing] this idea of mission meaningfully into my everyday job”; “whether I’m a professor… administrator… or in any role… I’ll easily see the tie to mission and work that aspect of the job.”

2. Educating “a little bit differently”: In a manner that is “beyond ethical” and “a step closer to God”; educating for both “competence” and “personal commitment to bettering human life”; preparing students who are “broadly educated” and “guided by God.”

3. Being an unlikely bearer of mission: “…in some ways, it’s better if the person who is carrying it is not somebody you’d expect to carry it”; someone who is “rational” as well as “guided by the spirit,” without overly compartmentalizing practical and religious aspects.

4. Being “a tangible sample”: Being a “model,” a “marker,” “someone who cares about” mission; “…in what I do and how I do it… that is a part of who I am.”

5. Being a catalyst in conversations: “…just be the [blue] drop… cause if you don’t put that drop in, sure the jug [of water] is almost the same, but that drop makes all the difference!”
6. Speaking for and about mission: Being open and inclusive, but also unapologetic about the religious side of the mission; “…if we have just a little bit of time [to talk about mission], maybe a little more than an elevator speech… people would be attracted to it….”

7. Keeping mission first, in planning and decision making: Making “trade-offs” for mission; even when it is the “harder road” or involves “sacrifice”; “we are the ones who own this thing…”; “if you and I don’t do that, then it’s over – we’ve got to be like that….”

8. Engaging in extended conversations: “Bringing people together”; fostering a lot of dialogue, debate, feedback, and true listening, “…and then, look at principles, and someone owns the decision and you move on….”

9. Leading through “influence” and “persuasion”: Not by “hierarchy and edict,” and instead, with a sense of empathy; “…what’s this gonna feel like to them… from their reality…?”; “top priority for me, do the right thing; second priority, try to help people see that it was the right thing.”

10. Allowing the mission to grow ubiquitously: Not containing it “in some named entity or structure”; “…the idea that it’s messy and everywhere is good”; nurturing “a critical mass of people” across all levels and areas within the university – persons “who really are here for the mission.”
Sam: A Portrait-in-words

Textural Description

This section contains descriptions of Sam’s experiences related to the composite phenomenon of “exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity,” which I will present in three parts: (a) personal journey, (b) interior experience, and (c) everyday practice.

Personal journey. Sam has been associated with the Marianist family for approximately twenty-five years; “I was [into my thirties] before I really learned about the Marianists.” His Marianist journey began in the role of a faculty member and gradually evolved in several additional capacities; “over time, my role has expanded beyond the campus….” In his current role at UD, Sam serves as an administrator and faculty member. He describes his role as that of an “influencer.” He explains:

…because I’ve been steeped in the Marianist educational tradition, now for [over twenty-five] years… [in] my day-to-day role as a faculty colleague, as a university colleague, in my interpersonal interactions with people, as well as in my teaching in the classroom… I have a responsibility to model Marianist attitudes, behaviors, values….

Sam describes his Catholic faith journey as a “gradual commitment.” He grew up in the Catholic environment of his family, parish school, and working-class neighborhood, wherein the life of his family and neighbors “revolved around the parish”; “[it] was more than simply a place one went to mass on Sunday….” His parents were very involved in the parish, and so was he; “there was this integration, a seamless web… that really [at] the core was the parish…. I can’t think of anything I did as a child,
activity wise… Boy Scouts, sports, other volunteer activities, that wasn’t parish-embedded.…” He reflects, “…that made me recognize the importance of that communitarian spirit in a Catholic environment.” He considers himself “lucky” in comparison to some people in his life “who didn’t have a good experience growing up Catholic”; he reflects:

…for whatever reason… luck… Holy Spirit… grace… I ha[d] a very good, happy experience growing up Catholic; I didn’t have any priest who tried to molest me… any nuns who hit me; I didn’t have any of that; I was nurtured in a very positive way…. 

Sam was close to several Catholic religious persons as a child; “this sounds contradictory, but [I was] ‘close from a distance.’” He explains, “I think, interiorly, I was connected to them, cause I watched them, I admired their faith, I admired their commitment to education….” Growing up in the post-Vatican II period, Sam noticed that “a lot of religious were leaving the orders”; he reflects:

So I knew [even] as a very young child… [they] could be getting married, [they] could be in a job… they don’t need to be here [in my school]. In fact, what they’re doing now is very countercultural – they’re staying… I admired that, I was nurtured by [that]…. 

Sam finds that his Catholic upbringing gave him an “anchor” that he continues to retain today; “…that anchor of faith and vocation and calling.” He reflects, “…as I got older, I began to realize… wow, my worldview was really… narrow at that [young] age…. 

However, in hindsight, he is grateful for his upbringing; he explains:
...I’m glad of it, because what it gave me was a foundation of values, norms, behavior, and culture, which then later, as I got out into the wider world... I could accept what was good... [and] critique what... needed to change....

Sam’s choice to become “a Catholic educator” came out of his intentional vocational discernment as a college student. Recalling a “seminal event” – a “Damascus Road kind of experience” as he was completing his undergraduate studies at a Catholic university, he says:

I applied to [professional] schools, got in, got scholarships.... I was all ready to go, and then, long story short... I remember thinking about things... [feeling] this black void... that said no, you need to be an educator... Catholic education is where you need to be, not [in a secular profession], but the broader idea of Catholic education.

Sam finds that he cannot separate his faith from his vocation; “in other words, my Catholic worldview, and so much of what it means to be Catholic is tied into education....” He reflects, “...that’s why I can’t imagine retiring, I can’t imagine leaving this kind of environment... I can’t see myself engaging in any other kind of Catholic organization but education.”

Reflecting about his journey as a Catholic educator, Sam says, “Ever since I was very young I felt I had a calling in Catholic education, not particularly Marianist at that time....” He traces his sense of vocation to his developmental experiences in Catholic educational institutions, all of which were run by Catholic religious orders. He recalls, “I always paid attention to those issues; I knew a lot about Catholic education, just avocationally... studying it, even though my degree was in [subject], I kept up with
Catholic issues….” Later, Sam took up doctoral studies at a major university that is not religiously affiliated. He recalls expressing to his professors, “much to their chagrin,” that he planned to apply to jobs at Catholic universities only; “…a lot of my professors at [the university] just did not understand this idea… [it] just mystified them [he laughs]; they thought that it was (a) stupid, and (b) dangerous.” Sam recalls a conversation with a well-reputed professor who said to him, “…even [when] applying to Catholic universities, don’t let the faculty know that’s why you’re doing it – you may not get hired.” Sam exclaims, “Isn’t that interesting? …and that became true, by the way, as I learned [that] at Catholic universities, it’s in some ways… ‘dangerous’ to be a Catholic faculty member from a professional point of view.” Sam acknowledges that this assessment “…is [probably] an overstatement.” However, he adds, “He [my professor] was right…. At first I thought, oh, he’s just being [overdramatic], but he ended up being right.” Paradoxically, Sam finds that the recommendation to hide his Catholic motivation actually “…fired [his] vocation”; “…it made me say, well, this is true, this is reality, the reality of what’s happening in Catholic universities, maybe I can be an instrument of changing some of that.”

At an early stage in his academic career, Sam considered “going into administration,” but ultimately decided to take himself “out of the administrative trajectory” because of the busy professional schedules of both his wife and him, coupled with the desire and priority for having adequate time with their children; “…obviously, you can’t have that kind of schedule and be Dean or Provost or President of a university….” He explains:
…I didn’t want to commit to an institution and then have to try to say… which obligation am I going to trim this time… [am] I gonna not see my kid’s ballgame or am I not gonna attend a university function? [I] just didn’t want to be under that pressure.

Reflecting about how he got increasingly involved in mission-related activities, Sam says:

…the [religious] Marianists and the lay leaders… saw me as a young faculty member… here’s someone who shows up at all the Marianist events… talks Marianist, Catholic talk… says that [he’s] interested, and so they kinda gradually pulled me in that direction, not [quite] intentionally [though]….

In the context of explaining why he got increasingly involved in mission, Sam uses a baseball analogy – having “a very small bench”; “…[by] low bench, I mean… there aren’t many faculty members, even at Catholic universities, [who] are there because it’s… Catholic… they’ve not made that vocational connection between being a faculty member and the faith orientation of the university.” He observes that some faculty members may rationalize their disinterest in mission by saying, “…well UD is Catholic, but that part doesn’t really matter to me, I’m a [subject expert]… they can do their thing, it doesn’t affect my thing.” He also observes some faculty members, “…those who were raised Catholic, [can] eventually, though over time… start to develop a vocational interest.” Sam contrasts these experiences with his own; “[however,] I came here, kind of, vocation-ready; I came here with a sense of – I only wanted to be at a Catholic university.” Over time, Sam realized that choosing to work at a Catholic university was “a correct step” for him. He recalls a mid-career experience of teaching some courses at
a “very prestigious, local [non-religious] university”; “…I taught there, and I enjoyed it, I liked being with the students, but it really taught me the lesson that the environment is very different, the ambiance, so to speak… the sense of mission is very different….” He reflects, “…so it taught me, midcareer… yes, I made the right decision, because these universities are different in character, and I would only feel comfortable teaching at a Catholic university.”

Reflecting about mission-related experiences that were especially formative, Sam says, “…they’d be [on-campus] talks given, and then fellowship afterwards, bringing people together to hear about Marianist topics; that’s always very formative and very interesting.” He also recalls going to Catholic conferences and learning about the charisms of other Catholic religious orders; “…that helped me put [the] Marianist charism in perspective with others that I met there… [it] allowed me to see the Marianist charism stand out, kinda in relief.”

**Interior experience.** Attempting to describe his inner experience of commitment to Catholic and Marianist mission and identity, Sam says, “[It] is just an unbreakable psychological bond in me… it’s really an unbreakable, psychological, emotional… spiritual bond; that this is my calling, and that there is nothing else; this is why I was put on earth – to do that.”

In the context of his interior life, Sam describes himself as “a reflective person”; “…I’m an introvert, and so I’m very reflective… I’ve always been.” He adds, “…I think that’s why… Catholic life resonated well with me. Some of my earliest best memories are – the quiet of the church… the solemnity of the mass, the artwork… [these] made me think and reflect.” He recalls visiting the houses of religious orders that he encountered
while growing up; “...the quiet, the ambiance, the sense of peace... all of that resonated well with my temperament...”

Reflecting about how he prays in the midst of his everyday leadership activities, Sam says, “My best prayer is interior... my prayer life and my spiritual life is very interior.” He says, “...going to mass is actually a very difficult thing for me to do... it’s noisy, in my mind... I’ve gotta acknowledge people around me....” He clarifies, “I go because I understand the importance of [the] presence of the Eucharist... [and] I’ve been to occasional silent masses. Oh! Those are so wonderful, and so prayerful for me, and so spiritual....” Sam finds that “spiritual reading” is not a prayerful activity for him; “[for me], it’s much more [about] centered prayer; it’s much more reflective and quiet and contemplative.” He adds, “...what I have to do [amidst a problem or crisis] is to be quiet in a room, and sit quiet, maybe with a lit candle and some prayer....”

Sam finds that his leadership-related self-talk tends to be “negative”; “I always immediately recognize... what I feel I didn’t do right, what I feel I should have said.... An hour later, I think, ‘Oh! If I would only have said this....’” He admits, “...I’m extremely hard on myself, at least that’s what my friends and people close to me say....” When he reflects about a recent interpersonal encounter, Sam “begins with the negative”; “…what I didn’t do, what I could have done better, what didn’t go right....” He consciously prepares for future interactions, “…I have to be prepared for what to say; next time, I will know to do X, Y, or Z... next time, I [will] have certain catchphrases that I will try to remember... [and] hopefully do better....”

Sam reflects about aspects of his interior life that are hidden, that is, not obvious to those around him; “I think that [many] would be unaware of the fact that my
spirituality and my prayer life is interiorly driven.” He explains, “Although I’m an introvert… I’m very good, I feel, at acting like an extrovert when I have to…. [Thus,] some people… [would] be surprised that I [am] an introvert, and… that my prayer life is so contemplative, so interiorly driven….” He adds, “I’m not pious… [in terms of] the external symbols and the external behaviors”; thus, “…[people] would be surprised at how much old-school Catholic stuff I like… old-school hymns… the rosary… the smells and bells, and the solemnity of high mass… I love that stuff!” He adds, “I love Gregorian chant… reading some of the very old texts… the Acts of the Apostles and some just non-canonical… early Christian writings…. Sam finds that people could make incorrect assumptions about him; “…they see me being extroverted… sometimes, [the] life of the party”; “…they’d be surprised, cause I think they might think [that] I’m more modern than I am!”

On the “spectrum of being task-oriented and relationship-oriented,” Sam tends to be “heavier on the task orientation.” From his perspective, “…behind that relationship is a task.” He uses the phrase “party with a purpose” to describe his approach towards balancing his personal task-orientation with Marianist relationship-orientation; “[that’s] how I’ve had to frame what I do to motivate me, to move me, to focus me to develop relationships…. This [the phrase ‘party with a purpose’] sounds trite, but it helps me remember…. When he is invited to an event on campus, he asks himself, “…what needs to happen for me to say, okay, that was [a] successful engagement?” He asserts, “So I don’t go just to meet people; I’d rather be home reading a good book…. I don’t go just to build relationships….” He clarifies, “…I have to be… build[ing] relationships because I see it serving the mission – my mission, and hopefully the mission of the other
people in Catholic and Marianist identity.” He also points out the “shadow side” of his task-orientation; “…you can be[come] a bit too instrumental… [and] not appreciate just the softness, so to speak, of being with other people, the relational side – in and of itself… sometimes, it makes me discount activities.” He recalls occasions when he felt unsure of how his participation at an event would fit into the mission; “…I’[d] go anyway, and find out that, actually, it was really important for mission…. …” Sam says, “I’m not really relational, and it’s not hypocritical on my side either…. …” He explains: …when people say, how do you want other people to be toward you – this is the task [oriented] person coming out – I say, I want them to use me, I want to be used up; now obviously what that means in context is – I want to be used for good purposes…. He recalls a conversation he had with some young persons on campus who told him [and a fellow lay administrator] about their “struggle with trying to get some new prayer life introduced at the university that [c]ould offend some of the more traditional [persons]….” Sam [and the fellow administrator] expressed openness and encouragement: …I said, “Use me, tell them that I’m supportive, throw me under the bus… let me take the heat off of you, tell them that I asked for you to start thinking about that, and make them come to me…. …” He reflects: Someone… more sensitive about relationships wouldn’t take that attitude, but I’m happy to be used… I’m happy to take on people if they need to be taken on…. Sometimes, people have to be told, wait a minute [Title], you might be Catholic
but that’s not very Christian. Now, I say that with humility, cause I know that sometimes I need to be told that too….

Sam reflects about the Marian dimensions of his interior life; “Marian and leadership, for me, has developed over time in a very rich way.” Recalling the beginnings of his Marian connection, he says, “My Marian devotion began very early because of my mother, she was very devoted to Mary… and I was very close to my mom, so I kept that in the back of my mind.” During his childhood, Sam did not give a lot of thought to how Mary spoke to him “personally”; “for my mom – great, as an icon – great, but not to me in terms of my personal behavior.” He reflects, “…that’s how the Marianist charism has been so important to me, and rich in terms of my leadership…. It has helped me, allowed me to… reflect more deeply about the feminine side of leadership.” He points out, however, that the phrase “feminine side of leadership” is “…transitioning to an old school way of thinking”; he explains:

…just to say that is setting up a boundary; it’s identifying that kind of leadership style… as being gender-based; well, if it’s gender-based, that means that I can’t do [it] and that’s unfair to me… to people I lead… to my students….

He adds, “As I reflect about Marian leadership and the Marian narrative… how that can influence leadership, I think [of] certain values like courage and strength, but also humility and nurturing… two traditionally male [or] masculine, two traditionally female or feminine…. He emphasizes that “Mary encompasses” all of them; “…she needed to combine all of those [virtues]….”

The virtue of humility is an important emphasis in Sam’s interior experience. Sam finds that humility involves leading and influencing others by saying, “…I don’t
know it all; I know I don’t know it all; my position doesn’t – all of a sudden – bless me with knowing it all…. I’ve made mistakes; here’s how I’ve made mistakes….” He recalls a piece of advice he received from one of his supervisors in an early-career, secular job; “…one of… the best things that’s ever been said to me by a higher-up manager… was, ‘I hope you make a lot of mistakes.’” Sam explains:

Now what he meant was, learn from them, but it took a lot of pressure off of me, because the other pressure is – never make a mistake or you get fired…. So that idea of humility, I think, is very much part of twenty-first-century organizations….

He reflects, “…Catholicism allows us that comfort zone that says, like [my supervisor]… I hope [you] learn from [your mistakes]… confess them and come back… that’s what the grace of God is all about; I believe in redemption, thank God!”

Reflecting about his experiences of falling short of the high ideals that Marianist mission and identity imply, Sam uses a baseball analogy; “…to be one of the best baseball players is to hit with [a] 300 hitting average; that means you strike out, or you don’t get a hit, seven out of ten times! You fail seven out of ten times….” He asserts, “…now, just because most of the times we fail, doesn’t mean we don’t pick ourselves up and, continuing the metaphor, we get back in the batter’s box… and try to do better.” He reflects:

I don’t know how often I fail, but I’m willing to accept the fact that I fail more often, probably, than I succeed. So as long as I keep that in mind, it keeps me humble, but the commitment… the discipline, and the courage keep me getting back into the batter’s box and trying again.
When his non-Catholic friends ask Sam about why he is “so Catholic,” he lightheartedly responds, “…because I need the Catholic Church, because I’m such a big sinner!” He clarifies, “…I say that [in a] trite, joking [manner] with my friends, so they don’t think I’m so serious about it all the time; but on a more serious note, it’s true!” He acknowledges, “…I know I’m weak, I know I do things I shouldn’t do, I know I sin a lot, and often in big ways… if I wasn’t such a big sinner, I wouldn’t need the Catholic Church…..” Sam emphasizes the importance of saying to oneself, “Yep, you did it! You did that [specific thing], because you’re human, now what are you gonna do?” He answers, “…we apologize for it… we take the ownership of it, we confess it, we get redeemed by grace, and we get up and start to do better next time.”

Sam finds that he has gradually become “less and less self-righteous” and “more and more understanding of weakness and sin, other people’s foibles and [his] own…..” He explains, “…I’ve seen it so often now, I mean I’ve seen redemption happen so often… that I’ve come to be much more sympathetic and empathetic about people’s weaknesses.” For example, in the context of working with students, he says, “…I don’t think there’s anything that the student could tell me today… that would shock me, or that would have me turn against them.” He adds, “In fact, in many ways, the more egregious their failure… the more empathetic I become… the more accepting, and the more nurturing toward them I become.” He observes, “I’ve seen a lot of people… [and] this could be some [Church leaders], they get very condemning and judging about the idea of sin, which I don’t quite understand…..” He reflects, “…either they’re not communicating… the Church’s concept of sin and redemption well at all, or they are just so closed-minded and judgmental that they shouldn’t be [Church leaders].” He exclaims:
…I’m gonna strike out more often than get a hit, and I just gotta keep getting back up, and the Church allows for that; the Church at its best allows for that redeeming quality; the Church at its worst, which can be judgmental and condemning, doesn’t….

Sam finds it wise to avoid the extremes positions of being either “closed-minded and judgmental” or on the “loosey-goosey side” that does not take sin seriously. He emphasizes, “…moving forward, one of the gifts that Marianist lay [persons]… bring to the charism, I hope, is a broader and deeper acceptance of human weakness.”

Sam speaks up for mission during administrative conversations, especially in the context of hiring for mission. He says, “I haven’t really faced… tremendous conflict, open conflict anyways; it’s just in those… small ways.” He explains, “Where I stood the ground [is]… hiring people who would be more plugged into the mission… typically, the criticism… comes more from a silence from colleagues….” He recalls, “…I felt that; when you feel the silence… you notice [that] you’re in the minority, cause no one else is speaking up.” He acknowledges:

I’m very sensitive, and so it would definitely strike me, and at first, it would drive me negatively… it would drive me to that discouragement idea, saying, “Sam, is this really worth it?” or “What a people gonna think about you?” or “You’re so out of step with modern times, with secular life.”

However, typically within twenty-four hours, Sam always finds himself reaffirming his commitment and moving ahead in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. He explains:
…for some reason, it’s like a rubber band… I go way down but then I shoot way, way up again… saying, wait a minute… this is what I’m about, this is my call, I can’t divorce [from it]…. I’ve gotta be the soldier in the keeps… trudging on and just keep doing it….

When he experiences criticism or conflict, Sam assumes that he is “usually always wrong”; he asks himself, “…did I say something wrong, or should I even hold that position, or I’m so out of step, and then I process it…. ” Reflecting about his experiences of being in difficult relationships, he says; “I have had those strained relationships, and how I deal with them… [is] a blessing and a curse.” He recognizes his tendency to “discount” the importance of a relationship that has become strained, and “…just set [it] aside” saying, “I’m not going to invest the time to try to fix that relationship… if this person’s not going to be my ally… I’ll find other people who can.” He reflects, “Now, it’s a curse because… that is discounting a relationship too soon; if I tried and worked through that relationship… maybe it would come out richer and better, and more giving to the task at hand.” However, he also tends “not to linger on people who don’t ‘like’ [him]”; “…the blessing side of it is that it helps to just move on… I’m going to try to love them, respect them… but let me move on to someone else [or]… some other way….”

Sam reflects about the interior cost of commitment, especially dealing with feelings of discouragement “…in terms of commitment to Catholic-Marianist identity… whether it’s gonna be around…. ” He explains, “…I think that the greatest cost in many ways [is]… sometimes, I get discouraged when I think of pushing this boulder up the hill… [asking myself,] why work so hard at it, why? …to the point of despair…”;
“…when I think about what the situation’s gonna be in hundred years from now, I don’t know, I sometimes get very discouraged, to the point of despair….” He points out, “In a way… I’m doing the same kind of thinking that… the SMs are doing when they see the decline in vocations, and they see the SMs going away; what did I give my life to then?” He adds, “…maybe through the grace of God, something’s gonna change, and I’ll keep working in what I work at….”

Sam recalls a particular low-point in his commitment, wherein he did not receive a mission-related opportunity that he had hoped for; “I was getting older and thinking to myself, being a teacher is wonderful, it’s in my soul, but I’m not being used enough… given my experience, my ability, and my age…..” Sam recalls praying in front of a Marian grotto during a personal retreat; “…I was at the point of despair; I thought, well… just chuck it all, just give it up…. As he sat there in prayer, Sam observed an elderly man approach him; “…he looked homeless… I just [didn’t] want to be bothered with [him] right now… he came over to me and he said… ‘Mary’s with you… she’s wrapped you in her cloak….’” Sam reflects, “…[that message] just really spoke to me, personally and spiritually… wow… that really did lift me… something was going on there; so the despair lifted, the idea of giving up lifted.” He clarifies, “I never got to [the] point [of giving up]… I only got to the point of questioning, is it all worth it? …and [thinking.] oh, what a burden this is…. He recalls bemoaning, “I’m never gonna be used up… used well… to me, that’s a sin… that was the trigger of despair… not being able to use my gifts to the extent that I thought I could use them…. He clarifies:

…I’ve never reached the point of giving it up – I can’t… [and] I don’t know if I’ve ever said this to myself – sometimes I wish I could… my life would be a lot
easier not being Catholic and not being committed to a Catholic-Marianist world…. He explains, “…it’ll be a lot easier, cause then I wouldn’t have to hold myself to any standards, and I wouldn’t have to keep failing…. I could just… do the secular thing… do what I want…..” He quickly adds, “But I can’t, I can’t divorce myself, I was too enculturated as a young Catholic growing up, I can’t divorce myself from it.”

**Everyday practice.** Reflecting about his approach in day-to-day academic life, Sam finds that much of Marianist influence happens in the “in-between” spaces, such as “hallway conversations” and “various events that are happening on campus….” He finds that two Marianist principles – egalitarianism and adaptability – are important emphases in his leadership approach. The idea of the equality of persons is “always in the forefront”; “I treat everyone I meet as an equal, whether it’s the janitor… the person who served me my breakfast this morning at the restaurant; everyone to me is an equal – no age difference, no Ph.D. difference, none of that.…” He emphasizes the need to be “responsive to change”; “being… Marianist-formed now, I’m much more sensitive when I read newspapers, watch the news, [and] talk to people about the signs of the times, change, being adaptable to change….” Sam finds that these Marianist emphases in leadership transcend religious and secular spheres within society; he reflects:

…a person in the secular world could watch me do… both of those traits, and… not see… Marianist in them, not even see Catholic in them; it’s just good business sense… it’s [also] a good way of being a human being…. Sam describes himself as “not exteriorly religious”; “for example, I will not pray in public, in a secular environment; I won’t pray at a meal in a restaurant.” He explains,
“I’ve been with Marianists who will, and so I will oblige… [but] I would never do it on my own… because to me, that’s a public display of religion, and I just don’t do public displays of religion….” He adds, “I think it’s because I’m so interiorly driven that I don’t want to call attention to that. I won’t wear a cross on the outside of my shirt, or anything like that, cause I don’t want to call attention….” He emphasizes, “I don’t like attention being called to myself… in any way, but especially in that [religious] way.” He clarifies, “…I don’t have any intention, nor any interest, in displaying any of that… [but] I’d be happy to tell people [who ask me] about it, but not call attention to it….”

Sam tries to be intentional about his mission-related influence as an educator; “…intentionally means… when I see students interested in Catholic-Marianist identity, to nurture that….” Sam does this in a “low-key” manner; “…[when] I talk about careers… or vocations… or the subject matter I’m teaching… [I try] to incorporate Catholic and Marianist ideas in a gentle way that gets them thinking…..” As an educator, Sam has a special interest in “Marianist pedagogy”; “…which I want to learn more about… just the idea of teaching in ways that would be… [not only] Catholic, but particularly Marianist.” He finds that his role as “influencer” plays out not only in his day-to-day work but also through some of his writings; “…[it’s] another way that I hope I can influence some people’s thinking about Marianist higher education and identity”; “I’m always trying to think through these concepts, to get a richer understanding of them….” He tries to convey that “Marianist administrative practices” are also “effective leadership strategies” in general; he exclaims, “…what I can’t accept is… say[ing], well… in the process of being and acting Marianist, we’re not going to be as effective of an organization… we’re not as effective because we’re Marianist… I absolutely refuse to accept that!” He points
out, “…that’s a violation of our fiduciary responsibilities… to use our donor’s money in a… less effective way….” He argues that persons who think that being Marianist implies being less effective are “…dealing with the shadow side of the Marianist values, not the grace side.”

Sam appreciates Marianist religious persons who have taken interest in him over the years; “…when they found someone like me, they probably said, okay, we need to make sure we nurture [that]….” He expresses gratitude for one Marianist religious leader in particular, who has been “…particularly active and intentional at drawing [him] into a lot of [Marianist activities]….” However, from the point of view of his professional background and knowledge, he adds:

…one of the shadow sides of the Marianist culture, although in fact… it talks about intentionality, from my point of view… they are not very intentional….

[This] has challenged them; they haven’t sought out, I think intentionally enough, young leaders who are vocationally tied to the mission and identity.

Sam finds that the experiences of Marianist lay persons differ from those of Marianist religious persons in some significant ways. He finds that lay persons have to not only “…be committed to the charism as professionals, but [also]… filter it through… a much more complicated life than the SMs had to.” He clarifies, “Now I understand [that] they lead complicated lives too; life in community is not easy, I recognize that; but… they don’t get a lot of calls [about worldly issues and family-life] that we as laypeople get….” He reflects:
…this is a little probably ungenerous of me, but… what the SMs are able to do is, they can ‘bury their sins’; they can send [the person] away… and have it not be known; that can’t happen with us laypeople…..

He adds:

I’ve known a lot of [religious persons] now for many years; they can hide that [issues concerning persons in their communities]… but we as laypeople have to deal with it [without the possibility of detaching ourselves], because these are real people [in our own families]….

Sam differentiates between personal and professional relationships in daily life; “…some of those cross the lines… but I kind of… compartmentalize – this is my professional life and this is my personal life; my colleagues are colleagues, they’re not friends….” Sam defines friendship “very narrowly”; “…someone to whom you can pour out your worst side and they still love you, despite of your failings and despite of your flaws, they’re always gonna be there for you – that’s family and close friends….” In contrast, he says, “…colleagues, I love and respect, and wanna be with, and enjoy being with… and that’s a form of friendship, but it’s not… real tight friendship – that’s colleague-ship….” He avoids intimate friendships in his professional life; “…that can really affect your decision making, when they also work with you…..”

Reflecting about relationships that nurture his leadership and commitment, Sam points out, “…surprisingly, [I do] not [have] many.” He explains, “…I think it’s a function of age and maturity…. Honestly, I feel like I’ve become like an elder statesman, that I don’t have a mentor now…..” He reflects, “…I think it’s a function of
age when I can say – I’m on my own in many ways in this…” Having said that, he finds that observing committed young people nurtures him; he reflects:

…when… I go to mass at UD… when I see those young people… I’m inspired by them… when I meet students… involved in Catholic-Marianist activities, that’s inspiring to me, that lifts me up, that mentors me in an informal way….

In addition to interior costs, Sam also speaks about the professional costs of commitment; “…there are many… I’ve had crises in my life, professional life, where I thought, ‘Is this really worth it? Is it really worth working in the Marianist Catholic vineyard because of the cost?’ So, there are a lot of costs.” He finds that there are “out there in the world” costs (financial and prestige-related) as well as “within the university” costs (being a minority and the giving of one’s time). Sam reflects about financial costs; “…I suspect, a lot of the Catholic universities… don’t pay as well… don’t have the highest benefits as private universities, nor public universities.” He clarifies, “UD does well, but that’s not the case with many smaller Catholic universities and less… affluent Catholic universities.” He adds, “I could’ve been a [professional] making lot more money, and that’s what the world values; so I’d be lot more cool out in the world….” Reflecting about prestige-related costs, he recalls some experiences at elite social gatherings:

…maybe it was a sensitivity on my part, but often once they found out [that] I was a professor, they discounted me entirely; some literally would walk away from me at a cocktail party… cause I didn’t have any kind of social standing as a professor.
Sam reflects about the cost of being “a minority”; “…even in a Catholic university, someone committed to Catholic-Marianist identity is a minority, and in some Catholic universities, they can become marginalized…..” He adds, “That’s not been my [personal] experience… [but] we’re still a minority; we’re still kinda pushing that precipice… pushing the rock up the hill.” Sam also emphasizes the cost of giving one’s time; “…I don’t have the publication record I could have otherwise, if I didn’t do all the Marianist stuff; those are hours and hours and hours where I could’ve spent writing and doing more research, but I didn’t.” He reflects, “…I’m first [a] Marianist educator, that’s what all this is about to me. If I don’t develop a great reputation or any reputation within [my field]… it really wasn’t that important, but it was a cost professionally….” Sam points out that, with the exception of “theologians and philosophers,” he does not know many scholars who are “…committed to the Catholic and Marianist mission at a high level, and also professionally known.”

Sam observes that there are two kinds of committed persons in faith-based organizations – “cultural catalysts and cultural citizens.” He finds that Marianist Educational Associates (MEAs) are cultural catalysts; “…these are people who are expected to take upfront leadership [or] exposed roles [in mission-related matters]….” He continues, “What we don’t do well enough… [and] I don’t speak from full knowledge… we don’t do enough about cultural citizens.” He explains:

…there are some people who want to be cultural citizen[s]; in other words, they like Catholic-Marianist, they want to learn more about Catholic-Marianist, but for whatever reason, they don’t want to take the time, they don’t want to be a leader, a catalyst in Catholic-Marianist….
He reflects:

I don’t think we do enough to nurture cultural citizens… [who are] gonna be the majority; without that segment of the organizational body… that’s where the faith-based charism is gonna die at the university, and that’s what I’m worried about….

He emphasizes that it is a “huge mistake” to “set up boundaries… in-group[s] and out-group[s]….” He observes, “The MEAs at UD are very involved… [and] there is a large cohort, which is healthy.”

Sam appreciates the Catholic and Marianist programming at the university; “…the programs campus ministry does: the masses, the liturgies, prayer services, [and] the programs they sponsor to form people….” He clarifies, “I think those are important to me, not so much because I expect them to form me [personally]; I do formation on my own, more or less.” He explains, “I constantly read about Catholic-Marianist issues, write when I can, think when I can… I’m kind of like my own [formator]… that’s what we Ph.Ds. are trained to do… [to] be [our] own formator[s]… have [our] own curriculum.” He points out that what he gets out of mission-related programming is, “…I get inspired, I get really energized… because it gives me hope for the future, [it] makes me feel okay, I’m not alone, other people are into this, [and] things are being done to commit to it….” He particularly finds inspiration in his students; “…the vocations they choose to go into… [when] they choose, as I did, to teach at a Catholic school instead of going to [profession] school… starting a non-profit instead of… a for-profit – those acts… inspire me.”
Reflecting about how Marianist leaders can nurture commitment to mission and identity, Sam shares “practical” and “symbolic” ideas. From the “practical” point of view, he emphasizes the importance of “putting their money where their mouth is.” He explains, “…what that means is… how well are [mission-related initiatives] funded at the university… how are faculty rewarded in time, in money, in recognition for… their Catholic-Marianist activities.” He asserts:

…if you wanna understand the values of the university, don’t listen to what people say… talk is too easy; don’t even necessarily watch what they do, cause smart people are sometimes very clever at hiding [their intentions]…. Look at the budget – follow the money.

He continues, “I’ve been doing this long enough now… to know that a lot of lip service, from administrators, is given to Catholic-Marianist identity; but… they expect faculty members to do the Catholic-Marianist stuff voluntarily [on their own time]….” Sam exclaims, “Well, altruism is fine… but self-interest is a lot more reliable!” For example, “…take a young faculty member, and s/he has all these responsibilities to get tenure, to get promoted; unless you make Catholic and Marianist a rewarded piece of that, I don’t blame them for not doing it.” From the “symbolic” point of view, Sam emphasizes the importance of making Catholic identity “more evident”; “…I’m big on symbolism, to make Catholic and Marianist visual symbols more evident on campus.” Sam considers the university chapel to be a key symbol; “…that chapel dome is our symbol, it should shine, it should vibrate visually… I think visual symbols are very important…. ” He also emphasizes the continual need for “…more programming that’s visual, that’s behavioral… just more activity.” He says, “UD does it very well, I have to admit… [but]
there’re other things we could do….” For example, he encourages the university community to celebrate Marian and Marianist feasts more actively.

Reflecting about his participation in this study, Sam points out that his articulation is “very fresh”; that is, it was not overly thought-out prior to the interviewing process. He expresses an appreciation for the research method used in this study; “…because you’re doing phenomenology, some of these foundational experiences are so important.” He expresses enthusiasm and gratitude; “…I’m very excited about this”; “this has been helpful to me….”

**Structural Description**

This section contains analyses of the underlying dimensions of Sam’s experiences related to the composite phenomenon of “exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity,” which I will present in three parts: (a) personal understandings, (b) phenomenological structures, and (c) essential meanings.

**Personal understandings.**

**Commitment.** Sam’s descriptions shed light on his personal understandings related to commitment. These include: (a) Commitment feels like an unbreakable bond; “…it’s really an unbreakable, psychological, emotional… spiritual bond [in me]…..” (b) “Commitment requires strength”; “…it’s holding close to and maintaining your commitment, your trajectory of what you say is important to you, and doing that….” (c) Commitment involves an “interior and exterior connection”; a “continuation” between one’s inner sense of calling and one’s involvement-choices in mission-related activities. (d) Commitment involves making a “vocational connection”; “…between being a faculty member [or any other role] and the faith orientation of the university.” (e) Commitment
involves a call to action; “…it’s not just simply because I’m a nice person… it’s because that’s… how I’m called to act based upon my Catholic and Marianist principles….” (f) Commitment implies living up to certain standards; “…it’ll be a lot easier [if I did not commit], cause then I wouldn’t have to hold myself to any standards….” (g) Commitment is a continuous state of being; “…this is my call, I can’t divorce [from it], I can’t disconnect my call, I can’t disconnect my commitment….”

**Leadership.** Sam’s descriptions shed light on his personal understandings related to leadership. These include: (a) Leadership is influence; “I studied leadership for a long time… cutting through all literature, cutting through all the fads… at the end of the day, leadership is influence.” (b) Leadership is not positional; “…as I studied more and more, and as hierarchies in organization began to break down… I realized… one can have moral influence and other kinds of influences, no matter what position one holds….” (c) Leadership is intrinsic to the educator’s role; “…being a faculty member, specially committed to Marianist mission and identity… I could have influence there.” (d) Leadership involves the responsibility of being a role model; “…[in] my day-to-day role… I have a responsibility to model Marianist attitudes, behaviors, values….” (e) Good leadership principles transcend societal spheres; “…I read about [humility] in the Wall Street Journal the other day, so this isn’t Marianist only, although I think… Marianist informs it….” (f) Leadership involves acknowledging one’s limitations and errors; “…lead[ing] others and influenc[ing] others by saying… I know I don’t know it all; my position doesn’t – all of a sudden – bless me with knowing it all…. I’ve made mistakes; here’s how I’ve made mistakes….”
Sam shares specific reflections related to four dimensions of Marian leadership, which Mary “encompasses” and “combines.” These are: courage, strength, humility, and nurture; “two traditionally male [or] masculine, two traditionally female or feminine….” He shares the following reflections: (a) Marian leadership involves courage; “…leaders have to be courageous, in the sense of [being] risk takers, thinking outside of parameters, being forward-thinking….” (b) Marian leadership involves inner strength; leaders also have to be “strong… to move an organization forward, [that] requires a certain amount of discipline, and discipline requires strength….” (c) Marian leadership involves humility; “…in the twenty-first century, leadership means humility… people respond to leaders of all levels… who have that sense of humility….” (d) Marian leadership involves nurturing; “…what is professional development, what is developing your people to meet the competition, but nurturing….”

Sam’s descriptions provide several insights into a particularly Marianist way of leading. These include: (a) Much of Marianist influence [leadership] happens in “the in-between spaces”; “…it’s the hallway conversations with a student or a colleague, it’s the various events that are happening on campus, it’s mass, it’s all of those in-between spaces.…” (b) Treating everyone as equals; “…this gets to the Marianist idea of going back to the concepts of ‘Mixed Composition’ [and] ‘Discipleship of Equals’… no age difference, no Ph.D. difference, none of that, everyone’s an equal.” (c) Being sensitive to “the signs of the times” and being “responsive to change”; “…thinking constantly about how I could help myself and help others be responsive to change.” (d) Practicing good leadership, not just because it makes “good business sense,” but because of one’s
“calling”; “…it gets back to that question, ‘Why be good?’ Well, I do it because I’m called to be, because it’s expected of me in my calling….”

Sam observes several common characteristics in exemplary lay Marianist leaders; these include: (a) Being person-centered in leadership; “…now this is the ideal of course, and we all have bad days, [but] when they’re at their best, they are very person-centered.” He explains, “…their default in decision making [and]… leadership style… is not to worry first about structures and processes, but first about people – the person in front of them, or the people that would be impacted by a decision….” (b) Nurturing in a Marian way and building community; “…the idea of developing… [and] maintaining an organization which is community centered….” (c) The idea of humility in leadership; “…low-key leadership… [personal] modesty….” Sam reflects, “…the whole idea of Marianist modesty needs to be retooled”; “we take the idea [of] Marianist humility too far… we are to be personally humble, but the work we do should be shouted from the mountain tops; let’s not be ‘humble and modest’ about the work we do….”

**Mission and identity.** Sam’s descriptions shed light on his personal understandings of Catholic and Marianist mission and identity. He summarizes his perspective in the following manner: “We as Catholic and Marianist educators are called to form, shape… educate individuals who go out and build the kingdom of God, very simply.” Reflecting about the “decline in [active, practicing] Catholics in America, he wonders if American Catholicism has become “a victim of its own success”; he explains: …American society… legislated… all kinds of social-net policies… [which] at their heart are Christian values. I wonder if people aren’t saying, well, why be
Catholic, because in my daily life, I value these policies, and I get that [without being Catholic]…

He finds that Catholic and Marianist values are “countercultural” to our political and economic systems. He argues, “…take American democracy and free market capitalism, and leave those systems to their own devices… as a machine… without an infusion of Catholic, Christian values – some very bad things can happen….” He clarifies, “…not because the system is necessarily bad… but people who are working the system can do not-so-good things.” Sam connects this political/economic reality to Catholic mission and identity; “so as a Catholic educator, I see my role… is to form and educate people who are going to lead those systems, in big ways and in small ways….” He wants to help students to become future influencers; “…they are role models… agents to infuse these… systems… with Christian values, and therefore make those systems more humane, and that’s… what it means to me [to] build the kingdom of God… infusing our earthly systems with Catholic values.”

Sam’s descriptions also shed light on his personal reflections on the Marianist charism in higher education. He emphasizes the importance of communicating to students and parents that “…there are Marianist behaviors, values, norms that can make our graduates better leaders… [in comparison to] secular trained leaders.” He provides two examples: (a) The idea of adaptation and change: “…intentionally educat[ing] our students to be adaptable, to appreciate… recognize… respond to change… to be an effective leader… we don’t do it because it’s in the literature… we do it because it’s a Marianist value….” (b) The idea of Marianist community: “…what’s Marianist community at its [best], when it works well, but collaboration….” He asks, “…what are
Fortune 500 companies hiring for today? Collaboration, collaboration, collaboration! …that’s what we do train people to be – to be people who can work in and through community.”

Sam argues that “the Marianist charism, updated, can speak to the twenty-first-century out there world, the secular world,” in ways that other charism’s may find difficult or new. He gives three examples: (a) Working “through” community: “…most charisms talk about community; that’s a very Catholic [idea]…. [However,] the idea of Marianist community… means working through [he emphasizes] community; that ‘through’ idea is particularly Marianist.” (b) The Three Offices [religious life, formation, and temporalities]: “…now that’s very old-school, and we need to really refresh that… that can be very twenty-first-century.” He reflects, “What that speaks to is the idea of consultation, collaborative decision making, checks and balances, delegation and participation… the way it diffuses, broadens, responsibility and authority….” (c) Mixed composition: “When I started learning about this ‘Mixed Composition’ idea, I honestly didn’t believe it [he chuckles]… but over time, I learned that… egalitarianism… discipleship of equals… that to me is wonderfully twenty-first-century.” He emphasizes, “…students who are intentionally educated that way… don’t segregate people… by titles, genders, ethnicities, anything like that; everybody’s equal, everybody....” He adds, “…a good idea can come from anywhere… [it] may come from very far down in the organizational chart… that’s Marianist, that’s the ‘Mixed Composition’ idea, that’s what we teach.”

Sam emphasizes that Marianist language needs to be “freshened up”; “…cause when you talk about… the Three Offices… Mixed Composition, naturally and rightfully
so, our students and people… just glaze over, cause that’s eighteenth, nineteenth-century language, which needs to be updated…” He emphasizes that lay leaders in Marianist institutions have a common project – studying and contemporizing the Marianist charism; he suggests:

…going back to its roots… to the Marian narrative… to the earlier Christian communities that Chaminade drew from, and then, the Chaminadian genesis… and then, the development of the Society of Mary over these 200 years… what is it, what values, what concepts, what practices are particularly Marianist… that we can contemporize….

He emphasizes, “…we can give fresh, contemporary language… which can explain to our students and their parents that getting a Marianist education will… not only help one be a leader in these systems, but actually, be a more effective leader.” He points out that one of the advantages of being a Marianist institution today is, “…unlike other religious orders, the Marianists don’t have to invent these ideas, these twenty-first-century concepts, [such as] the involvement of the laity; that’s not post-Vatican II for the Marianists, that’s pre-Vatican II, that’s Chaminade in 1801….” In the context of the decline of religious vocations, and the resultant Sponsorship initiatives undertaken by several Catholic religious orders, Sam observes that religious orders with “…more hierarchical… authoritarian… clerical…” traditions have to reinvent themselves; “…this idea of bringing lay leaders to carry on [the] charism… is gonna be new [to them]. They can [gradually] do it [through] formation, but it’s somewhat new. [In contrast,] the Marianists don’t have to do that [reinvent themselves].”
**Phenomenological structures.** Phenomenological theory suggests that every human phenomenon has universal structures, that is, existential themes in human experience, including: causality, temporality, spatiality, body-hood, self, and relationality. The following sub-sections emerge from considerations of these themes within Sam’s experiences.

**Causal influences.** Leadership commitment has a causal dimension. Sam’s descriptions shed light on his awareness of several interrelated influences that seem to have nurtured his leadership and commitment to mission and identity. These include: (a) Growing up in a Catholic environment: “…I think that fierce commitment occurred, by being nurtured in those kinds of Catholic educational environments…”; “…I was too enculturated as a young Catholic growing up, [thus] I can’t divorce myself from it.” (b) Having early mentors who “noticed this sense of vocation” in him: “I can point back to mentors throughout my Catholic education who mentored me, supported me, and held me up in my commitment.” (c) Being invited to greater degrees of participation in Marianist circles: “…the [religious] Marianists and the lay leaders… saw me as a young faculty member… who shows up at all the Marianist events… so they kinda gradually pulled me in that direction, not [quite] intentionally [though]…..” (d) Gradual formational experiences: “…it was much more just gradual, getting to know the SMs, etc….”; participating in mission-related campus events that “…bring people together to hear about Marianist topics…”; attending Catholic conferences that helped “…put [the] Marianist charism in perspective with others…..” (e) Proactively seeking to contribute in greater capacities: “…over the years, [my role] expanded – not so much by me being sought out, [but] more… [by] me looking to have a direct influence.”
**Experience through time.** Leadership commitment has a temporal dimension; it is experienced in relation to the passage of time. Sam’s descriptions reveal several temporal themes, including: (a) Gradual development of faith and commitment: “…it was much more just gradual…”; “…I think that it was a gradual commitment.” (b) Meaning making over a lifetime of experiences: “…over time, cause now I’ve been [over twenty-five] years as a Marianist educator…”; “…that comes just from over time… seeing mine and… other people’s weaknesses and foibles…” (c) Leadership commitment requires the giving of one’s time: “…now [that] all my children are grown… my time is more my own, and so I can take up… more formal… leadership roles.” (d) Relevance of the Marianist charism in the “twenty-first-century out there world”: Sam describes Marianist principles and practices as “wonderfully twenty-first-century”; “…unlike other religious orders, the Marianists don’t have to invent these ideas, these twenty-first-century concepts….”

**Spatial awareness.** Leadership commitment has a spatial dimension, which Sam expresses in terms of both physical and conceptual spaces. Sam’s descriptions highlight several spatial themes, including: (a) A “parish-embedded” childhood: “there was this integration, a seamless web… that really [at] the core was the parish…..” (b) Catholic universities contrasted with secular universities: “…the environment is very different, the ambience, so to speak…..” (c) A “Catholic worldview”: “…so much of what it means to be Catholic is tied into education…. I can’t imagine leaving this kind of environment… I can’t see myself engaging in any other kind of Catholic organization but education.” (d) Choosing the “Marianist Catholic vineyard” over professional fields: “Catholic education is where [I] need to be, not [in a secular profession], but the broader
idea of Catholic education.”  (e) Personal and professional spaces: “…some of those cross the lines… but I kind of… compartmentalize – this is my professional life and this is my personal life….  

(f) “In-between spaces” on campus: “I think where Marianist influence happens a lot is in the in-between spaces, it’s the hallway conversations… it’s the various events that are happening on campus….”  

(g) From the Marianist campus to the Marianist world: “…over time, my role has expanded beyond the campus where I am”; “…it’s been mostly in the US province, [but] I’ve had some contact overseas [too]….  

(h) Marianist principles can inform the secular world: They “…apply well… work well… in the management world… secular world.”

Expressions of body- hood.  Leadership commitment has a dimension of body-hood, which Sam expresses in several metaphorical and aging-related expressions, including:  

(a) Describing himself as someone “steeped in the Marianist educational tradition…”; someone who has “…that anchor of faith and vocation and calling.”  

(b) Referring to his Marianist mentor as someone who “reached down and plucked [him] out.”  

(c) Expressing commitment in terms of physical perseverance; “I’ve gotta be the soldier in the keeps… trudging on and just keep doing it”; “…we are pushing the rock up the hill, the boulder up the hill, and we are the minority.”  

(d) Wanting to be “…an instrument of chang[e]” in Catholic higher education.  

(e) Challenging decision makers to “put their money where their mouth is” in relation to funding for mission.  

(f) Pondering in light of his own aging and growth in maturity; “…when I was being mentored, I was always the younger person… now, with my age, I’m getting to be the elder statesman.”  

He recalls mentors from his childhood who, “at [his] age, are deceased now.”  He often
uses age-related phrases as he begins a thought; for example, “…it’s a function of age and maturity”; “as I’ve gotten older….”

**Descriptions of self.** Leadership commitment is experienced in relationship with oneself, reflected in Sam’s statements containing self-descriptions. Three dimensions emerge from these: (a) Personality and “temperament”: Sam describes himself as “very reflective,” “an introvert,” “not really relational,” “task oriented,” “very sensitive,” and “extremely hard on myself.” (b) A personal sense of calling: “…this is my calling… there is nothing else; this is why I was put on earth…”; “this is my call, I can’t divorce, I can’t disconnect my call, I can’t disconnect my commitment, it’ll be like taking everything out of me, what would I be without this commitment to Catholic education.” (c) Self-concept as a Marianist educator: Being “an influencer,” “leader,” “go-to person,” and “elder statesman”; “being a teacher… it’s in my soul”; being first a “Catholic educator,” and then a [professional]; being “vocation-ready” when he joined the university; gradually becoming “Marianist-educated, Marianist-formed”; being “a minority” because “…there aren’t very many faculty members… who are interested in being champions of the identity and mission”; being “my own formator… hav[ing] my own curriculum…”; being “on my own in many ways in this….”

**Relationship with others.** Leadership commitment has a relational dimension; it is experienced and expressed in relationship with others. Sam points out, “…being in community is an important Marianist aspect, and leadership is so relational.” His descriptions reveal several relational insights, including: (a) Struggling with the idea of community: “…what is it, how does it work, why is it important…?” He asserts that it would be incorrect to think, “…the idea of Marianist community can just simply be – we
have parties… coffee and donuts after mass, and as long as we do those kinds of things, we’re being a Marianist community….” He clarifies, “…that can be a way to it, but I don’t think that’s what Marianist community is all about!” (b) Working through community: “…[the] Marianist idea of working ‘through’ community suggests a process; it implies a process of collaboration….” (c) It is really about love: “…some people aren’t gonna like me and I’m not gonna like some people; we’re not called to like each other, we’re called to love each other… so out of love… I’m not gonna hurt that person….” (d) Relationships based on the tasks of mission: “…it’s all about relations in the sense of feeding mission…”; “…when people say, how do you want other people to be toward you… I say, I want them to use me… I want to be used for good purposes….” He summarizes his relational approach saying, “…how I work through relationships [is]… it’s relationships based on a task, and I don’t see relationships as ends in themselves, not professional relationships; personal relationship[s] – yes.”

Essential meanings. Sam’s own summary of what it means to “lead in a manner committed to mission and identity” includes three dimensions: (a) Public expression: “Being… publicly-known… as someone who’s committed to the Catholic-Marianist mission”; “…expressing [one’s] commitment to colleagues [and] to the… secular public.” (b) Personal formation: “Being constantly interested in personal, professional formation in Catholic-Marianist identity and mission”; “…to recognize [that] we don’t know everything… [to] be willing to change and adapt to the Catholic-Marianist mission.” (c) Intentional action: “…sharing it intentionally with people who might also have that interest… to watch for those who might have that call… like I needed to have… mentors [many years ago], to be that mentor to those people….”
Several additional, essential meanings can be derived from Sam’s descriptions in relation to the lived experience of the phenomenon in focus. Leading in a manner committed to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity involves:

1. Making a “vocational connection” between one’s role and the faith orientation of the university; choosing to work in the “Marianist Catholic vineyard” despite potential costs of commitment; doing it because of a “sense of calling.”

2. Practicing influence in the “in-between” spaces, in the ordinary interactions on campus; with a sense of responsibility to “model Marianist attitudes, behaviors, values”; recognizing one’s “moral influence,” no matter what position one holds.

3. Educating “intentionally”; being a “countercultural” role model; forming students who will “build the kingdom of God” by infusing our earthly systems with Catholic values.

4. Working “through community”; being concerned about people first, the person in front of you or the persons who will be impacted; building relationships towards “feeding mission”; recognizing that “through community” implies “a process of collaboration.”

5. Being “steeped in the Marianist educational tradition”; studying and pondering “…the Marian narrative… the Chaminadian genesis… the development of [the Marianists] over these 200 years…”; recognizing that Marianist ideas are “particularly twenty-first-century”; seeking to contemporize traditional Marianist language and practices.
6. Practicing Marian virtues in leadership; reflecting about how Mary speaks to me “personally”; leading with “courage and strength… humility and nurturing”; integrating traditionally-associated feminine and masculine qualities.

7. Striving for personal humility and institutional adaptability; humility that says “I know I don’t know it all… I’ve made mistakes…”; treating everyone I meet “as an equal”; being sensitive to “signs of the times” and promoting responsiveness to change.

8. Speaking up for mission; being “the soldier in the keeps… trudging on…”; pushing “the bolder up the hill…” even when one is a minority; being an instrument of change.

9. Being intentional about developing leaders; noticing persons who have a sense of “calling” and “vocation”; becoming a “mentor” and “elder” as one grows in maturity; fostering engagement opportunities for both “cultural catalysts” and “cultural citizens.”

10. Paying attention to both “practical” and “symbolic” expressions of institutional identity; funding for mission and rewarding mission-aligned faculty work; making symbolic expressions of Catholic-Marianist identity “more evident.”

11. Persevering through “human weakness,” in oneself and in others; recognizing that we are all “redeemed by grace”; continually picking oneself up and trying to do better; becoming “less and less self-righteous” and “more and more understanding.”
CHAPTER V
COMPOSITE SYNTHESSES

Introduction to Findings

In this chapter, I will present several syntheses related to the phenomenon in focus: *exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity*. Each synthesis emerges out of my collective analysis of the “portraits-in-words” presented in the previous chapter, and the extensive participant transcripts on which these portraits were based. Thus, the insights in this chapter come from the individual descriptions of the exemplary lay leaders in this study, which I have synthesized through the phenomenological research process, in order to present collective thematic descriptions (textures and structures) of the phenomenon, followed by vivid descriptions of its lived experience (streams), and finally, a brief statement containing its essential meanings (essences).

Thus, I will move through the following progression in this chapter: textures \(\rightarrow\) structures \(\rightarrow\) streams \(\rightarrow\) essences. A composite “texture” (textural theme) is that which is apparent in collective experience, and a composite “structure” (structural theme) is that which underlies it. In this study, the term “streams” denotes three distinct but inseparable dimensions within the lived experience of the phenomenon (exemplary lay commitment, exemplary Marianist leadership, and the experience of Catholic-Marianist mission and
identity). The term “essence” refers to essential, invariant meanings within the phenomenon.

Based on the above-mentioned progression, I have presented this chapter in four sections:

1. Composite textures of the phenomenon: Three clusters of the apparent textural themes present in the collective phenomenological data, namely: (a) formative influences, (b) interior dimensions, and (c) emphases in practice; and additionally, a fourth cluster related to participants’ reflections on (d) nurturing commitment and leadership.

2. Composite structures of the phenomenon: Six clusters of underlying structural themes present in the collective phenomenological data, namely: (a) causality, (b) temporality, (c) spatiality, (d) body-hood, (e) self, and (f) relationality.

3. Streams within the lived experience of the phenomenon: Three phenomenological syntheses of distinct but inseparable streams within the lived experience (the present, continuous experience) of the phenomenon, namely: (a) the lived experience of exemplary lay commitment, (b) the lived experience of exemplary Marianist leadership, and (c) the lived experience of Catholic and Marianist mission and identity.

4. Statement of essence: A brief, integrated collection of essential meanings that do not vary across the descriptions of exemplary lay leaders in this study.

The first, second, and third sections – Textures, Structures, and Streams – contain descriptions of collective experience; that is, these insights are part of the overall
phenomenon in focus, even though each particularity may not be experienced in the same
degree by every participant in this study. In contrast, the fourth section – Statement of
Essence – is a statement of common experience; that is, it contains invariant meanings
that are present in the lived experiences of all exemplary lay leaders in this study. Simply
put, the statement of essence is a collection of the “bare minimums” of the phenomenon
in focus.

I have adopted a “low-hovering, in-dwelling, meditative philosophy” and
approach with the data analysis and writing, as is appropriate to phenomenological
research (Wertz, 2005, p. 175), and in particular, to the transcendental (descriptive)
phenomenological methodology that I used in this study (Moustakas, 1994). In other
words, my analysis and writing stayed very close to the data. The writing style and tone
of the following syntheses is narrative and expressive; it is a blend of the words and
meanings shared by the exemplary lay leaders in this study. Every time I will use the
phrase “exemplary lay leaders” or the indefinite pronoun “one” (indicating singular
form), I am obviously referring to the participants in this study. Furthermore, it is
important to note that phenomenological writing differs from other forms of reporting in
qualitative research, in that phenomenology aims to vividly describe lived experience (the
present, continuous experience) of the phenomenon, rather than report predominantly on
themes within past experiences. There are plenty of references to past experiences of
course; however, the actual focus is on how the participant is making meaning of past
experiences while experiencing the phenomenon in the now – in the present, continuous
moment. Consequently, many of the sentences in the following descriptions begin with
phrases such as “there is…” or “it is…”; thus conveying the present, continuous nature of
participants’ meaning making and lived experience of the phenomenon in focus. I will begin each section on a new page.
Composite Textures of the Phenomenon

In this section, I will describe four clusters of composite textural themes that emerged from my collective analysis of the phenomenological data. These clusters are: (a) formative influences, (b) interior dimensions, and (c) emphases in practice; and additionally, a fourth cluster related to participants’ reflections on (d) nurturing commitment and leadership. Each cluster has seven interrelated textural themes.

Formative Influences

In this sub-section, I will describe seven textural themes related to the personal journeys of the exemplary lay leaders in this study, namely: (a) the meta-story underlying personal journeys; (b) Mary and Jesus; (c) the inspirational Marianist founders; (d) the witness of Marianist religious persons; (e) Brother Ray, servant leader; (f) the antithesis of Marianist leadership; and (g) appealing qualities in Marianist role models.

The meta-story underlying personal journeys. The meta-story underlying the personal journeys of exemplary lay leaders can be described using the metaphor of a seed that turns into a sapling when it finds fertile ground, gradually growing into a tree with deep roots and wide branches, in a continuous cycle of receiving and giving, and bearing much fruit through the process. The meta-story of exemplary lay leaders has four gradual and partially overlapping phases:

1. **Seeding: Values imbibed prior to entering the community.** The seeding phase consisted of experiences and influences that laid the foundations for commitments in later life, especially the culture of their family, church, and
educational institutions, and the presence of inspirational family members and educators.

2. **Rooting: Finding fertile ground in community.** The rooting phase consisted of entering the university community through serendipity or intention, and subsequently experiencing resonance with its shared values, the caring support of colleagues, and the exemplary witness of Catholic-Marianist role models.

3. **Growing into: A gradual movement towards commitment.** The growing into phase consisted of exploring and imbibing the Marianist charism – its history, spirituality, and educational approach; and gradually connecting with the broader mission and works of the Marianist family.

4. **Giving: As a present, servant-leader.** The giving phase of continually choosing to be a present, servant-leader on campus – a leader-educator, a reflective practitioner, a facilitator of conversations, a builder of community, and a bearer of mission and identity.

Exemplary lay leaders express gratitude for how the religious dimensions of Catholic-Marianist mission and identity have influenced their interior lives, in ways that may not have unfolded if they were working at a different institution. There are four common “inflection points” in their journeys of commitment – experiences wherein their commitment was perceptibly evoked and deepened. These inflection points are:

- Experiences of making a public commitment and sharing the journey with other committed persons.
- Experiences of accepting increasing responsibilities within the university community.
Experiences of extended conversations within (a) mission and identity-related working groups, and (b) immersive formational programs that provided greater exposure to the Marianist charism and its wider organizational reach.

Experiences of being appreciated, not only in formal ways such as being recognized with an award, but especially in the innumerable moments of feeling affirmed, valued, and nurtured along the way.

Mary and Jesus. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is an important figure in the descriptions of exemplary lay leaders; she is referred to as a “foundation” and “pillar” of the Marianist charism, signifying her primary role. For some, she has been a lifetime companion; for others, she is an intriguing figure whom they have grown to know, respect, and love. For some, experiences of pious Marian devotions were commonplace in their developmental years; for others, Marian devotion was not central in their faith tradition. However, with age and reflection, their connection and affinity with Mary have become increasingly personal – she is not statuesque or made of clay, but a real person and a revolutionary woman. The fact that she is a woman who is an extraordinary symbol of leadership is powerful in itself. Their personal relationship with Mary is characterized by pondering about her, or conversation with her, or both. Several mental images of Mary have a prominent recall, such as Mary at the Annunciation and at the foot of the Cross. For example, one exemplary lay leader reflects, “To know that she was confused [when Angel Gabriel spoke to her] gives me comfort in my confusion”; “she was there from the beginning to the end, standing at the foot of the cross when others couldn’t.” The gospel narrative of the wedding of Cana is a particularly important scene for the Marianists because it presents an interaction between Mary and Jesus that became
a central thought in Blessed Chaminade’s approach; that is, the words that Mary spoke of Jesus, to those at the wedding: “Do whatever He tells you.” Several exemplary lay leaders convey a strong sense of personal relationship with Jesus, which is manifested in their reflections in several ways; for example, thinking about Jesus’ repeated personal invitation to “come and see,” and returning regularly to the teachings of Jesus in the gospels and exclaiming, “Well, Jesus had it right a long time ago!”

Exemplary lay leaders reflect about Mary as a woman and as a leader; Mary’s leadership is incarnational – she brings Christ into the world; she encompasses traditionally-associated masculine qualities such as courage and strength, as well as traditionally-associated feminine qualities such as humility and nurture. For exemplary lay leaders who are mothers, there is a strong resonance between their personal motherhood and Mary as a mother; she is someone who had to do the unthinkable in being present to her son as he was dying on the cross. She is also described as a friend that one can speak with, share one’s burdens with – someone through whom one can find the grace to rest and the courage to wait.

**The inspirational Marianist founders.** The Marianist founders are a source of inspiration to exemplary lay leaders. There is a realization that the relationship between Father Chaminade, Mother Adèle, and Marie-Thérèse was unusual for their times; they were remarkable people who saw the gifts in each other and maintained relationships in a difficult context. There is a belief that Father Chaminade could not have realized his vision without Mother Adèle and Marie-Thérèse; each of the founders was an important contributor to the early Marianist story. There is an insight that they lived in perilous times. There is a recollection of moments of personally realizing that the Marianist
founders had the courage to stand up for what they believed, in the face of death – moments of exclaiming, “So this really was dangerous!” There is an acknowledgment that most of the challenges that leaders face today – such as budget constraints and relational conflicts – can appear trivial in comparison to what the early Marianists faced, as they could get their heads chopped off at the guillotine! There is an appreciation for Father Chaminade’s faithful openness to a future that was fraught with difficulty and uncertainty, and his ability to mix the faith issues and practicalities of his day, bringing together religious and lay persons in a shared mission. Father Chaminade appreciated the underlying positive values of the French Revolution – égalité, fraternité, liberté – despite the fact that some of the revolutionaries were trying to kill him. There is an insight that the Marianist founders were far ahead of their times; they were thinking about the role of the laity and a discipleship of equals long before these ideas became prominent in the Catholic Church’s discourse.

Exemplary lay leaders engage in conversations about how the work of the Marianist founders informs their own. There is an effort to really understand why the founders did what they did; to say, “Now I get the passion and the drive…”; to ask, “Okay, what did Father Chaminade do…”; to discern, “That’s certainly not what Chaminade stood for….” For those who experienced the beatification ceremony of Father Chaminade in Rome, it was a powerful experience wherein they felt deeply moved by the worldwide presence and global reach of the Marianist family.

**The witness of Marianist religious persons.** The witness and influence of Marianist vowed religious persons – brothers, sisters, and priests – is a prominent theme in the descriptions of exemplary lay leaders. There is an appreciation for the
egalitarianism in the structures of Marianist religious life; for example, instead of priests holding themselves above brothers, the fact that they are equals in Marianist religious life is an important witness. There is a recollection of being loved and cared for by numerous Marianist religious persons; a feeling of being valued and included; a sense of respect, responsiveness, and care for every person’s thoughts, regardless of their faith tradition or personal spirituality. There is a sense of gratitude for the remarkable attentiveness, support, and encouragement given by the Marianist religious persons who were particularly intentional in one’s life – those who took a personal interest in nurturing one’s commitment and leadership. There is a sense of admiration for Marianist religious persons who live their faith every day, and in many little ways – living how a Christian should live, demonstrating what being a Marianist looks like, and committing every ounce of their being to their faith. There is a recollection of their example of integrating mission and identity into everyday work, even as they differed in their personal styles of working that out. The example of Marianist religious persons raises the bar on the responsibilities of present-day lay leaders, who in turn need to ponder about how they will keep the conversation about mission and identity vibrant, meaningful, and non-superficial on a daily basis, thus passing it to future generations.

**Brother Ray, servant leader.** Brother Raymond Fitz, S.M. (Brother Ray), former President of the University of Dayton, is a prominent leader in the descriptions of the exemplary lay leaders in this study. He is described as someone who embodies servant leadership in everything he does, an epitome of someone who walks the talk, a model of how Marianist leadership can be demonstrated in real life, and similar to Father Chaminade – a pragmatist with a vision. There is an appreciation for his sense of honesty
and humility, his disposition for not taking himself too seriously, and being forthright about his mistakes and lessons learned. He is appreciated for not separating his faith from the practicalities of his role. As a university President, he had to engage in administrative activities that were not particularly religious – balancing the budget, dealing with building codes and lawsuits, and so on. However, he seemed to view all those activities through a different glass, performing them with a subtle sense of guidance from the principles to which he committed as a Marianist religious person. He is respected for his energy and passion, for his great vision for mission. He did not stand for mediocrity; instead, he held people accountable to high standards – standards that he regularly surpassed himself. He is remembered for his ability to articulate the Marianist charism through his words and actions, his efforts for making sure that everybody had a voice, and his willingness to listen to those who would challenge him with opposing views. There is a recollection of how he spoke of the university as a universe of intersecting conversations. He demonstrated that leadership meant being a key nexus point through which conversations would naturally flow. He was not always directing these conversations, but he was a centrally engaged listener and interlocutor. His example is a constant reminder that conversations about mission and identity are indispensable at every level of the university. There is a sense of clarity about what he stood for and a sense of imagination about what he would do in a given situation; he is a source of inspiration that urges one to ask amidst a difficult situation, “What would Brother Ray do?”

**The antithesis of Marianist leadership.** Exemplary lay leaders have an intuitive sense of the antithesis of Marianist leadership; they know what good and bad leadership
look like. There is a sense of clarity about the sharp contrast between a Marianist way of leading and its antithesis – an authoritarian, control-oriented approach. There is a sensitivity towards noticing leaders whose approach seems inconsistent with shared understandings of mission and identity at the university.

Exemplary lay leaders recognize the antithesis of Marianist leadership when they observe the exercise of authority without collaboration and transparency; it is a top-down model of leadership in which the boss’s word is final. It involves an apparent lack of empathy for how policy decisions will impact people, and a sense of hubris and vindictiveness that fosters a hostile environment wherein persons become fearful of being chastised, and consequently, do not feel safe to point out potential diversions to mission and identity. This antithetical approach can manifest itself as: (a) a lack of compassion for those who are most vulnerable, for those who are suffering, marginalized, and in most need of solidarity, kindness, and justice; (b) an excessive fearfulness of litigation that leads to a defensive, manipulative, and untrusting stance towards people; (c) a negative framing of policies with a punitive and controlling emphasis, rather than a positive outlook that emphasizes guidelines for good practice; (d) an extreme stance on mission and identity that is judgmental and dismissive of those who do not agree with one’s views; (e) a tendency to equate the Marianist approach with mediocrity that does not hold people accountable, and allows for excessive leniency without sufficient prudence; (f) an inordinate focus on chasing prestige, rankings, infrastructure, or economic gains, in a manner that seems incongruent with the purposes of a Marianist university; and (g) a lack of intentionality about developing future leaders.
Appealing qualities in Marianist role models. Exemplary lay leaders seek to emulate the role models of Marianist leadership in their lives. There is a recollection of the personal qualities of significant role models – religious and lay persons who continue to have an interior influence. These are qualities that exert a kind of interior pull – an inner attraction that draws one towards the Marianist charism. The five sets of appealing qualities of Marianist role models in the descriptions of exemplary lay leaders are: (a) interpersonal attractiveness, (b) personal selflessness, (c) a personal sense of responsibility, (d) an active intellect within a holistic practice, and (e) person-centeredness.

Interpersonal attractiveness. Marianist role models convey a strong sense of interpersonal attractiveness. They seem approachable and caring to persons they have just met. They convey a warmth that is attractive; a calm and openness to the thoughts of others that makes one feel safe; and a relational approach that is characterized by authenticity, integrity, graciousness, joyfulness, and humor. They have a positive outlook on the world and an incarnational attitude that is very Mary-like, nurturing persons and communities in a Marian way, building an organization that is rooted in its sense of community, and being concerned with manifesting the presence of God in every sphere of human life. They have an ability to communicate their convictions, inspiring others through their actions and words. They maintain a sense of hope, even when things do not work out as planned, trying to move ahead in imaginative and creative ways.

Personal selflessness. Marianist role models convey a disposition of personal selflessness. They have modest, egalitarian, and often low-key approaches. They work tirelessly for the greater good of the institution and the world, not for their own agendas,
nor to draw attention to themselves, nor for accolades, nor trying to impress others with their knowledge or abilities. They are self-aware about the big gaps in their knowledge and abilities, and willing to hire persons who are better than they are, allowing others to come in and find better ways of doing things, even if that means letting go of current approaches and beginning anew. They are mindful of the bigger picture in their decision making, not preoccupied with their personal stories and successes, nor concerned solely about personal objectives and consequences.

**A personal sense of responsibility.** Marianist role models convey a personal sense of responsibility. They have immense passion and energy for the work – not just for one’s personal role and its immediate implications, but also for the institution and the wider Marianist family. They care deeply about the institution and develop a comprehensive understanding of it. They have a strong desire to reflect what is best about being Marianist, and a realization that if lay leaders do not carry the mission – “it’s over!” They are committed to working their jobs in a Marianist way, keeping mission and identity front-and-center in everyday academic and administrative conversations, and especially at critical junctures such as strategic planning, hiring, and shared governance-related conversations.

**An active intellect within a holistic practice.** Marianist role models convey an active intellect within a holistic practice. They integrate spiritual and practical dimensions into their day-to-day activities, practicing rationality alongside an openness to being guided by God’s presence, without overly compartmentalizing their faith and work. They are enthusiastic about their subject area as well as educational pedagogy and human development in general. They are self-reflective, routinely asking questions and
challenging themselves to do better. They engage in deep thinking regardless of their job role. As professionals, they can be non-academic personnel who engage in continual learning or academic personnel who engage in research and scholarship.

**Person-centeredness.** Marianist role models convey a sense of person-centeredness in their approach and embody servant leadership. They are concerned about the persons who are impacted by their decisions and actions. They try to read the signs of the persons in front of them, to see into the hearts and minds of persons, and to be fully present to those around them. They are intentional about developing future leaders, providing counsel and fresh perspectives on circumstances and choices. They are quick to recognize the gifts within persons and to empower them, especially by generating opportunities to practice leadership skills.

**Interior Dimensions**

In this sub-section, I will describe seven textural themes related to the interior experiences of the exemplary lay leaders in this study, namely: (a) interior change, (b) the hidden work of leadership, (c) prayer and reflection, (d) personal discernment, (e) falling short, (f) low points, and (g) the challenges of being lay.

**Interior change.** Exemplary lay leaders find that their commitment has changed them interiorly. It has made them less self-centered and self-righteous, and more open and empathetic. There is a growing capacity for listening more intently to others’ perspectives, becoming increasingly non-judgmental and understanding towards people who may be at different places in their journeys of faith and commitment – to make a place for them and respect their paths. There is a growing acceptance of personal suffering, and a realization that one has to go deeper into oneself in order to transform
periods of sorrow or uncertainty into opportunities for growth in self-knowledge, surrender, and trust. There is a growing desire for deeper spiritual seeking, for prayer and/or reflection, and to keep moving ahead with confidence in God’s providence and/or a sincere openness to divine inspiration. There is a growing acceptance of human weakness – a deepening sense of empathy in dealing with the shortcomings and failings of others.

Exemplary lay leaders convey an awareness that they have grown in maturity and wisdom. There is a sense of clarity around important values and principles – about what really matters. Simultaneously, there is a growing tolerance for ambiguity – a realization that there are often more gray areas than are initially noticeable; that there can be more than one right answer. There is an effort to be more self-aware in decision making, and to move away from strict and unbending views about what student behavior or the wide range of university policies should be. Even though there is greater clarity about what is obviously wrong, there is also increasing tolerance for what might be the right thing to do in a given situation. There is a conscious effort to avoid extremes and remain open – not to harden one’s heart; to be neither closed-minded and judgmental nor negligent and lax about holding people accountable. There is an awareness of becoming more centered amidst day-to-day work, a sense of urgency for the institution’s future, and a sense of deeper purpose while educating – moving from a narrow focus on providing mere instruction on subject matter, towards an emphasis on transforming students who, in turn, will transform the world. There is a growing capacity for letting go – not wanting to control everything nor stressing over getting every detail to be exactly right, and instead, embracing all aspects of one’s job role more willingly. There is a conscious effort to
become less egocentric – not taking oneself too seriously, not being concerned about being in charge of initiatives or taking credit when things go well. The gradual loss of ego is one of the good costs of commitment – a cost one is glad to pay. There is a growing acknowledgment that it is not about “me”; instead, it is all about “us” – about community.

The hidden work of leadership. Exemplary lay leaders observe that the practice of leadership often requires hidden work – activities that are naturally interior in nature, and therefore not obvious to others; for example, personal prayer and reflection. Amidst day-to-day academic work, their interior lives and external activities are experientially integrated; that is, even though the interior and exterior dimensions of everyday life are intellectually distinguishable, they are experientially inseparable. They convey a sense of awareness of the simultaneity of the interior and exterior streams of lived experience, and try to integrate these in a manner that feels personally authentic. There is an awareness that the interior life overflows into exterior practice; for example, inner optimism fosters positive action, and inner gratitude compels giving forward.

There are times of appearing calm and decisive while simultaneously feeling troubled or unsure. There are times of feeling “stuffed with secrets,” because administrative conversations and decision-making processes often need to remain confidential in order to protect the persons and institutional interests involved. There is a desire to make confidential decisions in a manner that one will not feel ashamed about if, hypothetically, all details became publicly known. There is a willingness to speak up for the needs of one’s colleagues; to watch their backs and work in their best interests, even when they may not know about it. There is a sense of acceptance that many of one’s
efforts may never be seen and appreciated. There is an awareness that people who are evaluating one’s decisions from afar may not have full knowledge of all the considerations that went into the difficult choices involved. Thus, there is always the possibility of being unfairly judged or misunderstood.

Though much of leadership remains internal, exemplary lay leaders make an effort to be open and transparent in a manner that is reasonable and healthy. One of the blessings of being an educator-leader is to have the opportunity to reveal aspects of one’s inner experiences to others; that is, to make one’s interior life – exterior, and share one’s journey of the soul with others.

**Prayer and reflection.** Prayer takes several forms in the lives of exemplary lay leaders. It is experienced as moments of pausing to have a conversation with God, or simply a quiet period of centering and reflection. Some have a conversational emphasis in their descriptions of prayer – an interior, personal conversation; and others have a reflective emphasis – a thoughtful, discerning disposition. Prayer or reflection are not merely activities that are done occasionally; rather, they are orientations that are ongoing – necessary dispositions for dealing with the tensions inherent in leadership.

Exemplary lay leaders convey a sense of prayerfulness in action, reflective listening, and openness to divine inspiration that could come from any source; for example, through a random interaction with a person who is placed in one’s path, who says something that one needed to hear. There is a realization that everything does not always seem to cohere in a perfectly unified way; there is usually some degree of fragmentation and incompleteness that makes reflection necessary. There is an awareness that prayerful reflection can happen anywhere – in the chapel, at home, in the
shower, in the car; it can happen in quiet spaces and amidst busy ones. There are
moments of feeling inadequate about one’s interior life, especially one’s prayer life.
There is a realization that even though it is common to pray amidst personal crises, much
of prayer is really about receiving, appreciating, giving thanks, and listening.

Exemplary lay leaders convey that prayer can be experienced interiorly in several
ways. Moments of gratitude are a form of prayer; for example, observing the efforts of
several persons coming together in awe-inspiring ways, or consciously recalling the gifts
and blessings in one’s life. Moments of appreciating goodness are a form of prayer; for
example, observing beauty in nature, and in people. Moments of reflection amidst
decision making are a form of prayer; for example, asking for guidance to discern what is
the right thing to do.

Exemplary lay leaders also convey that prayer can be experienced as a spirituality
of meaningful relationships; for example, entering into interior conversations with God
the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit; inspirational figures in the Catholic-
Marianist narrative, such as Mary and the Marianist founders; or people in one’s past
with whom one feels a special connection, such as a parent who has passed away. These
prayerful conversations may or may not include imaginatively talking with the person
one is bringing to mind; however, they do involve a sense of accompaniment in spirit –
an interior companionship.

Some exemplary lay leaders make an effort to include a brief period of prayer
during official meetings and gatherings, while others may not necessarily take the lead in
doing so. However, there is a conscious effort to be sensitive to the faith traditions of all
persons involved, in a manner that respects individual journeys while also honoring the university’s religious ethos.

**Personal discernment.** Exemplary lay leaders convey that personal discernment involves both interior and exterior conversations. It requires giving appropriate amounts of time to different kinds of decisions. While there is a conscious effort to enter into reflection when faced with difficult decisions, there is also an acknowledgment that mundane decisions should not be relegated to an “auto pilot” mode; a prayerful and/or reflective disposition is necessary across all administrative decision making – both mundane and critical. There is an effort to really see what is truly important – to wonder about the big things that one does not yet see. There is an awareness that day-to-day academic and administrative decisions are ultimately connected with the big picture of mission and identity. There is a realization that, in hindsight, it is often the little things that turn out to be the most important.

Exemplary lay leaders differ in the religious expression of their inner discernment process, but not in their effort to engage in moral and ethical considerations, especially through the lens of the Marianist charism. There is a realization that emotions have a role to play in discernment, as they can serve as useful pointers to important and underlying issues. However, there is also an acknowledgment that even though it is helpful to consider one’s emotions during the decision-making process, it is important to allow the principles embedded in mission and identity to guide its final outcome. There is an openness to discerning the signs of happenstance or divine providence that are present in unfolding events, circumstances, and personal interactions. There is a willingness and
effort to reach out to trusted confidants amidst difficult decisions or conundrums – persons who will not shy away from sharing different perspectives.

Exemplary lay leaders convey a strong sense of clarity about their priorities in life. There is a realization that all commitments, personal and professional, are interrelated and make up an integrated whole. There is an awareness that their commitment to mission and identity has influenced their personal career choices, especially their scholarly and administrative trajectories.

**Falling short.** Exemplary lay leaders experience moments of falling short of the high ideals implicit in mission and identity. They are grateful for the appreciation and praise they receive, while simultaneously emphasizing that they have failings and weaknesses too. They are quick to recognize the times when they have momentarily behaved in ways that do not represent their best selves. When this happens, there is an effort to be self-reflective; there is a feeling of some remorse and an acceptance of ownership for one’s actions, followed by reminding oneself of one’s true identity and standards of behavior, and encouraging oneself to do better next time. There is a conscious effort to avoid a downward spiral of feeling guilty and inadequate, or worse, hypocritical as a committed person and leader. There is an inherent pressure in being a role model in small and big ways; there can be times of feeling a little exhausted and exclaiming, “I’m human too!” There is an awareness that one is unlikely to always live up to every expectation of people involved, or even one’s own. It is helpful to listen to the struggles of other leaders, especially those whom one holds in high esteem; it is comforting to know that seemingly self-assured and confident persons are, in fact, struggling to rise above their shortcomings too. Experiences of falling short foster
humility; they provide opportunities for developing courage and discipline – to acknowledge one’s weaknesses; to keep getting up; to try to do better next time.

**Low points.** There are low points in the commitment and/or leadership journeys of exemplary lay leaders – experiences of feeling conflicted interiorly. The sources of distress often include strained relationships, administrative conflicts involving difficult decisions, feelings of disappointment with leader behaviors, or discouragement when one’s gifts seem to be unappreciated or underutilized. Some have experienced occasional or sustained interior questioning concerning the tenets of their faith, or dry periods during which their faith-based commitments became less prominent in everyday life. Some have experienced difficult circumstances or relationships in their work-life that caused them to consider the possibility of leaving the institution. Some have experienced leader behaviors by lay and/or religious persons that seem to be inconsistent with shared understandings of the Marianist charism. However, none of them have experienced a crisis of commitment that led to the experience of “un-committing.” No matter how low they felt, their basic commitment to the values and principles implicit in Catholic-Marianist mission and identity were not in question; the uniqueness and significance of the Marianist charism were not doubted.

The absence of crises of commitment to mission and identity does not imply a lack of conscious effort. Exemplary lay leaders experience the inner work of choosing to stay committed, especially amidst difficult relationships or discouraging circumstances; moments when commitment felt strained or tested; moments of wondering, “Did it make any difference?” or “Did I truly believe in what I was saying?” or “Do I believe enough… to try to stay and be committed?” or “Is this really what we’re about?” or “Is
this really worth it?” Periods of questioning are usually short-lived in comparison to the experience of being actively committed. Periods of inner conflict tend to result in the deepening of commitment and conscious re-commitment. There is an acknowledgment that there are going to be good and bad days; not everyone is going to feel total commitment all the time. Simply realizing that there are going to be highs and lows, makes the lows not so low.

**The challenges of being lay.** Exemplary lay leaders convey that committed lay persons face distinct challenges and circumstances that are particular to their state of life, and in many ways, different from the experiences of committed religious persons. Several perspectives emerge from the descriptions of exemplary lay leaders, illuminating three interrelated facets:

First, the distinctions are not really about the titles of being “religious” or “lay”; instead, they are about the place that God holds in the person’s life – religious or lay. Exemplary lay leaders express appreciation for vowed religious persons who give their entire lives to God; however, there is also an observation that many lay persons seem to have a similar degree of life-encompassing commitment, each in one’s own vocational context. Thus, the distinction is not merely about external titles or states of life; rather, it comes down to the degree of interior commitment within each person – religious or lay.

Second, exemplary lay leaders appreciate that religious persons live out their commitment every moment of every day, and find that lay persons can also do the same in their own contexts. Some of them speak of their commitment to mission and identity as an important part of their lives; others speak of it as a central identity. This is not a dichotomy, but rather, a meaning-making strategy that helps lay persons maintain a sense
of balance between their professional and personal selves, while striving for wholeness in a manner that seems personally appropriate. Thus, even though committed lay persons can put their university-related commitments aside at the end of each workday, their interior commitment does not leave them when they return to their personal lives; they too are committed every moment of every day, albeit in a manner that is experienced differently.

Third, exemplary lay leaders convey that the amount of time perceived to be expected from committed lay persons could become a challenge in their lives. There is an acknowledgment that mission and identity-related activities often require the giving of one’s personal time, which in turn has implications on other personal priorities, especially as a parent and a spouse. While it is unhealthy for both religious and lay persons to regularly work long hours at the institution, religious persons can seem to do so in a manner that makes sense in the context of their religious vocation. However, devoting the same proportion of time can easily become unhealthy for lay persons, especially if it comes at the cost of time with family. Thus, in a sense, lay persons have to filter their commitment through a more complicated life. For example, they cannot detach from the difficult persons or situations in their families in quite the same manner that religious persons seem to have the option of sending away troublesome persons in their communities.

Exemplary lay leaders find that while they have generally been able to attend to their families over the years, it has been a demanding and often difficult balancing act that has required much effort and intentionality. It is common for their family members to be exposed to the institution, albeit in differing degrees of involvement. They cherish
the times when members of their families experienced the mission and identity of the institution in personal ways and expressed appreciation and support for it. For some of them, their commitment to the Marianist charism is a family endeavor, which adds an additional layer of complexity to their lived experience.

**Emphases in Practice**

In this sub-section, I will describe seven textural themes related to the everyday practice of the exemplary lay leaders in this study, namely: (a) educating intentionally, (b) an active intellect, (c) speaking up for mission, (d) consultative consensus building, (e) dealing with difficult relationships, (f) finding sustenance in supportive relationships, and (g) joyfulness and a whole life.

**Educating intentionally.** Exemplary lay leaders make a conscious effort to educate intentionally, helping students discover and develop their personal vocations in their deepest sense. They invite students to consider elements in mission and identity as resources that can make a real difference in their lives, and in the world. They find inspiration in students who are intentional about their commitment and activities related to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity. They notice students who seem interested in mission and identity, and make an effort to help them explore their curiosities. Amidst day-to-day activities with students and colleagues, it is not always possible, or even appropriate, to talk about topics directly related to mission and identity; however, when an opportunity presents itself, they make an effort to draw connections between the topic at hand and the university’s mission and identity, doing so in a low-key, sincere, and relevant manner that is likely to attract attention and respect.
Exemplary lay leaders learn from their students. They make a conscious effort to be present to students despite the many demands on their personal time and energy. They are open to being an elder or mentor to students – someone who accompanies them in their struggles, joys, and hopes. They try to notice those students who may not be feeling included, thus conveying that each student is important, that everyone’s opinion matters. They develop a special attentiveness towards students who are struggling and a greater openness towards considering ways to help them succeed, doing so in a manner that maintains the high standards of the university without succumbing to an unyielding, rigid stance towards students’ struggles and needs. They convey a realization that every interaction with a student is a potential teaching moment, that every student is a gift, and that education is about transforming the world – one student at a time.

**An active intellect.** Exemplary lay leaders have an active intellect. They try to make time for reading and study in a manner that is congruent with their scholarly and/or administrative roles and backgrounds. In every new role, they try to find and work the connection with mission and identity. They find value in reflection informed by disciplined reading and study. Some of them emphasize their recourse to reading the Bible and other spiritual books as sources of inspiration and wisdom, and all of them emphasize their ongoing reading and reflection about the Marianist story and charism.

Exemplary lay leaders who were faculty members when they took on administrative roles found that their new responsibilities made it difficult to pursue their scholarship at the same pace as before; nevertheless, they continued to make an effort to maintain some amount of intellectual activity. They are aware of their conscious choices in giving a substantial portion of their personal time and energy to mission and identity-
related activities over the years – time and energy that could have been directed solely towards a scholarly agenda or other personal pursuits. They convey a sense of conviction that it is not only faculty resumes and research that matter – teaching matters, students matter, and mission and identity matter.

**Speaking up for mission.** Exemplary lay leaders make an effort to speak up for mission; they ask questions and bring up issues that others may not. They also make an effort to speak up on behalf of their colleagues and students, especially in terms of pointing out policies and issues that may have an adverse effect on people or seem incongruous with mission and identity. It takes courage to put oneself out there – to reveal one’s convictions despite the risk of becoming marginalized or being received with silence. There can be times of feeling like a minority – not necessarily in a victimizing way, but an awareness of being a lone voice because no one else seems to be speaking up. There can be times of feeling discouraged, feeling like one is pushing the boulder up the hill.

There is an awareness of the need to avoid extreme approaches – not becoming apologetic about the university’s religious identity, nor behaving like the “Catholic police.” There is an emphasis on adopting a sensitive and respectful approach to giving one’s voice for mission – not in a discordant, self-righteous, or exclusive manner, but with a sense of confidence that if the Marianist charism is articulated in a less superficial and more personal manner, many more people would be attracted to it regardless of their faith traditions or professional backgrounds. There is an awareness of the responsibility to be a tangible example of someone who cares about mission within one’s department and unit.
Consultative consensus building. Exemplary lay leaders practice a consultative consensus building approach to shared decision making and problem solving. This is a continual, collective, and slow learning process that is “messier” and harder than a top-down approach because it seeks to involve every relevant person and listen to all perspectives. Consensus building involves an openness towards making mistakes and learning from them – making time for stepping back in personal reflection, and then coming together in collective reevaluation, uncovering new insights and possibilities each time. There is an element of creativity in shared decision making, especially in relation to the experience of bringing all relevant voices into dialogue and facilitating the process of consensus building through extended conversations.

Consensus does not imply unanimity; exemplary lay leaders convey an openness towards accepting collective decisions that they may not fully agree with personally, while also ensuring that these decisions are a result of sincere listening and collective discernment. There is an acknowledgment that a decision needs to be made at some point and the group needs to move on; however, there is also a commitment towards making every possible effort to listen to all voices, build consensus, and move forward together. There is an awareness that this approach is rarely perfect in its implementation, if ever, and that it tends to take a lot of time and effort; however, it is time and effort that is spent on the right things, which is ultimately worth it in light of mission and identity.

Dealing with difficult relationships. Exemplary lay leaders seek to work through difficult relationships in a manner that is consistent with their sense of commitment. They convey a realization that difficult conversations need not be discordant – it is possible to respect each other, and even love each other, despite serious
disagreements or personality-related dislike. Amidst a difficult relationship, it is helpful to remember that everything is not about oneself, and that there is something bigger at stake; the knowledge of the greater good helps one to keep moving forward.

Exemplary lay leaders make an effort to reach out to the persons in conflict, to keep the conversation going, not to pre-judge, and especially to listen from the other’s point of view and help them understand one’s own. There is an effort to sincerely consider one’s role in the conflict, acknowledge one’s shortcomings or wrongdoings, and attempt to make concrete changes. There is a conscious choice to not dwell on negative feelings, to let go and move towards hope and healing. Conflict is often an opportunity to listen to perspectives and worldviews that one does not perceive or fully understand; it is an opportunity to arrive at better decisions and richer relationships.

Difficult decisions involving letting go of current employees are a particularly potent source of stress. There is an effort to do everything possible to provide assistance and support to employees struggling with personal and professional challenges. There is an insight that every difficult decision has a story – for the persons involved, and for oneself. Exemplary lay leaders find that gratefully recalling the many gifts and blessings in one’s life is a key antidote to the stress and hurt experienced through negative interactions.

**Finding sustenance in supportive relationships.** Exemplary lay leaders find sustenance in supportive relationships with other committed persons – relationships that have grown in trust over a long period of shared personal histories. They have at least a few anchor relationships at the university – persons who form an inner circle of trust.
There is always someone to go to in times of difficulty and ask for advice or a neutral perspective – to allow one’s true self to be seen and loved.

Exemplary lay leaders draw strength and sustenance from little day-to-day interactions with persons they work closely with – faculty, staff, and students. These interchanges go beyond professional courtesy and small talk; they are ways of expressing support and feeling supported in light of mission and identity. Reading, studying, and reflecting on mission and identity-related materials becomes a shared quest in community, and a way of nurturing one’s interior life and everyday practice.

Joyfulness and a whole life. Exemplary lay leaders convey a sense of joyfulness in their descriptions. They speak of their own shortcomings and mistakes with a sense of humor. They tend to minimize the praise they receive – not in a self-deprecating manner, but in a way that conveys their self-awareness of fallibility as a human being. When they are describing difficult experiences or relationships, they emphasize having experienced much joy and blessings too. They make an effort to let go of hurt and stress, and hold on to a sense of gratitude and hope. Their joy and humor are often manifested in their conversations with God or personal reflections, and in moments of noticing little signs of divine serendipity amidst daily life. There are moments when they convey a sense of joy during the retelling of a grim or sad memory, and moments when they convey a serious insight through a lighthearted comment or joke.

Exemplary lay leaders seek to lead a balanced life and cultivate a wide range of interests – to be a whole person. They find value in rest and relaxation, in family time, and in fellowship with relatives and friends. They try to make their work environment a pleasant place to be; to share a warm smile with passersby, and kindness with strangers.
They convey a sense of realization that the story of commitment need not be that of sacrifice and suffering, but that of joy and gratitude, and occasionally, of laughter and fun.

**Nurturing Commitment and Leadership**

In addition to the three clusters of composite textural themes presented above, the exemplary lay leaders in this study shared several organization-specific reflections related to nurturing commitment and leadership. In this sub-section, I will describe seven reflective themes related to nurturing commitment and leadership, namely: (a) a shared responsibility, (b) formational programming, (c) Marianist educational associates, (d) mission-orientation in organizational processes, (e) nurturing commitment, (f) developing leaders, and (g) contemporizing Marianist language and application.

**A shared responsibility.** Exemplary lay leaders emphasize that the work of nurturing commitment to mission and identity, as well as leadership development, is a shared responsibility. It cannot be delegated solely to Marianist religious persons, campus ministers, Marianist educational associates, or other personnel whose roles or activities are directly related to mission and identity enculturation. They emphasize the importance of creating opportunities for departmental colleagues to discuss Marianist ideas in the context of their day-to-day work. They convey an insight that it is important to help committed lay persons realize that mission and identity can be transmitted from lay person to lay person; that they are as “qualified” as religiously-trained persons; that their witness can be as credible; that their service is as welcomed and valued as that of religious persons. They find that supporting student leaders who are committed to mission and identity is an effective strategy to reach other students.
Exemplary lay leaders convey an insight that, in some ways, there is greater credibility in the witness of “unlikely bearers” of mission and identity – persons whom one would not obviously associate with commitment. These include lay persons whose background, profession, or university role is not obviously connected to Catholic-Marianist activities; these are individuals who have come to commitment through unique pathways, and whose atypical expression of commitment attracts the attention of their students and colleagues, thus making their witness especially relatable and powerful.

There is a realization that it is better to allow mission and identity to remain uncontained and ubiquitous across the university community, so that diverse persons have the opportunity to experience it subjectively and spontaneously, and respond in unique and imaginative ways that allow for personal authenticity, expression, and ownership.

**Formational programming.** Exemplary lay leaders find that the formational programs and spiritual services offered by several offices within the university provide important intersections for people to come together and get inspired, energized, and instructed. These include programs and services offered by Campus Ministry, Office for Mission and Rector, Learning Teaching Center, Office of the Provost, Association of Marianist Universities, Fitz Center for Leadership in Community, and others. Mission and identity-related programming offers meeting places for developing an awareness that one is not alone in the search for meaning and purpose, in the human longing for the divine, and in the journey of commitment and leadership.

Exemplary lay leaders observe that there is a lot of Catholic-Marianist programming on campus, and limitations of time and energy do not allow them to engage with much of it. They experience moments of feeling weighed down by time constraints
and experiencing some guilt in saying no to some of the invitations they receive. They perceive the need to draw some boundaries between family and institutional commitments in a manner that is balanced and fair to both. They make an effort to make mission and identity-related programming available to their colleagues, supporting anyone who wishes to participate.

Exemplary lay leaders convey a felt need to devote more organizational energy and resources towards developing a larger circle of committed persons that the institution can turn to for major requirements of time, energy, and thought in connection with mission and identity-related objectives. They have come to realize that it is important to avoid calling upon the same committed persons repeatedly, so that their involvement does not become burdensome in light of their family and other commitments.

It is important that formational programs do not “fit neatly in a box,” that is, remain external and distant; it is better when these programs extend their services and influence in a manner that permeates into everyday academic life, meeting people where they are within the university community. The Catholic-Marianist ethos provides a unique opportunity to demonstrate the promise and power of collaboration for mission in ways that other universities may find implausible.

**Marianist educational associates.** The Marianist Educational Associates (MEA) program features prominently across the descriptions of the exemplary lay leaders in this study. They find that this initiative provides opportunities that allow persons from across the university to get to know, respect, and care for each other, and learn about Catholic and Marianist mission and identity in a safe and supportive environment. They emphasize that their formational experiences in the MEA program had a significant
influence on their lives and work as educator-leaders. They treasure the trusting and supportive relationships that developed over time; these personal bonds are a source of solace and recourse in times of need. They convey a recollection of engaging in sustained reading and conversations about the Marianist story and charism, gradually putting the pieces together, and especially connecting with the passion and drive of the Marianist founders. They find that the experience of making a public commitment was a particularly significant inflection point in their journey of commitment – a moment of saying a “big yes” to mission and identity.

Exemplary lay leaders convey a felt need for emphasizing that being an MEA is not about a special designation or group on campus. Rather, it is indicative of an interior commitment – a personal sense of responsibility for giving one’s voice and work for mission and identity. It is important to call on MEAs to offer mission and identity-related perspectives on university-related challenges and initiatives; however, it is also important to acknowledge that no single program or group should bear sole responsibility for the future of mission and identity. There is an acknowledgment of the danger of relying on MEAs in a manner that can appear to be exclusive; thus, it is important to avoid the impression of creating in-groups and out-groups, even when that is not the intent. There is an emphasis that the presence of MEAs does not substitute the need for nurturing and supporting leadership commitment to mission and identity at every level and area within the university; the presence of MEAs is meant to contribute towards that very need.

**Mission-orientation in organizational processes.** Exemplary lay leaders find that there are several mission-critical university-wide processes that provide opportunities for integrating mission and identity into the structure and culture of the university,
particularly: strategic planning, hiring for mission, employee orientation, job and competency descriptions, performance evaluations, and several forms of shared governance, especially the work of the Board of Trustees and the Academic Senate.

Within each of these mission-critical processes, exemplary lay leaders emphasize the importance of infusing mission and identity-related considerations early into the conversation – not as an afterthought, nor a “tick box” item. They point out the importance of keeping mission and identity front and center, amidst considerations of academic excellence, financial planning, program accreditations, university rankings, physical infrastructure, athletics, student services, and other operational areas.

Nurturing commitment. Exemplary lay leaders share several personal reflections about nurturing commitment. They convey an insight that leadership commitment is nurtured primarily through the power of personal example; it cannot be simply taught or trained. It needs to be demonstrated in everyday practice and exemplified in role models.

It is important to nurture cultural catalysts – persons who take up obvious leadership roles related to mission and identity. However, it is equally important to nurture cultural citizens – persons who are open to and appreciative of mission and identity but choose not to be actively engaged due to various personal reasons. It is important to find ways to extend the conversation beyond those who express commitment or openness to it. There is a need to talk about Marianist values in a manner that opens the circle, so that no one feels excluded nor marginalized, especially those who are not familiar with the Catholic or Christian faith tradition, or those who may not have any religious affiliation. Mission and identity need to remain visible in order to stay real.
Nurturing commitment requires both symbolic and practical responses. It is important to make Catholic-Marianist identity more evident across the campus, especially through visual symbols, celebrations, and other experiential markers. It is critical to ensure that mission and identity-related programming and initiatives are proactively planned and adequately funded. It is crucial to publicly recognize and personally appreciate faculty, staff, and students for their mission and identity-related contributions. The key is to make their engagement with the university community a valued and rewarded piece of their job profile. It is important to encourage new faculty to participate in mission and identity-related conversations and programs so that they have the opportunity to develop a sense of connection and commitment towards the broader purposes of a Catholic-Marianist university. Conversely, it is important to avoid protecting faculty from activities that go beyond their own research and teaching, as this often leads to the stunting of their growth as engaged leaders within the university community. It is important not to allow engagement with mission and identity to become something that is unappreciated, unrecognized, and unrewarded – something that is tolerated at best.

**Developing leaders.** Exemplary lay leaders convey a strong sense of gratitude towards several Marianist role models who had a significant influence on their own leadership; they find that mentoring younger leaders is a way of paying it forward. The intentional act and experience of accompaniment is an important Marianist emphasis in leadership development; it is vital to have elders who accompany younger leaders, especially during early development – sharing their life experiences as wisdom. The feedback and critique from others often contain learning gifts.
Exemplary lay leaders find that leadership development becomes increasingly real in the context of the critical need for having committed lay leaders across the university community. They share several practice-born insights and reflections related to developing leaders, including the following:

Leadership development is the continuous process of building a pipeline of leaders who are being prepared and supported to step forward and take on ever-increasing responsibilities for mission and identity. A key goal of leadership development is to build a critical mass of people at every level and area within the university – persons who are fully on board and choosing to work at the university for reasons beyond personal careers and needs – persons who are “here for the mission.” There is a need to clarify what it means to be a Marianist leader – what the practice of Marianist principles looks like in real life. It is important to distinguish between leadership and management, and recognize that leadership development can be an engaging experience that goes beyond academic “administrivia.” It is important to help educators realize that they are leaders in many ways, even when they may not label their day-to-day work as leadership. Bringing faculty and staff together, in order to learn about and from each other, is an important Marianist emphasis. It is important to find the right scale within each developmental program – the optimal group size and mix of persons and roles that can produce in-depth conversations and genuine relationship building.

Exemplary lay leaders convey a sense of urgency about leadership development; it is a worthy use of one’s time and energy. There is an effort to notice persons who have a sense of calling and potential for leadership. There is a resolve to develop leaders who will step into one’s role and perform it even better. There is an awareness that much of
leadership development is about perceiving and nurturing the leadership gifts within persons – giving them opportunities to discover and practice their talents and abilities. There is an insight that leadership skills can be developed, and can grow and mature over time; leadership development is really about providing the environment and opportunities for this to happen.

**Contemporizing Marianist language and application.** Exemplary lay leaders find that it is important to go back to the roots of the Marianist charism; to draw from the early Christian narrative and the Marian narrative that Father Chaminade drew from; to study the development of Marianist history, spirituality, and educational approach over the past two hundred years; to reflect about the values, concepts, and practices that are particularly Marianist. They recognize the potential for lay leaders to contribute to the common project of studying the Marianist charism, its distinctive ideas and approaches, and subsequently, contemporizing its language and application, each in the context of one’s own job role and scholarly field. They emphasize the importance of recognizing that egalitarian, non-hierarchical, non-clerical, and lay leadership emphases are particularly striking facets of the Marianist charism.

Exemplary lay leaders convey a sense of conviction that the Marianist charism has something special to offer to higher education, and to the world. They recognize that there are particularly Marianist values, norms, and behaviors that can make students better leaders. They find that Marianist principles and practices are also effective leadership strategies in general, and that there are several traditional emphases in Marianist education that are aligned with what modern organizations appreciate. For example, the Marianist emphases on community, collaboration, and adaptation can be
traced back to its founding era; and yet, these are ideals that are relevant, needed, and sought-after in the twenty-first century.
Composite Structures of the Phenomenon

In this section, I will describe the composite structures that emerged from my collective analysis of the phenomenological data, related to six existential themes underlying the phenomenon in focus, namely: causal influences (causality), experience through time (temporality), spatial awareness (spatiality), expressions of body-hood (body-hood), descriptions of self (self), and relationship with others (relationality) (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014).

Causality

Causality refers to the participants’ personal awareness and understandings related to how they came to experience the phenomenon in focus. My analysis of the phenomenological data revealed that leadership commitment has a causal dimension that is experienced as “evocations” of commitment, that is, significant periods of moving towards deeper engagement. Exemplary lay leaders shed light on several influences that nurtured and sustained their leadership commitment to mission and identity. Their descriptions contain six causal themes: (a) the presence of exemplary persons in early life, (b) initial resonance with Marianist values, (c) the influence of exemplary Marianist persons, (d) a deepening immersion into the Marianist charism, (e) the experience of extended conversations, and (f) a growing gratitude that evoked deeper commitment.

The presence of exemplary persons in early life. Exemplary lay leaders convey a recollection of developmental relationships in their childhood and young adulthood that predisposed them towards commitment. These were individuals who were inspirational because they possessed exemplary personal qualities, especially their faith life and/or personal character. These were parental figures, such as parents, grandparents, relatives,
teachers, or religious persons, who could be observed regularly and at close quarters. The degree of Christian or Catholic enculturation in their early developmental environments differs, but the presence of influential role models does not.

**Initial resonance with Marianist values.** Exemplary lay leaders recall their experience of initial resonance with Marianist values that were evident in the culture of the university. This experience was a precursor to conscious commitment. As they reflect about their experience of entering the university community, they recall a sense of ease with which they resonated with particular elements within the university’s culture – a sense of making a vocational connection with mission and identity. All of them experienced a sense of continuity between one’s personal story and elements in Catholic-Marianist tradition; a sense of compatibility between one’s personal temperament and the Marianist approach to relationships; and a sense of congruence or match between one’s personal convictions and Catholic-Marianist educational emphases, especially educating for justice and service, and for formation in faith. They differ in the religiosity of their meaning making but not in their sense of vocation as an educator. Some emphasize divine providence or a sense of God’s calling to work in Catholic education, and others emphasize chance or happenstance; however, all of them convey a strong sense of vocation as an educator, which moved them to build new commitments upon existing ones.

**The influence of exemplary Marianist persons.** Exemplary lay leaders emphasize the influence of exemplary Marianist persons, both lay and religious, in the context of an overall caring community. There is a recollection of having many inspiring examples of what good leadership looks like and what being a Marianist looks like.
There are fond memories of observing several exemplary religious and lay leaders who worked their jobs in a Marianist way – persons whom one grew to respect, love, and emulate. There is ongoing inspiration in the witness of religious and lay leaders one works closely with, as well as students who do extraordinary things in alignment with the university’s mission and identity. There is a recollection of being received into a caring community; finding other persons who share in one’s convictions and commitments; feeling needed, wanted, and sought out; and being personally invited to deeper levels of commitment.

**A deepening immersion into the Marianist charism.** Exemplary lay leaders recall their experiences of learning more about the Marianist story, especially finding inspiration in the lives of the Marianist founders. Gradually, they experienced a movement towards deeper immersion into the charism; engaging in serious reading, thinking, and soul-searching; and finding the Marianist charism to be a valuable resource that nurtured their spirituality and educational practice. There is a recollection of significant moments that evoked deeper commitment, especially interior experiences during events that provided exposure to the wider Marianist family, or programs that delved deeply into the Marianist story and charism.

**The experience of extended conversations.** Exemplary lay leaders recollect entering into increasingly extended conversations around mission and identity, thus building deeper relationships, sharing personal stories, clarifying understandings, and learning together. Some entered into extended conversations through their participation in formal working groups, while others came to it through their involvement in mission and identity-related programming. They differ in the extent to which they proactively
sought out mission and identity-related conversations; however, after responding to initial invitations or opportunities to participate, all of them experienced growth in commitment as a result of being engaged in sustained conversations with fellow seekers, learners, and contributors.

**A growing gratitude that evoked deeper commitment.** Exemplary lay leaders gradually developed a palpable sense of gratitude that evoked deeper, long-term commitment. They express a strong sense of gratitude for the trust, support, affirmation, and encouragement they have received; for being valued as persons, and appreciated in formal and informal ways; for being personally invited to contribute in specific roles and initiatives; and especially for previously unknown pathways and possibilities that came to be. There is an awareness that one has grown in responsibility for the mission – a sense of being personally entrusted with the mission. There is proactive seeking to contribute, and often in increasing capacities. There is a sense of comfort and strength in an inner circle of supportive relationships, especially during times of difficulty or discernment. There is a recollection of experiencing genuine mentoring, and consequently, a desire to pay it forward.

**Temporality**

Temporality refers to the experience of time – the past, present, and future – in relation to the phenomenon in focus. My analysis of the phenomenological data revealed that leadership commitment has a temporal dimension; that is, it is experienced in relation to the passage of time. The descriptions of exemplary lay leaders contain three temporal themes: (a) progressive phases of growth in commitment, (b) a sense of connection with the past and the future, and (c) a lifetime of meaning making.
**Progressive phases of growth in commitment.** Exemplary lay leaders experience their leadership commitment as an ongoing, interior process that is punctuated with significant experiences and critical junctures. None of them point to a singular transformational moment or decision at the onset of their commitment journey. However, in hindsight, all of them recall key inflection points; that is, life events, conversations, and crossroads when commitment was induced, expressed, or deepened. The progressive phases of growth in commitment are:

1. **Predisposition.** Receiving the seeds of commitment in early life, especially the values and faith traditions that were experienced and imbibed, often unconsciously, during their developmental years in family, church, school, and university life.

2. **Initial attraction.** Experiencing an interior pull towards specific aspects of Catholic-Marianist tradition, especially Marianist spirituality, educational approach, or interpersonal culture among both students and colleagues, which connected with threads in their personal life stories, gradually leading towards involvement in low-risk activities and conversations related to mission and identity.

3. **Affirmational ongoingness.** Observing and interacting with several exemplary role models, engaging in conversations and activities related to mission and identity, having innumerable experiences of positive institutional culture, picking little pieces along the way – like the flowing waters of the brook that shape the rock.
4. **An increasingly conscious commitment.** A gradual realization of increasing alignment between their interior convictions and Catholic-Marianist emphases; a growing into appreciation and connection; a rising awareness that is often imperceptible in the moment, but which becomes increasingly noticeable in hindsight.

5. **The continuing work of perseverance.** An ongoing process of endeavoring to live, sustain, and deepen their commitment in communion with other committed persons, and in engagement with the university community and beyond.

**A sense of connection with the past and the future.** Exemplary lay leaders find that their commitment gives them a sense of connection with the past, with the Marianist story, and with Catholic intellectual tradition and social teaching. It also gives them a sense of connection with the future – passing on the conversation to the next generation, and looking ahead with openness and hope. They are able to critique the university from a long-term perspective – what it used to be and what it is becoming. They see connections between the historical Marianist narrative of the founding era and the contemporary challenges faced by the Marianist family today. They recognize their role in the ongoing conversation about mission and identity. They convey a sense of gentle patience and steady pace, but also a sense of prudent urgency for the work of sustaining and nurturing mission and identity.

**A lifetime of meaning making.** Exemplary lay leaders experience a sense of growth in maturity and meaning making over a lifetime of experiences in the Catholic-Marianist context. Their sense of commitment is not time-bound, role-bound, or
employment-bound; instead, they convey a timeless sense of commitment that will continue through the rest of their lives. The giving of one’s “life” time is a normal outcome of commitment, and the challenge of balancing the many demands on one’s time is ever-present. They find that their commitment has required spending some of their time away from personal or professional priorities, especially family life and scholarship. They have come to realize that the work of commitment cannot be crammed in; it has to be commitment over a lifetime. They convey an insight that the present moment in time is where commitment is lived – the person one is interacting with, the choice one is making, one’s behavior in the now, and praying or reflecting within each transient experience of sorrow, questioning, or joy.

**Spatiality**

Spatiality refers to the experience of physical as well as mental spaces, and conceptual themes related to spatial awareness in the context of the phenomenon in focus. My analysis of the phenomenological data revealed that leadership commitment has a spatial dimension, which exemplary lay leaders conveyed using a blend of physical, interior, and metaphorical expressions related to working at a Catholic-Marianist university. The descriptions of exemplary lay leaders contain five spatial themes: (a) metaphors of immersion, (b) a gradual broadening of the scope of commitment, (c) the importance of conversational spaces, (d) the blurring between interior life and exterior practice, and (e) the balancing of personal and professional spheres.

**Metaphors of immersion.** Exemplary lay leaders often use spatial metaphors that convey a sense of immersion – a sense of being a part of something bigger. For example: being a pebble that can have a ripple-effect across the pond; being a blue drop
that makes all the difference in a jar of plain water; swimming in the waters of one’s faith community; working in the Catholic-Marianist vineyard; and finding fertile ground for development.

**A gradual broadening of the scope of commitment.** Exemplary lay leaders find that there has been a gradual broadening of the scope of their commitment, going beyond their professional role, department, or school, and towards the broader purposes of the university and contexts within which it operates, including: connections with the Marianist world, the national conversation across Catholic higher education, the social issues in secular culture, and indeed, the common good of all human beings. They differ in their activity levels within these ever-expanding spheres of influence; however, all of them experience a sense of extended outreach, an ever-expanding worldview, a growing vantage point to see the whole.

**The importance of conversational spaces.** The importance of conversational spaces is a recurring theme in the descriptions of exemplary lay leaders. Much of Marianist influence occurs in the in-between spaces of day-to-day interactions, and also in sustained conversations wherein commitment is clarified and nurtured. There is an emphasis on maintaining an open circle that allows diverse people to enter into dialogue – coming to and staying at the Marianist table in an ongoing effort to build consensus in the service of mission. There is an acknowledgment of the increasing size and social complexity of the university, and therefore, the need for helping people develop a sense of belongingness with the overall university community – moving beyond the “bubbles” of their classrooms and offices, and breaking down the barriers of departmental and professional silos.
The blurring between interior life and exterior practice. Exemplary lay leaders find that there is often a blurring between their interior lives and exterior practice, because part of being an educator is about making one’s interior life – exterior; it is an opportunity to lead a more whole and consistent life, without the need to overly compartmentalize one’s inner life and day-to-day work, both of which are experienced simultaneously, albeit with different levels of awareness during different types of activities.

The balancing of personal and professional spheres. Exemplary lay leaders make a continual effort to balance the personal and professional spheres in their lives. There is an effort to maintain a healthy distance between one’s personal and official relationships – keeping them sufficiently separate and allowing for a fuller life outside of university activities. At the same time, there is also an awareness of the interconnectedness and intermingling of these spaces and relationships, and an acknowledgment that they are all part of one thing – a unified whole.

Body-hood

Body-hood refers to the physicality of the experience, in terms of the physical body as well as metaphorical expressions of corporeality. My analysis of the phenomenological data revealed that leadership commitment has a dimension of body-hood, which exemplary lay leaders convey using (a) metaphorical as well as (b) physical expressions; additionally, they offer some insights into the materiality of the phenomenon related to (c) tangible markers of mission and identity.

Metaphorical expressions. The metaphorical expressions of body-hood in the descriptions of exemplary lay leaders contain four themes: (a) groundedness and change,
(b) doing physical labor, (c) the university as a living being, and (d) the interconnectedness of persons.

**Groundedness and change.** These expressions convey how commitment permeates their entire sense of being, grounding them and changing them from within. For example: developing an anchor in one’s faith and/or sense of vocation; being drawn into and becoming rooted in the charism; throwing one’s whole self into it; committing with every ounce of one’s being; having the foundations laid within oneself; being shaped like water over the rock; recognizing the movements of commitment within one’s heart; having the scales fall from one’s eyes; developing eyes that see and ears that listen; and not hardening one’s heart.

**Doing physical labor.** These expressions convey a sense of doing physical labor in the work of mission and identity. For example: being the soldier that trudges on; pushing the boulder up the hill; bearing a heavy responsibility for carrying the mission; continually working at the mission just like one does with regular physical exercise; becoming an instrument of change and a voice for mission; and knowing that one will ponder about mission and identity till the day one dies.

**The university as a living being.** These expressions convey a sense of institutional corporeality, as if it were a living being that is born and grows, and can eventually die. For example: keeping the Church alive; keeping the university alive; drawing from the Marianist roots of the university; ensuring the university’s survival; and recognizing the possibility that mission and identity can “die.”

**The interconnectedness of persons.** These expressions convey a sense of interrelationship between all persons within the university community. For example:
bringing people together and orchestrating things; developing a pipeline of leaders; latching on to exemplary persons that one is around, and drinking in from those encounters; being steeped in Marianist educational tradition; and shaping and molding students and future leaders.

**Physical expressions.** The physical expressions of body-hood in the descriptions of exemplary lay leaders contain four themes: (a) being visible and present, (b) pondering in light of one’s own aging, (c) integrating feminine and masculine attributes, and (d) physical manifestations of commitment.

**Being visible and present.** Exemplary lay leaders experience a growing awareness of becoming increasingly visible and known as a committed person, feeling more present within the wider community, and sensing a greater responsibility for being a good example, and at least not a bad one.

**Pondering in light of one’s own aging.** Exemplary lay leaders experience an increasing awareness of growing older in the context of a lifetime of commitment; a sense of growth and maturation that is a result of their immersion in the Marianist world, and not merely an outcome of the aging process. There is an openness to becoming an elder, offering one’s life experience as practical wisdom, walking with younger persons on the journey of human maturation, and uniting one’s work of the soul with theirs.

**Integrating feminine and masculine attributes.** Exemplary lay leaders convey a sense of appreciation for Mary as an extraordinary woman and leader; she combines and encompasses virtues that were traditionally attributed to either masculinity or femininity, such as courage and strength, and humility and nurture, respectively. They convey a sense of integration of Marian virtues into their person-hood and practice, doing so in a
manner that goes beyond a gendered outlook on leadership, thus seeking a holistic emphasis in the practice of influence as an educator-leader.

**Physical manifestations of commitment.** Exemplary lay leaders find that particular episodes of acting upon their commitment can sometimes have physical manifestations, often experienced as heightened states of emotionality, and remembered as episodic memories of experiencing joy and gratitude, or struggling through sadness or questioning. For some of them, this has also involved occasionally experiencing adverse effects on their emotional and physical health. Several of them recollect experiences related to difficult relationships or decisions wherein they experienced acute stress. All of them convey a sense of continual giving – not only of one’s personal time, but also one’s physical and mental energies to the work of mission and identity. They find that heightened states of emotionality are often manifestations of interior commitment; for example, being moved to tears or the experience of awe.

**Tangible material objects.** Exemplary lay leaders offer insights into some material objects related to the phenomenon in focus. Based on my analysis of the phenomenological data, I found that the existential structure of “materiality” did not feature prominently in individual descriptions. It is understandable that exemplary lay leaders did not speak much about material objects in the context of the interior focus of this study. Even though there was insufficient data to include descriptions of materiality within individual structural descriptions, my analysis of the overall data revealed three material objects that are important tangible markers – “containers” and manifestations of the university’s mission and identity: (a) the Cross in the classroom, (b) mission and identity-related documents, and (c) the university chapel.
The Cross in the classroom. This is a central symbol of the university’s faith tradition, present in every room where conversation, reflection, and learning takes place. It is a tangible marker of the university’s mission and identity – a reminder of its source.

Mission and identity-related documents. These materials are tangible “containers” of the ideas and values within mission and identity; they offer summative statements specific to the university, as well as those related to the broader Catholic and Marianist educational tradition. They convey shared understandings that can be “held in one’s hands.” They are “lenses” through which one can assess everyday academic and administrative conversations, practices, and decisions. They are sources of insight that one can keep returning to, especially when in need of direction and wisdom. They provide standards that persons can refer to amidst their disagreements, in an effort to discern a collective course of action.

The university chapel. This building is a central intersection within the university community – the heart of the campus. It is a symbol that shines forth the university’s mission and identity, a manifestation of its tradition, a meeting place for building relationships, and an in-between space wherein Marianist influence can happen.

Self

This structural theme refers to participants’ relationship with their personal self, in the context of the phenomenon in focus. My analysis of the phenomenological data revealed that leadership commitment is experienced in relationship with oneself and conveyed through expressions containing self-descriptions, especially considerations of personal identity and individuality. The descriptions of exemplary lay leaders contain six themes related to self: (a) adaptability of temperament, (b) several identities, (c) a
collective sense of Catholic identity, (d) openness and self-disclosure, (e) striving for personal humility and selflessness, and (f) being and becoming.

**Adaptability of temperament.** Exemplary lay leaders convey a sense of flexibility on various spectrums of personal orientation. Some describe themselves as extroverts, and others have introverted preferences; some have a propensity towards action orientation, and others prefer extended reflection; some feel naturally drawn towards the task at hand and getting the job done, and others towards the people involved and building relationships. Regardless of their personal temperament, all of them have developed a greater capacity for adapting to the side of the spectrum that is not their natural tendency; making an effort to continually balance the need to be rational, systematic, detail-oriented, and processual, with the need to be relational, intuitive, creative, and imaginative; and furthermore, making an effort to be patient with personal styles and orientations that are significantly different from their own.

**Several identities.** Exemplary lay leaders convey a few common themes in relation to their personal sense of self, including: (a) Being an educator: Exemplary lay leaders experience a strong sense of vocation as an educator, regardless of the current activity mix in their faculty and/or administrative role; being a teacher or educator is often described as a core identity – it is in one’s soul. (b) Being an influencer: Exemplary lay leaders convey a strong preference for practicing leadership as influence rather than power and role authority. This emphasis is expressed in several ways; for example, describing oneself as a servant leader, a facilitator, a worker in God’s kingdom/vineyard, and an elder and mentor. (c) Being a family person: Exemplary lay leaders convey a strong sense of awareness about their parenthood and/or family life.
They notice the intersections between being a committed leader at work and a spouse and/or parent at home, and the influence their commitment has on their family. (d) Being a woman: Exemplary women leaders reflect about womanhood and motherhood, especially as they reflect about Mary, the mother of Jesus. They reflect about being a working woman, a working mother, and a woman leader. They express their appreciation for Mary as an extraordinary woman and leader, drawing inspiration from her story and example of courage and conviction.

**A collective sense of Catholic identity.** Exemplary lay leaders who are not Catholic in their personal faith tradition express an awareness of not being personally Catholic at a Catholic university. Obviously, they do not refer to Catholic identity in the “I” statements in their descriptions; however, they often express “we” statements that convey their collective sense of Catholic-Marianist identity. They have an appreciation for elements in Catholic and Marianist history, spirituality, and educational approach. They differ in the extent to which they identify as a “religious” person – someone engaged in regular religious practices; however, all of them have an active interior spirituality; each of them, in one’s own way, is seeking the inspiration of the divine.

**Openness and self-disclosure.** Exemplary lay leaders convey a sense of openness towards persons and ideas, and towards the past as well as the future. They have a willingness to let their personal identity be publicly known, not in a loud or attention-seeking manner, but in their unambiguous stance of personal commitment in little and big ways, and their willingness to talk about it when appropriate and needed – not hiding it “under a bushel.” Many of them express a feeling of being a minority in terms of persons explicitly committed to mission and identity, and the responsibilities and
tensions inherent in that reality. All of them have an inner circle of supportive relationships, usually family, close friends, and mentors with whom they can be their authentic selves with ease, share their innermost thoughts and feelings, and receive advice and encouragement.

**Striving for personal humility and selflessness.** Exemplary lay leaders convey an awareness of how their commitment to mission and identity has challenged them to become more selfless, often amidst systemic tendencies towards self-centeredness in academic careers and self-preservation in organizational politics. They find that their interior commitment has helped them to gradually become less self-righteous and more accepting of others. They are quick to recognize their own shortcomings and limitations. They tend to underemphasize their personal contributions and redirect attention towards collective efforts instead. Each of them, in one’s own way, is gently self-critical, honest about one’s weaknesses and failures, and acknowledging of the limitations of one’s perspectives and understandings. They are lightheartedly dismissive of excessive praise that others may express about them, and emphasize the importance of not taking themselves too seriously.

**Being and becoming.** Exemplary lay leaders convey a strong sense of self-awareness, a mindfulness to the interior growth they have experienced, and a sensitivity towards changes in their interior states. They are self-aware about their gifts and the responsibility to build on them. They find that their sense of self has been shaped by their immersion in Catholic-Marianist culture; the university’s mission and identity are part of who they are and who they have become. They strongly convey, each in one’s own way, their appreciation for being Marianist-formed; a sense of not just belonging to
one’s department, but being the university, albeit a small part of it; a sense of not merely working at a Marianist educational institution, but being a Marianist educator. They emphasize that their encounter with the Marianist charism has exerted a gradual but significant influence on them, molding them into the kinds of persons, educators, and leaders they have become.

Relationality

Relationality refers to the participants’ relationship with others, in the context of the phenomenon in focus. My analysis of the phenomenological data revealed that leadership commitment has a relational dimension; that is, it is experienced and expressed in relationship with others, and in community. The descriptions of exemplary lay leaders contain seven relational themes: (a) growing in commitment in the context of relationships, (b) building relationships in light of mission and identity, (c) metaphors of connectedness, (d) working “through” community, (e) relational discernment and consensus building, (f) remaining in right relationships, and (g) nurturing commitment through a network of relationships.

Growing in commitment in the context of relationships. Exemplary lay leaders find that commitment develops in the context of relationships. It is not only interior work but also work with other people – listening, expressing, clarifying, and acting together. They convey an insight that though relationships are distinct from commitment, they are also inseparable from it. They have experienced a long-term relationship with the university and the joy of finding one’s tribe – a family of people who share in one’s commitments. They find that leadership commitment is a communal act; it is strengthened through one’s public expression of commitment in relationship with
other committed persons. There is a connection between the development of their personal sense of self and their sense of belongingness in community. There is an awareness that, similar to their students, they are also being educated within the university community.

**Building relationships in light of mission and identity.** Exemplary lay leaders emphasize seeing and appreciating the gifts within each person, recognizing that life is about serving others and also being served, and using our gifts for each other and for mission – recognizing that both are inseparable. They convey that the process of building relationships involves an interchange in close proximity – sharing something personal with each other, having a desire for truly getting to know someone, recognizing that informal social gatherings are opportunities for expressing gratitude and appreciation towards persons. There is a recognition that a central emphasis across one’s formal and informal roles is to build community – bringing people together to move the university forward, orchestrating a connectedness for the good of the institution, and recognizing that the sense of accomplishment through collective synergies is not likely to be obtained through solo endeavors. There is an effort to integrate rationality and relationality (the head and the heart) in the service of the mission – balancing the need for prudent reason in working for mission, with a caring outlook on the needs of persons and communities.

**Metaphors of connectedness.** Exemplary lay leaders use several metaphors that convey a sense of connectedness between individual lives and shared purposes; these include: (a) The metaphor of story: an ongoing narrative that intertwines individual and collective histories. (b) The metaphor of the crucible: bringing diverse people together for the purposes of Catholic-Marianist education. (c) The metaphor of the continuing
conversation: the university as a universe of conversations; a conversation between distinct groups, such as lay and religious persons, and students and educators; a conversation with who we (the university community) were and who we hope to become. (d) The metaphor of coming to and remaining at the Marianist table: engaging in open and honest dialogue, without pre-judgment; seeking to understand and converge for the sake of mission. (e) The metaphor of the orchestra: working in collaboration and generating a synergy that makes the whole greater than the sum of its parts.

**Working “through” community.** Exemplary lay leaders emphasize that community is a fundamental instrument of mission; it is an expression of who the university community is, and how it acts out its purposes. They wrestle with the notion of community, engaging in serious reflection about what it is, how it works, and why it is important. They convey several insights related to the Marianist sense of community, including the following:

The Marianist idea about community is subtle and unique. Community is not an end in itself nor a self-serving body; rather, it has to be motivated and directed to serve and lead in a manner that is animated by the values that emanate from the Catholic-Marianist faith tradition. The Marianist emphasis is not just about working “in” community but working “through” it – coming to realize that the community itself is doing the work of mission. The “through community” emphasis suggests a process involving collaboration, which in turn requires consensus building – coming to a place where all can move forward together. Community is not simply about being nice, always agreeing, or having fun gatherings. It is acceptable, and even necessary, to have constructive conflict, and sometimes, to agree to disagree. It is possible for persons of
good will, including exemplary persons, to be on opposite sides of issues; thus, it is important to stay at the table in sustained conversation. It is necessary to accept that there are times when those at the table fall short of their ideals, organizationally and personally. The orientation of the community’s mission is not just inward; it is towards building the kingdom of God, recognizing one’s connectedness with the entire world, working to make the world a better place, and recognizing that God is working in and through people everywhere.

**Relational discernment and consensus building.** Exemplary lay leaders experience a sense of relationality in personal discernment – seeking the counsel of others; not relying solely on inner, private discernment; and recognizing that people could be seeing in you something that you do not yet see in yourself. They emphasize mission-orientation in collective decision making – having extended conversations and messy democracy; having a lot of dialogue and listening of divergent views; building consensus through persuasion, not power; and seeking to exercise influence rather than role authority. There is an openness to arrive at decisions that one does not totally agree with, recognizing the possibility that one’s viewpoint could be limited or wrong. There is an effort to continually balance attentiveness to the persons involved, with the common good and purposes of the community as a whole. There is a realization that the ongoing conversation about mission and identity is indispensable across all functions and groups within the university community.

**Remaining in right relationships.** Exemplary lay leaders emphasize relationality that shares common commitment – building relationships that have intrinsic value, while also being directed intentionally towards feeding the mission. They
emphasize the importance of being relationship-oriented – being genuinely interested in and caring towards people. They practice an active sense of empathy – looking at things from the others’ perspectives, and intuited how they might feel if certain decisions or actions are carried out; being sensitive to people’s energies, trying to see into their hearts, and reading the signs of the persons in their presence. They convey an underlying insight, each in one’s own way, that it is really all about love. It is not necessarily about liking each other, but loving each other; ensuring that positive relationships continue to exist even when decisions are made wherein not everyone is in complete agreement.

Nurturing commitment through a network of relationships. Exemplary lay leaders convey an insight that leadership commitment is taught and transmitted primarily through the power of personal witness. They have observed and experienced relatable examples of exemplary practice over a long period – tangible role models who demonstrated what leadership commitment to mission and identity looked like in real life. They find that the work of practicing and nurturing commitment to mission and identity calls for the inclusion of everyone, regardless of who they are and what their role is within the institution; developing a shared sense of responsibility for owning the mission; and working towards building a critical mass of committed persons across all levels and areas within the university, thus building a network of relationships that keep the mission alive.
Streams within the Lived Experience of the Phenomenon

The phenomenon in focus is complex and multifaceted. It contains three distinguishable but inseparable streams within lived experience, which I have examined in this study and described next, namely: (a) the lived experience of exemplary lay commitment, (b) the lived experience of exemplary Marianist leadership, and (c) the lived experience of Catholic and Marianist mission and identity. In a sense, the following three syntheses offer a three-dimensional description of the composite phenomenon in focus.

Similar to the composite textural and structural themes presented in the preceding sections, the following three phenomenological syntheses contain a blend of words and meanings present in individual portraits-in-words, and the extensive participant transcripts on which these portraits are based. However, the following syntheses are distinct in style and voice; they are human descriptions of the present, continuous lived experience of the phenomenon in focus. Their affective goal is to “raise empathy”; that is, to describe the humanness of the experience in a manner that makes it possible for diverse readers to intuit the lived experiences of exemplary leaders in this study; to allow the reader to put oneself “in their shoes”; to “see” (visualize) lived experience in the present, continuous moment; and to empathize with what it “feels like” to be someone who is experiencing (a) exemplary lay commitment, (b) exemplary Marianist leadership, and (c) Catholic-Marianist mission and identity.

The Lived Experience of Exemplary Lay Commitment

The following is a synthesis of the phenomenology (the present, continuous lived experience) of exemplary lay commitment.
An interior act of will. Commitment is experienced as an interior act of will, an act of giving inner consent, an entering into deeper relationship, and a movement towards making an interior-exterior connection. It feels like an unbreakable bond, even though one is fully aware that it is an ongoing choice that is freely made. Commitment is a continual state of being; it is not a one-time decision, but rather an ongoing process. It is experienced as a compelling yet gentle attraction. Even though it exerts a strong interior pull, it is always a delicate awareness that is willingly explored. It is experienced as a growing awareness and conviction, which involves ongoing interior questioning and discernment. Individuals differ in their temperaments in relation to entering commitment. To some, commitment comes easily; it is a natural outcome of personal predispositions and life histories. To others, it is a cautious and tentative process. However, for all of them, commitment is experienced as a series of gradual interior movements towards greater degrees of intentionality; towards increasingly complex connectedness between one’s interior convictions and exterior practice.

An all-permeating awareness. Sincere commitment becomes gradually ubiquitous in the experience of everyday living; it becomes all-consuming as it permeates through everything in one’s life, one’s entire sense of being. It is experienced across the dimensions of one’s spiritual, psychological, and physical being, as well as social and professional lifeworlds. It seeps into one’s conscious choices as well as unconscious leanings, and is expressed within ongoing decisions and actions. It becomes a continual awareness, in big things and in small, during major events and mundane activities – an awareness that is continually present at the back of one’s mind. Commitment is an interior state, but not necessarily a personality trait. For some, making commitments
feels like a natural disposition; for others, making commitments is a cautious and evaluative process. However, commitment is always a dynamic and active state of being; it is not passively experienced, nor is it a static, unchanging awareness. It grows and is sustained because its bearer “works” at it – intentionally, actively, and repeatedly.

**A gradual growing into.** Commitment appears to grow very gradually, often imperceptibly; however, critical events and crossroads that stimulated commitment are clearly noticeable and appreciated in hindsight. The journey of commitment consists of innumerable “small yeses” and some “big yes” inflection points. Sustained commitment leads to gradual self-transformation. It causes one to focus decreasingly on one’s ego, personal success, and reputation, and increasingly on the needs of persons and the community as a whole. Commitment is not a dichotomy; it is not simply a matter of being committed or not. Rather, the experience of commitment is a continuum. Persons can be committed in different ways, depending on their personal life stages, backgrounds, and circumstances. Commitment is intrinsic to human experience; one is constantly making commitments in every sphere of one’s personal and professional life. Thus, commitment is a fundamental aspect of being human.

**A compelling conviction.** Commitment has a compelling quality; it gives one a personal “why”; a sense of trajectory in one’s life; and a sense of conviction for what is true, good, and beautiful. It is a source of joy, meaning, and hope. It exerts a gentle yet potent force that nudges one towards congruent action; to care deeply enough to act upon one’s convictions. It conveys a continual call to action; to weave one’s convictions into one’s daily work; to try to live up to the high standards that commitment implies. It compels one to go beyond minimal role-related accountabilities and become a catalyst for
mission in everyday work-related conversations; to develop a sense of personal responsibility towards the common good, and a sense of intentionality in every interaction. Individuals differ in their personal styles of expressing commitment; however, sincere commitment generates the courage to reveal one’s true identity; to be open about one’s interior state of being, letting it be seen and expressed when appropriate. Commitment induces the desire to share one’s experiences and reflections with others; to do more than just brief “elevator speeches”; to convey with clarity the reasons for one’s commitment, and gently invite others to consider deeper levels of commitment and broader spheres of engagement. It fosters the desire to serve others, to make a difference, to help in some way – however little. Commitment compels one to regularly step back in reflection, honestly evaluating personal and collective practice; to step forward in speaking up for mission in everyday academic and administrative conversations; and to step up to the challenge of keeping the mission front and center, integrated into all that is said and done during academic and administrative activities. Commitment urges the giving of one’s best work and the making of decisions that are in the best interest of the mission, even if that means treading on the harder road of making trade-offs, difficult choices, and necessary sacrifices for the sake of mission.

**A relational, personally-authentic experience.** Commitment is relational in nature; it is inseparable from relationships in everyday life. It is experienced in a state of being open and attentive to others. It is strengthened and nurtured in community with other committed persons. Commitment involves being in communion with others; however, it does not necessarily imply formal group membership, such as participation in specific faith groups on campus or mission and identity-related programs. It urges living
in a manner that is aligned with one’s faith or personal beliefs. Committed persons can belong to different faith traditions and find themselves at different places in their personal faith journeys; however, each of them is trying to be true to oneself; to practice commitment in a manner that feels honest and genuine. In other words, each of them is continually striving to be interpersonally and interiorly authentic.

**An unfolding story of perseverance.** Commitment plays out as an unfolding story of perseverance. It calls for the inner strength to persevere, and the courage to maintain congruence between what one says is important and what one is willing to do as a result. It involves the inner struggle of wrestling between realities and ideals; a continual effort to discern the choices and actions that are most congruent with the values implicit in one’s commitment, regularly pondering and sometimes wondering – what is the right thing to do? This state of continual discernment is experienced as a worthy struggle; it does not feel futile in hindsight, but in the moment, it can feel difficult, confusing, and sometimes, overwhelming. Though the contents and contexts of this inner struggle evolve with age, the challenges and work of staying committed continue to remain real and potent. In other words, persons who have stayed committed across multiple decades can engage in inner questioning or doubt, not unlike someone at a younger stage in life or earlier stage of commitment.

**A giving of oneself.** Commitment involves the giving of oneself; a sharing of something one possesses interiorly, especially one’s time, attention, and caring. It involves becoming vulnerable to something that is bigger than oneself – something beyond one’s complete grasp. It involves taking the risk of engaging in something that seems difficult or uncertain; giving one’s best effort, even when the possibility of failure
or loss exists. There is always the risk of giving too much, sacrificing too much, often without immediately recognizing that one is doing so. In difficult times, commitment can have consequences to one’s emotional well-being, and for some, to their physical health. It could involve periods of sadness when one feels that one’s gifts are not being utilized, disappointment when one experiences apathy, or distress when one observes or experiences leader behaviors that seem to be at odds with shared understandings of mission and identity. It involves a sense of determination to keep returning and trying, a recognition that everyone is fallible, and a resolve to rise above and keep trudging ahead – despite the odds, despite one’s shortcomings and weaknesses, through moments of falling short of one’s ideals, and sometimes, experiencing failures, pitfalls, and dead-ends. There is a normal “cost” to commitment, especially the giving of one’s time and energy. There is often a personal offering to be made – a throwing in of oneself with abandon. Individuals differ in terms of how they experience this cost. To some, it feels real and palpable at critical junctures; to others, it is not something that they think much about, if at all. The costs of commitment are, in fact, choices that are freely made. Commitment evokes a sense of deep gratitude despite its challenges; it is a source of much joy; it is an interior consent that is not easily regretted, even when circumstances or outcomes may suggest otherwise. Commitment is a state of being that involves consent and action, even though it is always gift and grace.

The Lived Experience of Exemplary Marianist Leadership

The following is a synthesis of the phenomenology (the present, continuous lived experience) of exemplary Marianist leadership.
Leadership is influence. Leadership is essentially about influence. Influence is manifested through the persons and processes involved, and consequently, on the outcomes. One can have influence without possessing any positional authority; one can have moral, spiritual, and other forms of influence, regardless of one’s formal role. Influence involves persuasion. Trying to do the right thing is the first priority; however, there is a second priority that is no less important — to persuade the persons involved, helping them understand one’s perspective and seeking sincerely to understand theirs, and trying to come to a place wherein all can move ahead together. Giving no attention to the second priority is to be avoided, but so is giving it more attention than the first. Leadership is intrinsic to being an educator because of the influence exerted in and through education. It is practiced in many ways within the educational community; all members can exercise influence through various means.

A Marianist approach to influence. The Marianist approach to influence is to do it through example and persuasion — not hierarchy and edict, nor power and coercion. It involves a genuine sense of empathy; to care about people’s concerns, their lived experience, and their worlds. It is about practicing the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you; and then, taking that principle a step further — sincerely trying to do unto them, within reason, as they would want it done. Much of Marianist influence happens in the in-between spaces — the informal intersections in community, such as hallway conversations, and day-to-day religious and social gatherings. It is about acting within one’s spheres of influence and giving voice to mission, especially during the little exchanges in ordinary academic life. The Marianist approach to influence is about working with and through others, and generating a sense
of synergy – achieving something collectively that individuals could not have accomplished on their own, similar to the conductor of an orchestra who influences the creation of beautiful music. Liking or enjoying every aspect of one’s role is not a primary concern; what is important is to contribute to the creation of shared value – having a strong feeling towards yielding something for the good of all, and for the ongoing mission.

**A conversational stance.** The Marianist way of leading is characterized by a conversational stance – conversations that lead to transformation. It involves being attentive, responsive, and then, influential in some way – however little – in supporting others within the institutional community and the wider Marianist family. It is about leading collaboratively and consultatively, and always in the context of community. It is about bringing everyone to the table and facilitating conversations; trying to include everyone’s voices, regardless of who or where they are at the institution; and generating open, honest discussions. Hierarchical relationships and role-based structures continue to exist, but do not subdue the work of collaboration; they are “dropped off” as one enters a sincere conversational stance. There is an awareness that one has to really listen before one can work towards meeting the needs of others and moving the institution forward – a realization that the best outcomes come out of collaboration and staying at the table. There is a sincere effort to listen first, especially when one has positional authority; inviting others to contribute before putting forth one’s perspectives.

**A creative tension and mystery.** Marianist leadership is experienced as a creative tension and mystery. There is often a sense of some friction between seemingly opposing emphases – not necessarily an emotionally disturbing conflict, but a tension that
one needs to ponder, a sense of mystery that unfolds, a multifaceted concept and phenomenon that can seem elusive to define – a bit of a puzzle at times. It is not easy to have a well-articulated way of integrating all formal aspects of one’s role and its subtler interpersonal dimensions; to maintain personal attentiveness alongside a communal sensibility; to balance the purposes of the organization with the needs of the person(s) in front of oneself; to read the signs of the times as well as the signs of the person(s); and to be a responsive, attentive, and caring listener to everyone, including persons whose perspectives seem to be at odds with one’s understanding of mission and identity. There is a continual effort to balance relationships and tasks; deeply caring about the people one works with while simultaneously keeping each other accountable for accomplishing the objectives. There is a creative tension and mystery in the call to be a spectacle of saints as a community while simultaneously offering a quiet, humble, and practical invitation; to preserve the core of the Marianist tradition while stimulating adaptability to change; to cultivate personal humility alongside a bold outlook for the future of the community – a great vision for mission. There is an ongoing effort to avoid compartmentalizing one’s faith life and professional career; to integrate religious and human values with practical and real-world sensibilities, thus making an ongoing effort to be a reflective practitioner. The practice of influence within these creative tensions is a mystery that permeates the experience of Marianist leadership.

A personal calling and humble response. Marianist leadership is experienced as a personal calling, an extension of one’s vocation as an educator, and a desire to serve that compels one to choose to lead – through influence. There is an awareness of personal risk in leadership – not only the risk of accepting responsibility for mission but
also the risk of letting go; not controlling everything to the point of stifling creativity, similar to an artist who needs to step back and let inspiration enter, let God enter. There is a willingness to take a chance, to make new mistakes and learn from them, and to reflect honestly in hindsight. There is a willingness to admit to one’s limitations in the presence of others, an acknowledgment that one does not know it all, and a realization that education or position does not suddenly bless its bearer to know it all. What really counts is listening, loving, and serving – not titles and status – but a conviction that one’s work aligns with making the world a better place.

**Being a present, servant leader.** The Marianist leader seeks to be a present, servant leader and contributor on campus; to practice servant leadership, which is about relationships, about valuing each person. It is about being present and responsive in a manner that goes far beyond tolerance, or even respect; it is a general form of seeking to love; it is a realization that God is present within every person, and thus, being present to others is a way of being present to God. Servant leadership is really all about love; it comes down to serving others through one’s gifts, and being served by others through theirs. It is not about hierarchies, nor positional authority; it is about working with and among people, not over them; it is an approach to leadership that is grounded in service motivated by love. In everyday practice, the Marianist servant leader seeks to be a facilitator – empowering people, minimizing obstacles, providing support and direction without trying to micromanage, and fostering an environment that makes people feel respected and safe, thus enabling them to bring their best selves forward.

**An inclusive, invitational stance.** The Marianist leader seeks to lead in an egalitarian manner, and with an open and invitational stance; treating everyone as equals,
fostering a welcoming and inclusive community that brings together people from all walks and states of life – lay and religious persons, women and men, young and old, staff and faculty, and persons from diverse cultures and disciplines. There is a continual sense of striving to be personally humble and unassuming; not holding oneself above others; not asking of someone, something that one will not do too. There is an aversion towards seeking personal privileges or benefits that others obviously do not or cannot have.

There is a sense of fairness in giving the credit to whom it is due, as well as a willingness to take the heat for others in a manner that is appropriate, especially when faced with a difficult choice, setback, or failure as a team. There is an acknowledgment that if one’s role possesses positional authority, it is important to take responsibility in decision making; one cannot shy away from or deny accountability – the buck has to stop somewhere, and if appropriate, with oneself.

**The gifts in moments, and in persons.** In day-to-day practice, there are moments of sighing in prayer amidst mundane activities – not necessarily external prayer practices, but a prayerful disposition; an interior state of listening and openness to the divine, which can be experienced as prayerfulness in action and a spirituality of meaningful relationships. There are moments of joy and belongingness amidst day-to-day interactions; moments of calm and gratefulness at the end of the day; moments of awe when things come together after sustained collective work; and moments when one just sits back in amazement and gratitude, looking upon relationships and tasks that came together in wonderful ways that witness to the mission and identity of the institution.

There is a realization that persons are gifts in themselves; that they are sent by God in the lives of individuals and communities; that each person is precious; that even though role
holders are replaceable, the persons themselves are not. There is also an awareness that persons are bearers of gifts that can be directed towards the ongoing mission. There is a sensitivity towards the gifts of others – a propensity for spotting strengths, intuitions, potentials, and appreciating contributions. There is a desire and effort to help others discover their talents, and to nurture, magnify, and reflect their gifts – for the good of the community and its mission.

**An interior companionship.** Marianist leadership is experienced as an interior companionship with the many role models in one’s life, and consequently, a sense of responsibility for being a role model to others; to pay it forward as a mentor and supportive colleague; to be a tangible example of someone who cares about mission; to be a marker for mission within one’s unit – someone who represents other committed persons who also care about mission; someone who models Marianist attitudes, values, and behaviors. There is a recollection of how other exemplary persons have been influential in one’s life, and a deep sense of gratitude for their personal witness. There is an awareness of being publicly observed, and a willingness to be open about one’s personal convictions and journey – to reveal who one truly is, in a manner that is authentic to one’s temperament and appropriate in one’s role. There is an acknowledgment that leadership can be difficult, especially because people expect much and hold you to high standards, and rightly so. Therefore, there is a prudent effort to hold oneself to the high ideals contained in mission and identity; not accepting mediocrity by default, merely because of the difficulty of being exemplary.

**A faithful openness to the future.** Marianist leadership is experienced as a faithful openness to the future. There is an awareness that the rich heritage and history
that the community inherits does not constrict the future of the mission; the ongoing story of a Marianist educational community is still very open, and filled with a sense of newness, possibility, and hope. There is a prudent sense of urgency to work for the preservation and perpetuation of mission and identity, alongside an ongoing effort to be sensitive to the signs of the times and responsive to change; to learn and adapt personally, and help others do the same. There can be, at times, a significant struggle to remain open to the future, especially in terms of new or expanding roles for oneself and for others; not to act as though everything has already been scripted for the community, as if relationships are fixed and static, as if the future is closed off and everyone is only required to play preassigned roles.

**A Marian approach.** Marian virtues inform the practice of Marianist leadership. Mary’s model of courage, strength, humility, and nurture is a source of inspiration; it induces reflection about how Mary speaks to one’s life, how her example relates to one’s leadership in a personal way. There is a realization that Mary is not only an extraordinary woman in human history but also a significant influencer-leader and leadership formator in the life of the Church. Marian leadership involves the courage to take risks imaginatively, the inner strength and discipline to move the institution forward, the humility that keeps mission and organizational needs before self, and the nurturing of persons and future leaders. Virtuous leadership principles transcend societal spheres; for example, personal humility and visionary commitment to the common good are virtues that are appreciated across public life in general. However, Marianist leaders practice these principles, not merely because they make business sense, or even because they appear to be effective; they do it out of a sense of faithfulness and appreciation for the
remarkable distinctiveness of the Marianist charism in education, and as participators in the ongoing Marianist story in the world.

**The Lived Experience of Catholic and Marianist Mission and Identity**

The following is a synthesis of the phenomenology (the present, continuous lived experience) of Catholic and Marianist mission and identity.

**The role of mission and identity.** Mission and identity convey the essential nature of the university, that which is truly core to the university – what it is about and why it exists. The phrase “mission and identity” contains two distinct yet inseparable terms. The mission conveys what the institution intends to be in its broad organization – its purposes and reasons for existence. The identity of the institution articulates what it stands for – its core character that becomes increasingly observable from the outside, as it is consistently lived on the inside. The unified construct of mission and identity contains the defining aspects of the university community – that which makes it different from any other place. It has personal and collective implications. It serves as a guide for personal and shared spirituality and practice. It can interact with each member of the community in personal ways. Each person can manifest it in one’s interior life and role-related work. It gives its bearer a bigger cause – a reminder that “it’s not just about me,” and that “we’re all in this together.” It has implications for individual and collective decisions and actions, which in turn, have implications for the ongoing development of mission and identity; thus, it is an ongoing cycle of discernment and practice.

**The notion of mission.** The notion of mission needs to be examined closely – what it is and what it implies, in general, and in Catholic and Marianist contexts. On the surface, the term “mission” could sound as if there should be complete clarity about what
the institution is meant to be and where it is going; as if it were riding on a predetermined railroad track; as if the story was already fixed; as if there is always a single right approach or answer. However, the Marianist sense of mission is very different; there is a sense of emerging direction that is guided by faith; it is characterized by openness and newness, and looking towards the next horizon with imagination, possibility, and hope – it is a faith-filled sense of mission. The emphasis on building community is central to the mission – not in a vapid, “kum ba yah” sense, but with a real sense of togetherness and generativity; becoming a community of people who, in turn, will build other communities. The notion of mission is an ever-present influence; it “pings” its bearer interiorly, amidst day-to-day activities, nudging deeper reflection and more intentional action, little by little. It feels like an intriguing mystery that one will continue to contemplate for the rest of one’s life; a mystery that is centrally connected with the Christian mystery, and extends into the human family. Mission has a transforming quality; it provides impetus to conversations that lead to transformation.

**The notion of identity.** The notion of identity involves a shared sense of commitment, and common ways of articulating it using a shared vocabulary. There is a continuing history and tradition as well as common ways of feeling and speaking about these with one another. There is an acknowledgment of the primacy of being a university, and the basic responsibility of doing an excellent job at educating; putting out the best possible professionals – engineers, teachers, artists, lawyers, business and social leaders – into every commercial and public sphere. The university is more than simply an academic entity; it is an educational and intellectual community that has broader intersections with other communities, the Church and other social structures, and indeed,
the entire world. Catholic life and imagination inform what a university should be. The Catholic intellectual tradition is a historically extended conversation that continues today; it involves an engagement between faith and reason in the development and continual advance of that tradition. The university’s story is linked to the Catholic and Marianist story, the Christian story, and indeed, the human story. The purposes of a Catholic and Marianist university extend to all humanity; in the final analysis, mission and identity contribute to the unfolding story of achieving the wholeness of the human family in God’s, Jesus’ love.

**Manifesting the promise of a Catholic, Marianist university.** The Catholic university is multifaceted and complex. It is neither a church, nor a social-service organization, nor an educational factory. However, it does have a religious identity and mission that necessitates educating differently than a secular institution; educating students to integrate faith and work, and nurturing professional competence as well as personal commitment towards transforming the world – to manifest God’s reign on earth. All universities, generally speaking, claim to be committed to producing ethical graduates; however, to be a distinctively Catholic and Marianist university is to be beyond ethical – it is to be a step closer to God. There is an awareness of how the forces of secularization and market economies exert influence on the discourse and practices within the university, often in ways that could seem counterintuitive to mission and identity. There is a recollection of the numerous ways in which the university has responded to these challenges and pressures, in many positive ways, and at times, in ways that seem counterproductive. There is a sense of obligation to work one’s job in the spirit in which the institution was founded; to weave the idea of mission into one’s everyday
work; to be intentional about one’s contributions; to make one’s programs and services a manifestation of mission and identity; to demonstrate what being Catholic and Marianist looks like at its best. There is a sense of responsibility to educate in a manner that is faithful to Catholic and Marianist tradition, even when that seems countercultural in the secular world. There is a commitment to be an ambassador for and advocate of the university in all its dimensions – not only its academic life but also its religious ethos.

**An integration of Marianist educational characteristics.** The five characteristics of Marianist education provide a useful framework for the reflective practice of the Marianist charism in education – educating for formation in faith; integral learning; family spirit; service, justice, and peace; and adaptation and change. There is an ongoing effort to return to and draw from these characteristics that convey how the Marianist educational experience is different – why it is distinct. There is an awareness that the work of educating students is not about immediate payoffs; rather, it is about sowing and nurturing seeds that grow and transform over students’ lifetimes – nuances that they will increasingly appreciate in hindsight. There is a sense of familiarity with the ideas and language contained in mission and identity-related documents. There is a holistic engagement with all the characteristics of Marianist education; however, individuals differ in the emphases that they most resonate with; for example, educating for formation in faith is a key emphasis for some, and educating for justice and service has the strongest pull for others. Gradually, there is an integration of all the characteristics into specific insights for practice; for example, the insight that warmth and hospitality are important manifestations of the charism, the coming together of disciplines and the integration of curriculum are natural extensions, and graduating students who are
broadly educated and committed to transforming the world are basic outcomes. There is an effort to integrate mission and identity into one’s teaching – not in a proselytizing or pushy manner, but in a clear, unapologetic, and conversational stance that is gentle, and often subtle; conveying a sense of openness to ideas, respect for the dignity of all, appreciation for the gifts of each person, religious and human imagination, and shared exploration in the search for truth.

**The tensions between ideals and realities.** There is an inherent tension between ideals and realities in organizational life; an awareness of human weakness and fallibility, in oneself and in others; an observation that the pieces do not always seem to fit perfectly, especially in light of human sin and frailty. There is a continual effort to bring all the pieces together; to move towards wholeness – personally and collectively. Considerations of mission and identity often lead to moments when one needs to make a difficult choice that involves sacrifice or risk; it involves taking the harder road even when everything else points in the opposite direction; it is in these moments that the extent of one’s commitment becomes apparent. There is an acute awareness of the pressures on one’s time, and an intuitive understanding that fewer things are core than they first appear in the busyness of academic life. Therefore, there is a continual attempt at discerning what is truly important, critical, and non-negotiable – what small and big activities are most aligned with mission and identity. There is an acknowledgment of the “shadow side” of the Marianist charism – the possibility that good emphases can become morphed into unintended and undesirable expressions of being Marianist; for example, it is possible to misinterpret the Marianist emphasis on respect and acceptance of persons
with mediocrity and lack of accountability. There is an effort to be vigilant about the shadow side of the charism, and to seek to manifest its grace side instead.

**The ease of finding a little connection.** It is easy to connect with mission and identity and easy to avoid it, whatever one’s role at the university may be. For those seeking a little connection with mission, it is easy to find one; for those seeking to rationalize or justify their lack of engagement, thus relieving themselves of any responsibility, that can be easily done too. The human values contained in Catholic and Marianist mission and identity transcend national cultures, religious traditions, and academic disciplines; much of it is obviously “good stuff” that is hard to disagree with. There are understandable differences too, as well as debated issues concerning religious doctrines and practices; however, it is possible to come together around fundamental human values. The context of Catholic thought can be a powerful and beneficial influence, even when one may not personally accept every aspect of it. Despite the potential ease-of-connect, mission and identity are not passively received or passed on – they do not just happen. Rather, they need to be worked at, especially by educating a little bit differently, and working all aspects of one’s role a little bit differently, gradually and gently moving closer towards Catholic and Marianist ideals in one’s everyday practice. Mission and identity give deeper meaning to the act of teaching as well as any other role at the university, thus enhancing the potential for employee engagement and long-term retention.

**The power of unlikely bearers of mission.** There is an awareness concerning the decreasing number of religious persons, and a recollection of several efforts within the university community to ensure that Catholic and Marianist spirituality and culture
continue to remain ingrained in the life of the university. There is a recognition that the symbolic function that was accomplished through the powerful witness of specific religious leaders in the past – persons who served as “big symbols” – continues to be present in a more infused manner through the exemplary witness of numerous lesser-known persons within the community. This new reality can be a positive development because it can lead to more lay persons perceiving the need and opportunity to make a conscious, personal effort to manifest the Marianist charism in their respective areas, thus eventually deepening mission and identity within the university’s culture. There is a sense of concern for the future of mission and identity, but also a sense of confidence that the experience of the charism is still present at the university; it did not go away with the decline in religious vocations; it can still be connected with; it can be carried by unlikely bearers of mission – lay persons whose job roles are not particularly religious in nature; persons who live out their commitment to mission in unexpected, atypical, and wondrous ways.
Statement of Essence

The following is a statement of the essential, invariant structure of the phenomenon in focus: exemplar lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity. These are the essential meanings in the lived experiences of the exemplary lay leaders in this study – meanings that do not vary across their descriptions. This statement of essence is not meant to be a simplified list of exemplary characteristics, even though it contains these. It is not a substitute summary for the detailed composite syntheses contained in this chapter. Specifically, it is a presentation of shared meanings within the phenomenon in focus; meanings that are distinguishable yet inseparable in lived experience; meanings that are common across individuals. It contains a listing of 12 sets of essence statements – essences that have a sense of progression to them, even though they are often co-occurring and generally interconnected in innumerable ways. The following statement is a minimalistic expression; it conveys the “bare necessities” that make up the lived experience of the complex, human-organizational phenomenon in focus.

The essential meanings within the phenomenon of exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity are:

1. Being…
   - self-aware and authentic, living one’s commitments in a way that is honest to oneself.
   - willing to enter dialogue as a caring, attentive, responsive listener.
   - committed to human values, to community, to making the world a better place.
2. Accepting…
   - to work one’s job in the spirit in which the institution was founded.
   - a personal sense of responsibility for the institution’s mission and identity.
   - to lead as a way to serve, to be an influencer and facilitator.

3. Connecting…
   - with the university community, building relationships beyond one’s unit.
   - with persons seeking to deepen their understanding of mission and identity.
   - with a circle of supportive relationships that share one’s sense of commitment.

4. Learning…
   - about the Marianist founders, history, spirituality, and educational approach.
   - about the Marian narrative, and Catholic intellectual tradition and social teaching.
   - about the university’s history and tradition, and the wider Marianist family.

5. Integrating…
   - academic practicalities and charism-inspired purposes in a unified, reflective practice.
   - attentiveness to the person in front of you, alongside a communal sensibility.
   - one’s day-to-day work into the purposes of the university as a whole.

6. Practicing…
   - intentionality as an educator-influencer, in the present moment, with every person.
   - a conversational stance, collaboration for mission, and working through community.
adaptability and a faithful openness to the future, with hope and imagination.

7. Emanating…
   - warmth and hospitality towards every person one meets.
   - respect for the dignity of all persons and openness to diverse perspectives.
   - joyfulness and good humor amidst mundane or trying circumstances.

8. Striving…
   - for personal humility and selflessness, working tirelessly for the greater good.
   - in continual discernment of the right thing to do in light of mission and identity.
   - for balance and wholeness in one’s professional and personal life.

9. Witnessing…
   - by being a tangible example of someone who cares about mission and identity.
   - by giving one’s voice for mission and identity in university-wide conversations.
   - as a mentor and supportive colleague, with a sense of gratitude that gives forward.

10. Nurturing…
    - commitment to the Marianist charism, inviting others to explore, discuss, and learn together.
    - mission and identity-driven consensus building within one’s spheres of influence.
- the leadership gifts within persons, creating opportunities for exposure and practice.

11. Persevering…

- through the normal costs of commitment, especially the giving of one’s time and energy.
- through moments of inner questioning, turmoil, or falling short of one’s ideals.
- through difficult relationships and behaviors that seem to be at odds with being Marianist.

12. Growing…

- in one’s ability to lead within the creative tensions in the Marianist approach.
- in one’s capacity for letting go, for accepting human fallibility, and for love.
- in one’s appreciation for the Marianist charism as a gift for the whole world.
CHAPTER VI
DISCUSSION

Introduction to Discussion

In this chapter, I will present a reflective discussion on several insights and applications emerging from this study. The chapter contains five sections: First, a brief summary of this study, expressing its central value and contribution. Second, a review of the introductory chapters, highlighting the key points in the (a) introduction, (b) literature review, and (c) methodology of this study. Third, an evaluation of the research design, involving an appraisal of the (a) trustworthiness and (b) limitations of this study, and consequently, (c) recommendations for future research designs. Fourth, a closer look at research findings, reviewing insights related to the (a) contributions to the literature, (b) striking allusions in the data, (c) insights for Marianist practice, and (d) recommendations for future research studies. Fifth, concluding reflections, conveying some personal insights in light of my experience of conducting this study from the (a) professional, (b) methodological, (c) spiritual, and (d) readers’ point of view.

Summary of this Study

This study demonstrates the value of organization-specific articulations of exemplary leadership. The research topic relates to leadership and organizational studies in general, and higher educational leadership and organizational commitment in
particular. The focus of inquiry is the complex, human-organizational phenomenon of exemplary leadership commitment to mission and identity among lay leaders in the Catholic and Marianist tradition of one top-tier research university in the United States. The context of inquiry is the emerging prominence and critical role of lay leadership in Catholic higher education. This study is an in-depth examination of how exemplary lay leaders experience and practice their personal commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity. The research objective is to understand and describe the essential meanings in the lived experiences of exemplary lay leaders, presenting individual descriptions and collective syntheses of the phenomenon in focus. The intended audience includes leaders in Marianist and Catholic higher education; administrators involved in leadership development and mission and identity enculturation; and researchers in higher education, phenomenology, and interdisciplinary studies in leadership and organizational behavior.

Using the transcendental phenomenological research method, I generated eight individual “portraits-in-words,” containing multilayered human portrayals that allow the reader to intuit and empathize with the interior experiences and meaning making of the exemplary lay leaders in this study. Next, I analyzed the experiential data collectively, presenting numerous “composite syntheses” of the apparent textures and underlying structures of the phenomenon in focus. Finally, I described three “streams” within the lived experience of the phenomenon, namely: exemplary lay commitment, exemplary Marianist leadership, and the experience of Catholic and Marianist mission and identity, concluding with a brief “statement of essence” containing essential meanings that do not vary across the descriptions of exemplary lay leaders.
This study contributes to the narrative of Catholic and Marianist higher education by empirically investigating the interior lives of exemplary leaders, articulating a phenomenology of exemplary lay leadership commitment to mission and identity, and drawing insights from the lived experiences of present-day exemplary leaders, in order to inform future leadership practice, development, and research. The future of mission and identity in Catholic and Marianist higher education hinges on one critical factor – the ongoing presence of the interior phenomenon of exemplary lay leadership commitment to mission and identity. This study sheds a bright light on this noteworthy and necessary phenomenon – *sine qua non* (without which nothing) – thus preserving its legacy in institutional memory, and offering “seeds” for reflection, conversation, and action.

**Review of Introductory Chapters**

**Introduction**

I introduced this study in the context of the scholarship of leadership, observing that leadership is a vastly explored and contested construct in organizational studies in general, and also in education. The works of several noteworthy scholars of leadership theory and practice have described leadership as a phenomenon in human experience. Even though the construct of leadership is remarkably multi-dimensional and cross-disciplinary in nature, it has shared patterns that can be discovered and studied, especially in particular organizational contexts. The search for the essences of leadership amidst a multitude of meanings has generated an unintended mystification of its theoretical construct; consequently, even though leadership is amongst the most observable phenomena in organizational life, collective expressions of its shared meanings often remain evasive, or simply unexplored. Thus, there is value in organization-specific
articulations of exemplary leadership. Even though an all-settling theory of leadership is likely to remain elusive, the essences of exemplary leadership in the context of the mission and identity of a particular organizational system, such as a single university, is within the grasp of researchers, especially phenomenological researchers who practice distinctive meaning-giving methods for exploring lived experience.

The focus of inquiry in this study was the complex, human-organizational phenomenon of exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity. The research problem had a four-fold context, namely: (a) the need for greater alignment between leadership practice and institutional mission and identity in higher education; (b) the emerging prominence of lay leadership in Catholic higher education; (c) the need to clarify and richly describe what exemplary lay commitment and leadership look like amidst day-to-day life in Marianist institutions; and broadly, (d) the need experienced within organizations across all sociological and economic spheres for nurturing mission engagement and shared identity within its constituents, especially its leaders. The research site was one institution in the Catholic and Marianist tradition, the University of Dayton, a top-tier research university in the United States. The guiding research question was: “What are the meanings that exemplary lay leaders ascribe to their lived experiences of endeavoring to lead in a manner committed to the Catholic-Marianist mission and identity of the University of Dayton?” The objectives of the study were: (a) discover essential meanings, (b) present individual descriptions, and (c) collective syntheses of the phenomenon in focus. The intended audience included: (a) all types of leaders and influencers in Marianist and Catholic higher education; (b) administrators in organization-spanning roles, especially those concerned with leadership
development and mission and identity enculturation; and (c) researchers in the fields of higher education, phenomenology, and interdisciplinary studies in leadership and organizational behavior.

Finally, I presented a brief description of my interdisciplinary, cross-functional, and cross-cultural background as an educator, researcher, and consultant in the fields of learning, leadership, and organizational development, as well as my personal connection with Catholic and Marianist ministry. I commented on my central understandings related to leadership, and the theoretical sources and practice-related influences that shaped those understandings, concluding that the future of mission and identity in Marianist and Catholic higher education hinges on the ongoing presence of the interior phenomenon of exemplary lay leadership commitment to mission and identity.

Literature Review

The literature review in this study covered three overarching themes, namely: (a) leadership in higher education, (b) Catholic mission and identity in higher education, and (c) Marianist educational culture and leadership. At the end of the literature review, I presented a summary of key insights from it, which I will not repeat here. However, in light of the subsequent findings in this study, three sets of insights are particularly noteworthy:

First, in relation to the theme of leadership in higher education: (a) It is indeed important and possible to study the complex, multidimensional phenomenon of leadership through the phenomenological research process amidst the complexities of higher education. (b) The phenomena of commitment and leadership are indeed inextricably intertwined in day-to-day reflective practice in academic life.
Second, in relation to the theme of Catholic mission and identity in higher education: (a) Several research studies have highlighted the challenges and hopes inherent in the emergence of lay leadership in Catholic higher education. The first wave of research focused more on executive levels amidst the evident transition from religious to lay leadership, especially among presidents and trustees. (b) There is a need for a stronger second wave of research focused on non-executive levels of lay leadership across the organizational matrix, and this study demonstrates a thoughtful response to it.

Third, in relation to the theme of Marianist educational culture and leadership: (a) There are fewer empirical research studies related to Marianist educational culture as compared to scholarly and religious commentaries, and even fewer related to leadership. (b) The idea of lay leadership is central to the Marianist narrative, originating in its earliest history and not as an afterthought. The concern for nurturing lay leaders is not merely a necessity due to declining vocations; rather, it is a foundational idea in Marianist thought.

In light of the literature review, the significance of this study can be expressed at two levels. First, in the context of the Marianist narrative, this empirical, phenomenological study is the first of its kind, seeking to understand and describe the lived experience of exemplary lay Marianist leadership and commitment to mission and identity. Second, in the context of broader sociological spheres, this study demonstrates a case-in-point for organization-specific articulations of exemplary leadership, and also contributes research-born, experiential insights to the wider discourse within Catholic higher education as well as higher education, phenomenology, and leadership and organizational studies in general. Based on a central insight offered by Marianist
founder, Blessed Chaminade, who emphasized: *The essential is the interior*, this study examines the interior lives of exemplary lay leaders, seeking to understand their lived experiences from the inside out.

**Methodology**

In this chapter, I presented an introduction to qualitative and phenomenological research, followed by a description of the specific methods used in this study. There were three broad methodological choices in this study:

First, the choice of qualitative research methodology: In the absence of a widely-recognized theory of leadership in the Marianist tradition, qualitative research allowed for the qualitative-quantitative continuum to be set into motion. The philosophical and methodological assumptions underlying qualitative research were particularly aligned with the purposes of this study, which focused on generating descriptive, experiential knowledge that could highlight topics and questions for future empirical research.

Second, the choice of phenomenological research methodology: Phenomenological research was particularly suited because it offered a rigorous, human science approach for studying complex, interiorly-experienced, human-organizational phenomena such as leadership and commitment. The tradition of phenomenology is linked to the Catholic intellectual tradition, and its methodological variants offer powerful approaches for gathering and analyzing experiential data through the phenomenological research process, eventually revealing the emergent, self-showing truth within the participants’ descriptions.

Third, the choice of transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology: The transcendental phenomenological method developed by Moustakas (1994) is oriented
towards the discovery and description of the essences of participants’ lived experiences, while remaining as close as possible to participants’ own meaning making. Moustakas’ approach was especially appropriate because of its (a) reflective, descriptive (rather than interpretive) emphasis, and (b) structured, step-by-step method for discovering the essences of lived experience. While maintaining a transcendental emphasis throughout this study, I integrated (a) the practice-orientation essential to higher educational research and appropriate for addressing the complexities involved in studying composite phenomena in applied, professional settings, as well as (b) relevant insights from several qualitative and phenomenological resources, especially Van Manen (1990, 2014), Creswell (2007, 2013), Seidman (2013), and Ridenour and Newman (2008). I implemented this study in four phases:

First, the pre-execution phase included: (a) groundwork for the study, especially exposure to relevant literature and organizational culture; (b) proposal writing and reviews; and (c) pilot interviews for clarifying and practicing the interviewing process.

Second, the sampling phase included: (a) prospecting for participants by considering lay persons who had received mission and identity-related awards, as well as those intentionally nominated for this study through my anonymous online survey administered to appropriate persons; (b) conducting recruitment interviews with potential participants and evaluating qualifying responses to questions related to active experience and reflective practice of the phenomenon in focus, followed by practical considerations such as availability to participate in the extended phenomenological process; (c) selecting a sample of exemplary lay leaders \((n = 8)\) for this study, representing a wide range of personal characteristics as well as professional subject and practice areas.
Third, the data collection phase relied primarily on a three-phased phenomenological long interviewing process, exploring the (a) focused life journey, (b) details of the experience, and (c) meaning making of each participant. The interviewing process incorporated four sets of considerations: (a) before the interview, especially setting aside pre-understandings; (b) at the beginning of the interview, especially helping the participant get into the needed frame of mind; (c) during the interview, especially maintaining a non-directional approach as an active listener and interlocutor; and (d) follow-up interactions after the interview, especially reviewing transcripts and clarifying understandings.

Fourth, the data analysis phase consisted of four progressions within the transcendental phenomenological method, namely: (a) epoché: bracketing (setting aside) personal understandings; (b) phenomenological reduction: developing descriptions of the apparent textures of the phenomenon; (c) imaginative variation: developing descriptions of the underlying structures of the phenomenon; and (d) synthesis of essential meanings: developing a collection of invariant essences of the phenomenon.

**Evaluation of Research Design**

**Trustworthiness of this Study**

Throughout the conceptualization and implementation of this study, I sought to incorporate design features that would build trust and truth-value. There are three sources of trustworthiness in this study: (a) the credibility of the participants, (b) the trust-building checks incorporated into the design, and (c) the rigor of the phenomenological research process.
**Credibility of the participants.** The most important design feature in this study is not that of process nor effort, but rather, the credibility of the participants involved. Each participant was (a) an active, highly experienced educator-leader; and (b) someone who had demonstrated sustained commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity. Participants were identified as exemplary lay leaders through processes of collective discernment, and not through personal choice; that is, participants had been (a) publicly recognized and awarded for their contributions to mission and identity, and (b) intentionally nominated by appropriate persons through my survey. Thus, at the point of recruiting them personally, I was reasonably convinced that each of them was an exemplary lay leader, and subsequently, my confidence in this sample of “best examples” only grew stronger through our interactions over a sustained period.

**Trust-building checks incorporated into the design.** In addition to the collective discernment processes during participant selection, I incorporated three trust-building checks across the work of data collection, analysis, and writing. First, peer debriefing, which was an external-to-study check, ensured that there were neutral assessments of my methodological decisions at key junctures, as well as several evaluations of my ongoing analysis and writing. Second, member checking, which was an internal-to-study check, ensured that all participants reviewed the drafts of their respective portraits-in-words as well as the collective statement of essence. Additionally, several participants \( n = 4 \) reviewed all composite syntheses. Third, my regular practice of the phenomenological process of epoché, which was an inner attitude check, ensured that I remained intentional about maintaining a phenomenological attitude all through this study. Thus, the individual descriptions and collective findings presented in this study
went through a meaning-making process that was rigorous and collective, resulting in an output with reasonable credibility, especially in light of the discernment of many credible persons who contributed to it.

**Rigor of the phenomenological research process.** My experience of engaging in phenomenological research gave me a sense of appreciation for what its foundational thinker, Edmund Husserl, envisioned when he conceptualized an approach for engaging in philosophical inquiry that could be considered as “rigorous science” (Van Manen, 2014, p. 90). The subsequent works of several phenomenological methodologists, including Van Manen (1990) and Moustakas (1994), developed and demonstrated this rigorous human science approach. I concluded that an undeniably distinctive characteristic of phenomenological research is its emphasis on the integration of philosophical insight and methodological rigor, thus producing a qualitative research methodology so unique that its central challenge is not its processual activities, but rather, the sheer enormity of its overall undertaking. The use of a specific method made it possible for me to remain consistent, as much as is humanly possible, across my interactions with different participants, and across the phases of the research. It made it possible for my dissertation guide and peer debriefer to evaluate my decisions, analyses, and writing at key junctures in the research process. Moreover, it makes it possible for other researchers to compare findings as well as replicate this study in different settings.

**Limitations of this Study**

The design choices that researchers make during the research process often produce concurrent benefits and drawbacks. In this study, I found that my design choices for enhancing trustworthiness resulted in three sets of limitations: (a) limitations of the
sample, (b) limitations of the phenomenological approach, and (c) limitations of the findings.

**Limitations of the sample.** There are two important limitations related to the sample in this study: First, I chose to delimit this study to one Catholic-Marianist research site, which made it possible to minimize extraneous factors that could influence the research process and findings. However, the limitations of the site also became the limitations of the sample, especially the lack of racial diversity. Second, I chose to identify prospective participants through collective discernment processes such as awards and nominations, which minimized personal discretion in selection and produced the desired sample of mid to senior-level leaders. However, the delimitations of these processes also became the limitations of the sample, especially the non-inclusion of four important types of leaders, namely: (a) student leaders, (b) predominantly grassroots leaders, (c) members of the Board of Trustees, and (d) religious Marianist persons.

**Limitations of the phenomenological approach.** There are two important limitations inherent in phenomenological research: First, even though the interior process of epoché is one of its distinguishing features and strengths, it is important to acknowledge that bracketing pre-understandings is an aspirational goal that is never fully accomplished. Thus, it is possible, and even likely, that other researchers conducting this study could discover horizons of meanings that my personal questioning did not evoke, and the human limitations of my consciousness did not observe. Second, it is also important to reiterate that even though the phenomenological research process produces thick descriptions, the horizons of the phenomenon in focus are “never totally exhausted” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). In other words, it is possible, and even likely, that the
addition of other participants, as well as the analyses of other researchers, could illuminate horizons that were not prominent in the data in this study or inadvertently undetected by me. Thus, phenomenological researchers, as well as qualitative researchers in general, cannot claim completeness nor certainty, but thoroughness and data-driven plausibility at best.

Limitations of the findings. There are three important limitations related to the findings in this study, emerging from the nature of phenomenological work:

First, the differences between transcendental (descriptive) and hermeneutical (interpretive) approaches: I adopted a low-hovering relationship with the data in this study; that is, the words and meanings that I incorporated into the writing were apparent in participants’ descriptions, thus eliminating the need for excessive interpretation. This design strength in descriptive phenomenology simultaneously produced an inherent drawback; namely, the exclusion of several interpretive possibilities or truth-claims within the data. For example, most participants referred to their experiences with the antithesis of Marianist leadership. I described and synthesized this theme in detail, but did not make interpretive truth-claims about its implications for present and future organizational culture.

Second, the uniqueness of phenomenological writing: Phenomenological descriptions and syntheses are distinct from other forms of qualitative reporting. The phenomenological researcher focuses particularly on the lived experience of the phenomenon; that is, the present, continuous experience. Thus, the distinctive benefits of the phenomenological attitude also produce an inherent limitation in the writing; that is, the reader does not receive extensive biographical or cultural details. It is important to
note that I carefully incorporated a certain degree of intentional vagueness into the writing, in order to (a) obviously protect the privacy of the participant, and (b) to subtly allow the reader to intuit and empathize with the humanness of the person rather than the biography of the personality (as done in case study research) or the culture of the institution (as done in ethnographic research).

Third, the difficulty of summarizing and reading phenomenological work: Van Manen (2014) pointed out, “A high-quality phenomenological text cannot be summarized”; rather, it needs to be encountered and suffered; the reader needs to consume it and be “consumed by it” (p. 355). Thus, it is important to note that the phenomenological descriptions presented in this study do not lend themselves to speed reading or quick referencing. They are meant for reflective reading that produces vivid mental pictures, helping the reader to empathize and intuit the humanness of persons and their lived experiences. Thus, there is the danger of misreading certain parts of this writing without engaging with the whole. Furthermore, it is not appropriate to exclusively use parts of the study to represent or summarize its whole, such as a single portrait-in-words or composite theme, or even the statement of essence. Put in another way, the output of this study is not simply at the end of the manuscript; rather, it is the “bulge in the middle” – the whole of chapters four (individual portraits-in-words) and five (composite syntheses).

**Recommendations for Future Research Designs**

The above-mentioned limitations point to several possibilities for design variations in future research. I will present three sets of recommendations: (a)
alternative research sites, (b) alternative research samples, and (c) alternative research methodologies.

**Alternative research sites.** One of the central aims of this study was to demonstrate the potential for organization-specific articulations of exemplary leadership by developing a methodology for discovering what it means to lead in a manner committed to a distinctive organizational mission and identity. This is a needed and noteworthy contribution to the fields of leadership and organizational studies in general. In essence, the design of this study indicates that virtually any organization can be a potential site for the replication of this approach.

Specifically in the context of Marianist institutions, I recommend that this study be replicated at the other two Marianist universities as well as other Marianist ministries that are likely to benefit from this approach; for example, Marianist schools in the United States, and also globally, especially those that have longstanding cultures and shifting leadership demographics. These organization-specific studies will provide the Marianist Sponsorship initiative, and other formation-related offices, the experiential data necessary for devising ongoing formational programs for present and future lay leaders in Marianist ministries. More broadly, the value of this methodology for producing organization-specific articulations of exemplary leadership can be harnessed across Catholic universities and other Catholic institutions, as well as secular universities and virtually all organizations that are seeking to clarify and deepen the enculturation of their respective missions and values.

**Alternative research samples.** In continuation to this study that focused on a particular kind of exemplariness at the research site, it makes sense to replicate this
approach with other distinct groups of leaders. The findings in this study point to four such groups: (a) exemplary student leaders, who have a particularly critical role to play in student-to-student enculturation; (b) exemplary grassroots leaders, who exert cultural influence in subtle, informal, and innumerable ways; (c) exemplary board members, who exert strategic influence on the overall governance and trajectory of the university community; and (d) exemplary Marianist religious leaders, whose experience and wisdom can benefit future generations of leaders, both lay and religious.

**Alternative research methodologies.** In addition to phenomenology, organization-specific articulations of exemplary leadership can benefit from three complementary qualitative research methodologies. These are: (a) the case study approach, wherein the researcher examines individual and institutional peculiarities and challenges, which readers in similar roles and settings are likely to find relevant and useful; (b) the ethnographic approach, wherein the researcher explores cultural components and interpersonal dynamics, which readers who are concerned with institutional culture are likely to find informational and insightful; and (c) the historical research approach, wherein the researcher examines antecedent examples of a presently-relevant topic; for example, a historical content analysis study of lay leadership in the founding era of the Marianist narrative.

The findings in this study provide the descriptive data necessary for initiating the qualitative-quantitative research cycle in relation to the topic of exemplary leadership and commitment, especially at the research site. Specifically, I suggest two quantitative research possibilities that could be important extensions to this study:
First, it could be beneficial to develop an organization-specific, self-administered instrument for assessing various dimensions of personal leadership and commitment to mission and identity. The thick descriptions in this study provide sufficient data for creating individual line items for such an instrument, eventually developing composite scales for (a) exemplary Marianist leadership and (b) exemplary lay commitment, using quantitative, factor analysis methods (Pallant, 2010).

Second, it could be helpful to incorporate insights related to exemplary leadership and commitment into quantifiable statements within organizational assessments that are currently in use; for example, climate surveys and performance evaluations. In time, unit-level quantitative data will offer numerous possibilities for correlational and group comparison studies, eventually gathering sufficient data for exploring predictive, multiple regression models (Pallant, 2010) that could be helpful in discerning the interventional needs of different groups within the university community.

A Closer Look at Research Findings

Contributions to the Literature

The findings in this study have numerous connections with the scholarship of leadership, commitment, Catholic higher education, and Marianist educational tradition. I will limit this section to two sets of perspectives that are particularly noteworthy: (a) findings that affirm or extend related scholarly narratives, and (b) contributions to the Marianist narrative.

**Findings that affirm or extend related scholarly narratives.** In light of the literature review, the findings in this study affirm or extend scholarship related to (a)
leadership in higher education, (b) the scholarship of commitment, and (c) Catholic mission and identity in higher education.

**Leadership in higher education.** In light of leadership theory and practice, this study adds to the literature on higher educational leadership, exploring the interplay between theory and practice (Bensimon et al., 1989; Kezar et al., 2006). In addition to making a contribution to qualitative research related to leadership studies in general (Klenke, 2008), this study adds to the limited body of knowledge related to the phenomenology of practice (Van Manen, 2014) of higher educational leadership.

The findings in this study affirm phenomenological insights concerning educational leadership, especially the dialogical nature of being-with-others in an educational environment (Mitchell, 1984), and the importance of role modeling in the context of developmental relationships (Sherick, 2014). The findings are also aligned with Herbstritt’s (1999) conclusion that persons learned to be leaders by being leaders. The findings affirm phenomenological insights related to Catholic higher educational leadership, such as the primacy of servant leadership alongside an integration of several compatible ideas in leadership theories (Muoneme, 2014), and the importance of proactive preparatory experiences (Raynis Meeker, 2008). In general, the findings align with Bensimon et al.’s (1989) conclusion about the particular relevance of symbolic and cultural emphases in higher educational leadership, as well as Kezar et al.’s (2006) discussion on emerging trends such as team leadership, organizational learning, ethics, spirituality, collaboration, and empowerment.

The Marianist approach to leadership offers several distinctive emphases that are particularly noteworthy in the context of contemporary leadership theories. The
organization-specific findings in this study suggest that the Marianist approach to leadership involves a noteworthy both/and emphasis that incorporates several contemporary theories of leadership (Northhouse, 2013), especially servant, authentic, principle-centered, and transformational leadership. The findings also suggest that the Marianist tradition offers distinctive working models that have the potential to enhance contemporary leadership practices in diverse settings. For example, the traditional Marianist approach of the Three Offices offers a unique way of practicing shared leadership in the spirit of a founding figure – an approach that is strikingly different from mainstream leadership theories and organizational practices.

The lived experiences of the exemplary lay leaders in this study extend Kouzes and Posner’s (1987, 2003, 2012) conceptualization of the five practices of exemplary leadership, presenting different dimensions of these practices in the context of a faith-based university, especially: (a) the experience of life-encompassing commitment to organizational mission and identity, within the exemplary practice of “inspiring a shared vision”; and (b) the interaction of faith-based values and contemporary leadership imperatives, within the exemplary practice of “challenging the process.”

**The scholarship of commitment.** The findings in this study are aligned with Benbow’s (1994) conclusion that the phenomenon of commitment cannot be fully explained merely through socialization and educational experiences; rather, the phenomenology of commitment is related to the interaction between the person’s consciousness and a specific set of values. The descriptions of exemplary lay leaders in this study highlighted the role that values played in the development of interior commitment, especially the common experience of early resonance with Marianist values
during the “rooting” phase within the educational community. The findings are also aligned with MacRenato’s (1995) conclusion that the intention to make a difference was paramount, regardless of the outcomes of the service. This conclusion corresponds with Greenleaf’s (1973) foundational insight concerning the motivation of servant leaders; that is, their desire to serve precedes their decision to lead, and in effect, it is their desire to serve that compels them to lead. The descriptions of the exemplary lay leaders in this study demonstrate Hunter’s (1999) conceptualization of the phenomenon of commitment as a dual action – active psychosocial synthesis, alongside empathetic receptivity and discernment. The development of commitment in the Marianist context required a dual action – personal (interior) work, alongside work with others (in community).

The findings in this study extend Meyer and Allen’s (1991) conceptualization of the three dimensions of organizational commitment (affective, continuance, and normative) by providing additional insights that seem characteristic to faith-based organizational traditions. For example, while several exemplary lay leaders in this study spoke of their continuance commitment in terms of assessing the costs associated with staying or leaving the organization, they also exhibited a strong sense of lifelong commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity in itself, thus presenting a new dimension of continuance commitment – the possibility of lifelong organizational commitment; that is, the intention to remain committed to the mission and identity of the organization, even if one decides not to be employed in it anymore. From the perspective of the scholarship of organizational engagement in general, this is a peculiar human-organizational phenomenon that needs to be further explored. The findings in this study also extend Stanage’s (1970) three-staged conceptualization of the phenomenology of
commitment (consentive, intendive, and active). The causal descriptions of exemplary lay leaders highlighted two additional stages: a pre-content phase, which I referred to as “predisposition”; and a post-action phase, which I referred to as “the continuing work of perseverance.”

**Catholic mission and identity in higher education.** This study contributes to the discourse on Catholic mission and identity in higher education because the research site, though unique, has several commonalities with other major Catholic universities in the United States. The descriptions of exemplary lay leaders in this study affirm Morey and Holtschneider’s (2005) outlook that the future of Catholic higher education will be in the hands of faith-filled and hardworking lay persons. The “Christian inspiration” called for in Ex Corde Ecclesiae (John Paul II, 1990, para. 13) is apparent in the descriptions of exemplary lay leaders in this study. In the context of Morey and Piderit’s (2006) four models of Catholic universities, the findings in this study suggest that the research site has some of the characteristics of immersion, persuasion, and diaspora universities. However, the university’s educational emphasis comes closest to the fourth model of Catholic universities – Catholic cohort universities – which seek to attract talented students regardless of religious background, and nurture Catholic (and Marianist) values that prepare them to make a positive difference in the world.

The nature of the data obtained through the phenomenological research process as compared to the online survey in this study, affirms Ferrari et al.’s (2010) conclusion that semi-structured interviews are likely to yield much richer results as compared to surveys about sustaining Catholic mission and values. The reflections of the exemplary lay leaders in this study also affirm Cole’s (2013) observation that leadership development
programs tend to become vehicles for enculturation, as well as Olin’s (2005) conclusion that a university’s ethos of promoting lay leadership can be a distinct advantage in terms of its adaptive capacity in dealing with modern-day market forces that influence higher education. Similar to the participants in Gardner’s (2006) study, the exemplary lay leaders in this study share a positive outlook concerning the potential for lay leadership as an effective means for ensuring the future of Catholic higher education. However, the latter also convey a rather cautious tone, alluding to several challenges that committed lay leaders often have to overcome or endure, distinct from those experienced by their religious counterparts.

**Contributions to the Marianist narrative.** This study has contributed to the Marianist narrative in many obvious and subtle ways. It has shed a bright light on the noteworthy and necessary phenomenon of exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity, thus preserving its legacy in institutional memory. The findings offer prominent as well as allusive insights for future practice and research, many of which I have discussed in this chapter. However, most obviously, this study has produced not only numerous ideas and perspectives related to leadership and commitment, but also materials for leadership development and conversations related to mission and identity.

Specifically, this study has contributed five sets of materials to the Marianist narrative: (a) eight portraits-in-words that offer detailed human narratives of exemplary lay leadership; (b) four clusters of composite textural themes, containing 28 distinct syntheses; (c) eight clusters of composite structural themes, containing 30 distinct syntheses; (d) three phenomenological descriptions of lived experience (exemplary lay
commitment, exemplary lay leadership, and Catholic-Marianist mission and identity) containing 26 distinct syntheses; and (e) a statement of essence, containing 36 distinct essential meanings (12 action-oriented sets, containing three statements each). In total, this research study has yielded 120 distinct outputs – fruits containing “seeds” for reflection, conversation, and action.

There are several ways in which the above-mentioned materials could be used, the most obvious of which are: (a) for private reading and reflection, and (b) for shared reading and conversation within university programs related to leadership development and mission and identity enculturation. Furthermore, the statement of essence could be particularly useful in conversations with prospective and new members of the university community, as a means of communicating what exemplary lay leaders tend to have in common despite their diverse temperaments and backgrounds. The statement of essence provides prospective and new members with an easy-to-access starting point for reflection about their own commitment and leadership, suggesting important conversational cues as they explore the university community. From a long-term perspective, this study of exemplary lay leadership has captured an important snapshot within the overall Marianist and Catholic narratives in higher education, something that future generations of lay leaders can access, reflect upon, learn from, and perhaps, nurture in their personal and organizational practice.

**Striking Allusions in the Data**

Van Manen (2014) pointed out that one of the ways to evaluate phenomenological work was to ask if the text showed “reflective allusions and surprising insights” (p. 355). In this study, I found that the data and the resultant syntheses indeed suggested numerous
subtleties and unexpected insights. Among these, I will discuss the following three, which are particularly striking and important. The first allusion (the antithesis of Marianist leadership) calls for caution; the second allusion (the layperson-to-layperson dynamic) calls for hope; and the third allusion (the underemphasized legacy of the exemplary-lay) calls for action.

**The recurring presence of the antithesis of Marianist leadership.** Experiences with the antithesis (opposite) of Marianist leadership were a recurring feature in the data. Several exemplary lay leaders elaborated on their negative experiences with other leaders, both lay and religious, often alluding to the possibility that leaders can “harden their hearts,” pay lip service to mission and identity, or inadvertently prioritize industry accomplishments and market considerations over the fundamental nature and purposes of a Marianist university. There is always the possibility of mission drift – gradually, and often imperceptibly, moving away from stated fundamentals and shared understandings.

In this sense, the University of Dayton is not different from any other organization, because human nature remains the same. However, in another sense, the University of Dayton is distinct from other organizations, because of the distinctiveness of the Marianist charism within the Church, within education, and indeed, in the world. Members of the university community who look for examples of “un-exemplariness” (the shadow side) are likely to find several, and those who look for examples of exemplariness (the grace side) are likely to find several too. Simply put, the commitment of the exemplary lay leaders in this study is not only “commitment because of…” but also “commitment despite of….”
The experience of entering commitment, and subsequently remaining committed, comes down to a personal choice – a choice of intentionality between the grace and shadow sides – that is, the choice to accept personal responsibility for being a tangible example of someone who cares about mission and identity (and the difficulty that entails), or the choice to not accept personal responsibility for being a role model. It is important to note that none of the exemplary lay leaders in this study claim that they are always able to manifest the grace side, and neither do they expect other persons to be perfect – human nature is what it is. However, all of them practice intentionality about manifesting the grace side, accepting personal responsibility for being a good example – to be on the right side of the Marianist story – and that is the point.

The prominence of the layperson-to-layperson dynamic. The exemplary lay leaders in this study described how several religious Marianists had an important influence on their commitment and leadership. However, their experiences of being supported and mentored by other lay persons were equally potent in their descriptions. They referred to several lay persons whom they looked to as role models of Marianist leadership – persons who practiced Marianist stances in day-to-day academic life, mixing spirituality with practicalities, integrating rationality and relationality in decision making (the head and the heart), striving to be present to one’s family as well as the university community, and being a tangible example of someone who cares about mission and identity within one’s unit, department, classroom, and so on.

The prominence of the layperson-to-layperson dynamic in the data offers an important and hopeful clue for the future of mission and identity. This dynamic in the lives of exemplary lay leaders suggests the possibility for the Marianist charism to be
sustained and transmitted to future generations within a Marianist educational community that is predominantly lay. It is also important, however, to note that exemplary lay leaders conveyed a rather cautious sense of optimism because of the difficulties and challenges involved in being “lay-committed.” For example, one exemplary lay leader explained, “I think that laypeople can carry the mission quite admirably, but I think we gotta work at it.” Put in another way, if the intentionality to “work at it” is present, lay leaders in the future will have access to the same spiritual charism and cultural ethos that their predecessors had. Thus, the emerging Marianist story, which originally began amidst the phenomena of lay commitment and leadership, continues to remain open with imaginative possibilities and a faith-filled sense of hope.

**The underemphasized legacy of the exemplary-lay.** The individual portraits-in-words and composite syntheses in this study shed a bright light on the experiences of the exemplary-lay. This work, however, stands in contrast to the vast proportion of Marianist literature that contains the life experiences, scholarship, and reflections of religious Marianist persons.

The findings in this study indicate that exemplary lay leaders tend to underemphasize the significance of their own contributions as well as the correctness of their own articulations. They are conscious of their own limited formation and exposure to Marianist history and spirituality, especially in comparison to religious Marianist persons whom they consider to be “better formed”; that is, religious persons obviously receive more formal and sustained education and formational experiences in the wider Marianist context. In the descriptions of exemplary lay leaders, there appear to be two reasons for their underestimation of themselves: first, (more obviously) their disposition
towards personal humility and selflessness; and second, (less obviously) their feeling of being – for lack of a better phrase – “less well-formed.” This observation offers an important clue for action, especially in the near future; that is, there is a need to encourage experienced lay persons to contribute their personal life experiences and reflections to the Marianist narrative in more prominent and long-lasting (recorded, referable) ways, much like several religious persons have done in present and preceding generations. One exemplary lay leader emphasized, “So I think the main message would be – from lay person to lay person… don’t feel inadequate about it; you’re perfectly qualified and credible, and God will welcome your service as well as the [religious person’s] service.”

The exemplary lay leaders in this study empathize with religious Marianists who are experiencing the process of letting go of older paradigms and transitioning to substantially new ways of engaging in ministry. It is noteworthy, however, that exemplary lay leaders are also going through a similar process of letting go in the context of their own aging process – passing on the responsibility for mission and identity to the next generation of lay leaders. Their descriptions contain several references to the need for accepting new realities, much like their religious colleagues.

The present generation of exemplary lay leaders is likely to be the last, in the foreseeable future, to have worked closely with large numbers of religious Marianists, thus making their life experiences and reflections potentially thought-provoking and useful to future generations of lay persons who are likely to experience predominantly lay leadership within the university community. Thus, given the fact that exemplary lay leaders are likely to underemphasize the value of their own reflections and wisdom as
compared to that of religious Marianists, it is important that all Marianists – lay and religious – encourage and support reflection on the legacy of the exemplary-lay who worked alongside the exemplary-religious.

**Insights for Marianist Practice**

In this section, I will extend the practice-related syntheses presented in the preceding chapter by highlighting key insights underlying the overall data, especially in relation to: (a) emphases in leadership practice, (b) applications for leadership development, and (c) clues for nurturing commitment. These insights are broadly applicable to diverse lay persons within Marianist educational communities.

**Emphases in leadership practice.** In continuation to the practice-related insights presented in the preceding chapter, the findings in this study conveyed two general emphases in leadership practice: (a) infusing reflective practice with Marianist ideas and values; and (b) embracing non-dualistic, principle-centered, virtuous living.

**Infusing reflective practice with Marianist ideas and values.** The individual portraits-in-words and composite syntheses in the preceding chapters articulated several Marianist values, which offer leaders the moral yardsticks necessary for discernment and reflective practice – reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983). Regardless of personal backgrounds, scholarly fields, and faith traditions of lay leaders, the findings in this study suggest that Marianist ideas that are experientially imbibed in the context of community, not only cause initial attraction but also offer common ground for ongoing personal and collective reflective practice. In essence, the interiorly-experienced clarification of Marianist ideas and values is the key to developing an authentically Marianist reflective practice.
Embracing non-dualistic, principle-centered, virtuous living. The reflections of the exemplary lay leaders in this study offer potent descriptions of the creative tensions inherent in Marianist leadership. There is an inherent mystery in the Marianist both/and emphasis, which necessitates continual pondering. This is a creative struggle that exercises commitment, and can deepen it. Non-dual thinkers “. . . no longer need to divide the field of every moment between up and down, totally right or totally wrong, with me or against me” (Rohr, 2011, p. 146). Rather, there is an effort to integrate seemingly opposing extremes into virtues that necessitate a balanced life and practice. In essence, (a) Marianist leadership practice has a lot to do with virtuous living and principle-centered leadership; (b) Marianist leadership development has a lot to do with developing the capacity for practicing moral virtues and discerning Marianist principles for leadership; and relatedly, (c) the Marianist spiritual tradition offers a System of Virtues that can help leaders grow in virtuous living and leadership discernment.

Applications for leadership development. In continuation to the practice-related insights presented in the preceding chapter, the findings in this study indicated two key applications for leadership development: (a) fostering growth experiences and developmental relationships, and (b) promoting the sharing of lay personal narratives.

Fostering growth experiences and developmental relationships. The descriptions of exemplary lay leaders indicate that their personal leadership development took place mainly through osmosis; that is, through their ongoing interaction with exemplary Marianist leaders, both lay and religious, whom they worked closely with and gradually sought to emulate. Their descriptions suggest that they developed leadership by practicing leadership, and that much of their development was self-directed; that is,
they were proactive in their efforts, with a sense of ownership for their own development. Their experiences are generally aligned with the 70-20-10 rule of leadership development (Center for Creative Leadership, 2015), which emphasizes the prominent role of challenging experiences (70%) and developmental relationships (20%), as compared to formal programming such as coursework and training (10%). While the corroboration of these numbers is beyond the scope of phenomenological inquiry, this three-fold principle seems to be aligned with the data in this study; that is, Marianist leadership development mainly involved (a) growth experiences, supported by (b) developmental relationships, and occasionally reinforced by (c) formal programming.

However, the experiences of exemplary lay leaders suggest that the Marianist approach laid greater emphasis on developmental relationships than the 70-20-10 rule suggests (more than 20%). More accurately, Marianist leadership development seemed to differ from the 70-20-10 rule in that (a) and (b) often overlapped substantially; that is, growth experiences tended to occur in close proximity with exemplary persons and role models, who also offered developmental relationships as mentors and elders. This is an important clue for administrators of leadership development programming because it suggests that much of the work of designing organizational processes and experiences for leadership development needs to take place outside of formal programming, and in close proximity with exemplary persons and developmental relationships. The presence of intentional persons is critical to every area and level within the educational community – individuals who, despite their personal shortcomings, strive to be tangible examples of Marianist leadership stances and provide support or mentorship to others, thus serving the enculturation and formational needs of both new and experienced members of the
In essence, the Marianist approach towards developing others flows out of a spirituality of accompaniment; thus, it is important to design leadership development experiences that accentuate the power of presence, example, and gentle influence.

**Promoting the sharing of lay personal narratives.** As discussed earlier in this chapter, the findings in this study indicate the prominence of the layperson-to-layperson dynamic of nurturing commitment and leadership. Given this insight, the eight individual portraits-in-words presented in this study become important vehicles for transmitting the essences of lived experience. The findings also indicate the significant influence of being in sustained conversations; that is, the experience of encountering the interior meaning making of other persons tends to have a profound influence on the personal narratives of all involved. The findings also suggest that exemplary persons demonstrate an active intellect, regardless of their role at the university – academic or non-academic.

These insights, and several others related to the relationality of the phenomenon in focus, suggest an important application for future leadership development; that is, the value of personal narratives shared among lay persons who are seeking to clarify and deepen their engagement with the Marianist charism. While personal narratives are shared in numerous informal ways in day-to-day academic life, their potential value in leadership development suggests the need to encourage committed lay leaders to articulate their personal leadership narratives on long-term, referable platforms. There are several oral and written ways of doing this within academic culture. For example, Nash (2004) offered a methodology known as *Scholarly Personal Narrative*, encouraging scholars to make sense of their own life experiences, using personal insights to make broader connections for readers, as well as challenging and reconstructing older
narratives. Scholarly personal narratives have the potential to convey the human dimensions of mission and identity, offering a human “face” and tone to the frequently faceless and formal articulations of mission and identity.

In the context of the University of Dayton, there are several institutional as well as general articulations related to Catholic and Marianist mission and identity (Office for Mission and Rector, n.d.a). Galligan-Stierle (2013) observed that the university’s collection of mission and identity-related documents was “incredibly impressive” (35:00). This study of exemplary lay leaders has contributed eight scholarly narratives (portraits-in-words) that “humanize” the university’s mission and identity. These narratives can help readers make intellectual connections with ideas and values in Catholic-Marianist mission and identity, and perhaps go a step further – developing a sense of empathy and resonance with exemplary lay leaders who embodied those ideas and values.

**Clues for nurturing commitment.** In continuation to the practice-related insights presented in the preceding chapter, the findings in this study suggested two important clues for nurturing commitment: (a) accentuating lay commitment in unexpected settings, and (b) exploring the margins of the Marianist open circle.

**Accentuating lay commitment in unexpected settings.** Among the most significant findings in this study is the insight related to the power of unlikely bearers of mission; that is, persons who demonstrate that personal commitment is possible in practice areas or scholarly fields that are not typically associated with the idioms of mission and identity. The descriptions of the exemplary lay leaders in this study emphasize the need to foster the conversation about mission and identity in functions and
groups that do not generally engage in mission-speak. For example, one exemplary leader points out that when students notice unlikely persons caring about mission (that is, persons who are not generally associated with mission and identity-related conversations and activities) – it gets their attention; “…then you go, oh wait a minute, we’ve got people in Purchasing… [and] Parking Services who care….”

Specifically, this provides an important clue for administrators involved in mission and identity-related programming; that is, the need to accentuate lay commitment in unexpected settings, to shed a bright light on committed persons whom others do not obviously associate with commitment. Perhaps the single most high-impact activity for the future of mission and identity is the work of inviting unlikely bearers of mission to consider sharing their personal narratives in detail, and providing conducive platforms for their stories to be told, honored, and remembered.

Exploring the margins of the Marianist open circle. The findings in this study indicate the possibility that persons can be partially or differently committed; that is, the experience of diverse persons within the university community, whose personal beliefs diverge from ideas and values in Catholic-Marianist mission and identity in some significant ways, but who, nevertheless, experience a sense of commitment towards many key emphases. Heft (2003a) referred to the Marianist university as an open circle – the circle contains core beliefs and principles, and its openness implies that persons from all walks are welcomed to engage, challenge, and support it. The work of making such persons feel respected and included requires continual and sensitive effort; it is the work of exploring the margins of the Marianist open circle, and seeking to expand it.
Specifically, the findings in this study point to the need for understanding the lived experiences of particular kinds of persons on the Marianist margins, including: (a) persons who may struggle with Catholic aspects but not with Marianist, or vice versa; (b) persons who may struggle with faith but not with shared human values; or (c) persons who may struggle with their commitment because of severe negative experiences with particular persons or groups within the community. One exemplary lay leader asks, “How do we still make a place for them here, and how do we still respect their path…?”

Commitment among cultural catalysts is important (grassroots leaders who are committed in obvious, active ways). However, the high-potential work of nurturing commitment is that of attending to the struggles and needs of lay persons on the Marianist margins – helping them find little connections with the charism, or simply providing some much-needed human support – thus gradually nurturing a sense of mutual respect and openness, and subsequently, the willingness to engage and belong.

**Recommendations for Future Research Studies**

My interactions with the exemplary lay leaders in this study, alongside the sustained phenomenological analysis and writing process, revealed numerous topics that could be explored in future research and scholarship. I will offer four sets of research themes that could be particularly important extensions to this study, namely: (a) exploring related hyphens, (b) studying related phenomenologies, (c) articulating related narratives, and (d) developing related arguments.

**Exploring related hyphens.** This research study of exemplary lay leaders explored specific hyphens in lived experience. In the context of qualitative research, the metaphor of the “hyphen” signifies relationships between persons, ideas, identities, or
experiences in the context of a social discourse. Specifically, this study explored three hyphens: (a) the exemplary-lay, (b) the exemplary-leader, and (c) the exemplary-committed. The experiences of the exemplary lay leaders in this study shed light on other important and subtle phenomenological hyphens that could provide important clues for those involved in leadership development and mission and identity enculturation, as well as researchers in higher education, phenomenology, and leadership and organizational studies. Three particularly noteworthy hyphens that could be explored in future research are: (a) the unlikely-committed, (b) the dissimilar-committed, and (c) the disappointed-committed.

**The unlikely-committed.** These are persons whose commitment to mission and identity evokes a positive sense of wonder and awe in those who observe them; persons whose commitment attracts special attention in the sociological contexts of the organization. For example, persons whose job roles or subject areas are not obviously associated with mission-speak.

**The dissimilar-committed.** These are persons on the metaphorical margins of the circle of commitment; persons who experience commitment to mission and identity but live it in notably different ways as compared to the majority of committed persons within the organization. For example, persons who are committed to several ideas and values within mission and identity, but who do not fit neatly into traditional molds of belongingness and group membership suggested by the cultural norms of the community.

**The disappointed-committed.** These are persons whose difficult experiences have led them, metaphorically, to the margins of the open circle. These persons experience commitment, but also struggle with hurt and disillusionment due to specific
organizational and/or interpersonal realities. Relatedly, the phenomenological investigation of the opposite experience of exemplary commitment, that is, “the process of ‘decommitting’” (Hunter, 1999, p. 136) could also yield important counter-insights.

Additionally, the exploration of other identity and role-related hyphens is also a natural extension to this study of exemplary lay leaders, including (as discussed earlier): (a) exemplary student leaders, (b) exemplary grassroots leaders, (c) exemplary executive leaders, and (d) exemplary religious leaders.

**Studying related phenomenologies.** This research study explored a composite phenomenon in an applied, professional setting; namely, the phenomenon of exemplary lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity. The experiential insights gained in this study suggest related human-organizational phenomena that could provide important cues for future phenomenological investigations. Three particularly noteworthy phenomenologies that could be explored in future research are: (a) the interior experience of “commitment conversions,” (b) the challenge of being a role model amidst hypervisibility, and (c) the spirituality and practice of Marianist accompaniment.

**The interior experience of “commitment conversions.”** This is the experience of accepting employment at an organization without any intention of personally committing to its mission and identity, and subsequently, the phenomenological process of undergoing a “change of heart,” which eventually develops into a sincere and sustained state of interior commitment as well as congruent practice.

**The challenge of being a role model amidst hypervisibility.** This is the experience of striving to be a good role model, and at least not a bad one, within an organizational function/role that has unusually high visibility. It is the phenomenology of
authenticity in public life, that is, the experience of striving to be one’s true and best self amidst palpable expectations of moral excellence.

**The spirituality and practice of Marianist accompaniment.** This is the experience of forming sustained mentoring relationships with exemplary Marianist elders, or simply, supportive relationships with trusted colleagues within Marianist educational communities. It is the phenomenology of giving and receiving human companionship guided by the Marianist charism, along the unfolding journey of leadership, commitment, and life in general.

**Articulating related narratives.** This study presented individual and collective narratives of exemplary lay leadership and commitment. The findings in this study offer several cues for other relevant narratives that could make for insightful reading, reflection, and conversation. Three particularly noteworthy narratives that could be explored in future scholarship are: (a) narratives of early enculturation in Marianist institutions, (b) narratives of right relationships in difficult contexts, and (c) narratives of Marianist imagination.

**Narratives of early enculturation in Marianist institutions.** These could be longitudinal studies of the experiences of new members within a particular Marianist educational community, which could reveal key cultural enablers and roadblocks to engagement with mission and identity. An important insight in my study is that commitment is processual in nature; it is an interior state that develops gradually. Thus, longitudinal studies could provide insightful narratives into the early and gradual development of commitment, which studies relying primarily on long-term hindsight may not uncover.
Narratives of right relationships in difficult contexts. These could be personal stories of how exemplary Marianist leaders built and maintained relationships in difficult contexts, especially the experiences of persevering through interpersonal conflicts in day-to-day organizational life, in light of mission and identity.

Narratives of Marianist imagination. These could be inspiring stories of Marianist communities that demonstrated extraordinary ingenuity and courage amidst challenging circumstances, especially the experiences of adaptation and creative faith in doing the work of mission, demonstrating the Marianist maxim: For new times, new methods.

Developing related arguments. The findings in this study indicate several socially-relevant points of contention and areas of debate that scholars in Catholic higher education need to respond to with well-developed arguments. Three particularly needed arguments are: (a) the moral implications of working at a Catholic university, (b) the equal potentiality of religious and lay leadership, and (c) the value of human science in Catholic intellectual tradition.

The moral implications of working at a Catholic university. There is a need to clarify the moral issues inherent in the choice of accepting employment at an institution with a faith-based mission and identity. Though general commentaries are needed and useful, the potential for organization-specific articulations that elucidate specific implications to prospective members of a Catholic university could be a particularly valuable tool for reflection and conversation. Moreover, in contrast to general mission and identity materials given to prospective and new members of a Catholic university, ethical arguments can be particularly compelling from a secular perspective, and are
likely to be helpful to persons from diverse backgrounds and faith traditions as they discern their sense of purpose and place within a Catholic university.

*The equal potentiality of religious and lay leadership.* The Marianist narrative has a particularly distinct ethos and voice that could encourage scholarship that supports lay leadership in Catholic education. Benlloch (2001) emphasized the need for the Marianist family to return to a “balanced ecclesial composition,” remembering the lay origins of the Marianist movement – a reality that changed with the development of a strong organization among religious Marianists (p. 117). The future of the Marianist sponsorship initiative depends on a renewed discipleship of equals between Marianist religious and lay leaders. In the context of strategic planning in the Marianist Province of the United States, Glodek (2010) explained, “We [Marianist religious] have understood ourselves as the leaders, and more recently, as the sponsors of these institutions. Now we commit ourselves to a large shift in self-understanding: We commit ourselves to be partners in mission” (p. 7). In the context of this sociological shift within Marianist institutions, there is a need for developing general and organization-specific arguments for the viability of lay leadership. For the ongoing transition from religious to lay leadership to be successful, it is important that a significant proportion of persons within each Marianist educational community are convinced that religious and lay persons have equal potentials to live the Marianist charism, and serve the Marianist mission.

*The value of human science in Catholic intellectual tradition.* The quantitative, positivist orientation in much of academic research is often at odds with the qualitative research paradigm (Ary et al., 2010; Ridenour & Newman, 2008; Seidman, 2013). In this context, Catholic universities can serve as important venues for qualitative research in
general, and human science approaches such as phenomenological research in particular. The Catholic intellectual tradition emphasizes the unity of all knowledge, and the value of varied scholarly traditions and methods for accumulating it. The effort to deepen our appreciation of the nature and dignity of the human person is a central theme in Catholic social teaching (Mich, 2011; McKenna, 2002). This makes phenomenological human science particularly relevant to the scholarly discourse within Catholic higher education. The historical intersections between Catholic intellectual tradition and phenomenology suggest rich possibilities for future scholarship, and the idea of the Catholic university is particularly well-suited to be a fertile ground for human science research. Therefore, it makes sense for Catholic universities to (a) support scholars who incorporate phenomenological perspectives and methods into their work, especially in light of Catholic intellectual tradition; and (b) encourage scholars across disciplines to draw practice-related insights from phenomenological human science research.

**Concluding Reflections**

In this closing section, I will offer four personal reflections. The first reflection is professional; it relates to all organizations, and is titled: The relevance of organization-specific articulations of exemplariness. The second reflection is methodological; it provides an artistic insight into phenomenological research alongside an insight into the transition occurring within Marianist institutions, and is titled: The changing (not dying) of the light. The third reflection is spiritual; it offers an insight into the intergenerational Christian and Marianist experience, and is titled: The phenomenological mystery of faith and charism. The fourth reflection is an expression of hope; it is a personal note to the reader, and is titled: A note to the lay leader reading this work in the (distant) future.
The Relevance of Organization-specific Articulations of Exemplariness

A central insight that I have come to perceive as an educator, researcher, and consultant is that organizations with longstanding histories and complex cultures tend to have dispersed “pockets of excellence” (such as high impact teams and programs) as well as diverse “persons of excellence” (exemplary leaders who practice personal stances and competencies that are worthy of emulation). The approach I have demonstrated in this study presents a case-in-point for harnessing the wisdom and experience that these organizations already possess and obviously need to clarify, communicate, and nurture within their broader constituents.

Regardless of the nature or context of any given organization, phenomenological insights about leadership and commitment to mission and identity have relevance across sociological and economic spheres because of the universality of these phenomena in human-organizational experience. For example, in the context of higher education, Kezar (2005) pointed out that amidst market-driven competition and declining public funds, justice is often at stake; “. . . the main point is that core values supporting higher education are in jeopardy, thereby threatening the ability of institutions to fulfill their vital mission of serving the public good” (p. 38). Similarly, in the context of for-profit businesses, Russo (2010) explored the mission-driven movement among secular organizations, which violated the basic assumptions of profit-driven motives in the business world by introducing moral imperatives into company missions. Russo argued that even if these companies are not able to reach their idealistic aspirations consistently, “the movement of mission-driven companies is much more frequently right than wrong. These companies have shown that it’s possible to create viable business models that in
some sense defy economics and finance textbooks” (p. 190). The example of such
mission and values-driven organizations, as well as individual leaders, is key to nurturing
similar practices in other organizations and leaders. This is because human desire tends
to be mimetic in nature (Girard, 1996); that is, human beings tend to desire what they
observe others desiring. Thus, the positive example of role models (exemplariness that is
worthy of emulation) is the primary human mode of transmission of good leadership
values and practices.

Conversely, it is also important to consider that the absence of organization-
specific articulations of exemplariness would mean that leadership development
initiatives would be left solely to the personal perspectives of individual administrators.
In other words, “. . . to develop better practices or policies, an examination of shared
experience is necessary” (Ary et al., 2010, p. 472). The absence of a unifying leadership
philosophy can make leadership programs more idiosyncratic and potentially less
effective. On the other hand, leadership development programming that is unified in
leadership philosophy can help diverse organizational constituents cultivate the capacity
to “self-organize” (Burke, 2014, p. 324). A unifying leadership language can help
individual leaders become more fungible across functions and departments, making them
more likely to navigate role transitions successfully.

From a professional perspective, this study of exemplary leadership commitment
contributes to the phenomenology of practice; that is, it is oriented towards practice; it is
research that is of and for practice (Van Manen, 2014). This study demonstrates the
possibility of investigating composite, multi-concept phenomena in applied settings. The
phenomenon in this study was complex because it had sociological, psychological, and
spiritual dimensions, thus presenting a significant research challenge – the co-exploration of eight human-organizational dimensions, namely: exemplariness, lay experience, leadership, commitment, Catholic, Marianist, mission, and identity. In essence, this study demonstrated the possibility and value of organization-specific articulations of exemplary leadership – demystifying leadership one institution at a time. Moreover, the phenomenological study of exemplariness offers a new way of growing in personal experience. Van Manen (2011b) explained that phenomenology allows us to “borrow” the experiences of others; “we gather other people’s experiences because they allow us, in a vicarious sort of way, to become more experienced ourselves” (para. 3).

**The Changing (Not Dying) of the Light**

In order to explain the title of this reflection, I need to begin by explaining two separate insights. First, amidst my engagement with phenomenological research, I discovered impressionist art forms that seek to depict the essences of ordinary life and their ambient feelings, such as the paintings of Monet and the music of Debussy, among many others. Impressionist artists use “spots of color to show the effects of different kinds of light, and . . . attempt[ing] to capture the feeling of a scene rather than specific details” (Merriam-Webster, 2015). As I viewed several impressionist paintings, I noticed and appreciated the particular difficulty and beauty of impressionist works that sought to depict a scene in the precise moment when the light was changing. It was not difficult for me to see the connections between impressionism and phenomenology – both are interested in capturing the essences of scenes and persons; both seek to evoke feelings of empathy with the contents of the portrait that the viewer/reader is experiencing. Thus, I came to see my phenomenological research work as an impressionist art form.
Phenomenological research is a “poetizing activity,” an “evocative speaking,” and a “primal telling” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 13).

Second, as I studied the narrative of Catholic higher education, I found that a grim outlook was rather common in the literature. For example, I was particularly struck by the phrase – the dying of the light (Burtchaell, 1998), used in the context of the increasing disengagement between institutions of higher education and their faith-based traditions. The metaphor of the dying light seemed to aptly describe, at least partially, the realities of several institutional case studies within Christian higher education in general. However, my engagement with the Marianist narrative offered an alternative possibility, especially because of its unique ethos of lay leadership and cultural emphasis on adaptation. In my interactions with the exemplary lay leaders in this study, I found cause for hope. Though they expressed several reasons for concern, and also some occasional despair, they simultaneously recognized the unique potential of the Marianist charism for embracing inevitable transitions and manifesting a positive future. I saw in them a sense of hope that the light was not dying – it was only changing. I heard in them a prayerful sigh, desiring that the charism they had cherished for much of their adult lives be continually experienced by future generations.

Thus, I came to see this phenomenological research study as an impressionist work of art in the Marianist narrative. From a faith-inspired perspective, the light is not dying – it is only changing; and the eight portraits-in-words of exemplary lay leaders in this study have presented impressionist, human portrayals amidst the changing of this light. Given its history, the Marianist movement has a unique opportunity to manifest an alternative legacy of transition from religious to lay leadership in Catholic higher
education – to create an alternative portrait amidst the changing (not dying) of the light.

One exemplary lay leader in this study said, “…the Marianists don’t have to invent these ideas, these twenty-first-century concepts, [such as] the involvement of the laity; that’s not post-Vatican II for the Marianists, that’s pre-Vatican II, that’s Chaminade in 1801….” Thus, a central challenge before the Marianist family is this: Though Marianists do not need to reinvent these ideas, they do need to return continually to them. The work that is needed is that of remembrance first, then adaptation.

**The Phenomenological Mystery of Faith and Charism**

Through my lived experience of conducting this study, I have come to see a central phenomenological insight concerning the mystery of faith, and that of charism. The insight is this: The basic mode of transmission of the mysteries of faith and charism is phenomenological; that is, it is experiential and pre-verbal. Put in another way, it is not the spoken or written words that are the most important agents of transmission; rather, it is lived experience that offers the natural mode of continuity. A phenomenological look at the Christian gospels, as well as the early Marianist story, illustrates this point in numerous ways, which I will briefly explain next.

In the context of the phenomenological mystery of the Christian faith, it is important to look at its central figure – Jesus Christ. It is noteworthy that Jesus did not personally put his teachings into the written word. The gospels tell us that he read the scriptures in the temple, and that he had access to several scholars and scribes who, conceivably, could have transcribed his words privately or during his public sermons. However, Jesus did not, apparently, consider it important to give his disciples personally written words. Instead, what he gave them was personal lived experience with himself –
being present to them, accompanying them, feeding them, washing their feet, conversing with them, and ultimately, communicating unfathomable volumes through his lived experience on the cross, in a manner that can evoke greater empathy, at a fundamental human level, than even the most eloquently written words. The point I am trying to make is this: The central figure in the Christian faith, whom innumerable persons have believed to be the “Word” of God and the Christ, chose to begin the Christian narrative not merely with words, but through the sharing of lived experience.

Likewise, in the context of the phenomenological mystery of the Marianist charism, it is important to look at its foundational figure – Blessed Father Chaminade. It is noteworthy that Father Chaminade did not write lengthy treatises formulating the Marianist charism. He used words of course, and we have several of his letters and other writings, including some key articulations; for example, his letter to the retreat masters in 1839. However, Father Chaminade’s approach was, first and foremost, that of lived experience in faith, and in community. He exhorted the early Marianists, lay and religious, to give the world a spectacle of saints; that is, to present the lived experience of the charism, to manifest it, to witness it. Benlloch (2001) reviewed several accounts of Father Chaminade’s experience of divine inspiration while he was in exile in Saragossa, which led him to begin the work of nurturing lay sodalities, and eventually, religious congregations. It is noteworthy that Father Chaminade did not give elaborate details about his private spiritual experiences; for example, sensing his future collaborators “in the twinkling of an eye” (as told by Father Rothéa, in Benlloch, 2001, p. 11). Rather, Father Chaminade emphasized, among other things, the experience of being a community
in a continuing mission. His approach, like that of Jesus, was about transmission through lived experience first, and then, using words as appropriate.

In the final analysis, the Christian faith and the Marianist charism are mysteries; they are gift and grace. Words are helpful, but the words do not contain the mystery – the mystery contains the words. Thus, as I am nearing the end of this rather lengthy research manuscript, I find it necessary to emphasize that it is only an imperfect container of a profound mystery – the mystery of the Marianist charism, in the context of the Christian faith. In a sense, this manuscript presents a written “spectacle,” which draws attention to the witness of exemplary lay leaders who imbibed the Marianist charism from other Marianist persons, who received it from those before them, and so on.

A fundamental premise of living the Christian faith is that the foundational mystery of faith experienced by the early Christians continues to be experienced by Christians today. Likewise, a fundamental premise of living the Marianist charism is that the foundational mystery of charism experienced by the early Marianists continues to be experienced by Marianists today. Conversely, for the sake of argument, if the actual lived experience of the mystery was not passed down through the generations, what is left today is mere words (and thoughts) about the mystery, but not real experience of a continuing mystery. Thus, the real phenomenological challenge of mission and identity is not so much the need for words, as it is the necessity of experience, and consequently, of witness – it is the call to live the mystery. The findings in this study of exemplary lay leaders suggest the continuity of the mystery of the Marianist charism within persons in Marianist higher education today. This is a source of hope – a spectacle worthy of attention and celebration.
A Note to the Lay Leader Reading this Work in the (Distant) Future

I would not have been able to conduct this study without the support of several Marianist religious and lay persons. In particular, 12 lay persons (11 plus me) were most closely involved in the work of this study; that is, the eight exemplary lay leaders in this study; my dissertation guide – Dr. Schaller; my reviewer – Dr. Ridenour; and personally, my wife, Hazel, who supported me through all the difficult choices that were involved in beginning and staying committed to this work. Amidst my doctoral coursework, I observed several colleagues exclaiming that dissertation manuscripts are rarely read by many persons. During the countless hours of doing the work of this study, I sometimes wondered: What if this manuscript is not read by many? Metaphorically, what if this tree that grew amidst much difficulty and sacrifice is left to wither away? What if its branches are not explored? What if its fruits are not received? Nevertheless, I stayed committed to this contributory project, knowing that I simply needed to give my best work and surrender the outcomes to God. I continued to conceive and develop this manuscript elaborately, as you can see, and with a quiet hope that this work would experience a different outcome.

As I continued nurturing this research (the tree), it produced eight branches (portraits-in-words), from which came 120 syntheses and essences (the fruits). Many times during the research process, I asked the lay persons involved in this study to pray for one particular intention: For God’s breath in this work. One day, in a moment of prayerful reflection, I found myself pondering: Even if the branches of this tree were left to wither away, and even if the fruits are not received, this work would still produce something – seeds. Seeds tend to last longer than fruits; they can even remain dormant
for long periods, coming alive when they find open soil and nurture. Perhaps this was God’s greater purpose for this work – that it would bear fruits that, regardless of their fate, would contain long-lasting seeds. Thus, to the lay leader who is reading this work in the future (and perhaps the distant future) of the Catholic and Marianist narrative, I wish to convey: Our prayer was that you experience God’s breath in this work. This manuscript is a “bagful of seeds” for you and your community, and it is our hope that God’s Spirit will evoke in you the same mystery that we experienced too. This is our little gift to you.
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## APPENDIX A
### FRAME FOR CONVERSATION

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<tr>
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<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Mission and Identity (Catholic-Marianist)</th>
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<td>Personal Journey</td>
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<td>Interior Experience</td>
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<td>Everyday Practice</td>
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<td>What does it mean (to me) to lead in a manner committed to Catholic and Marianist mission and identity?</td>
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APPENDIX B

REQUEST FOR NOMINATIONS

Subject: Requesting for your inputs in a research study of exemplary lay leaders at UD

Dear Marianist Educational Associates, Lackner Award recipients, and Religious Marianists at the University of Dayton,

My name is Savio Dennis Franco. I am a doctoral candidate in the Ph.D. in Educational Leadership Program, School of Education and Health Sciences, University of Dayton.

The purpose of my doctoral dissertation is to understand and describe how exemplary lay leaders at the University of Dayton live out their commitment to Catholic and Marianist mission and identity. A critical starting point in this study is to identify “best examples” among lay leaders at UD, across any level, department, or role (both faculty members and administrators) who exemplify the phenomenon of lay leadership commitment to Catholic-Marianist mission and identity. This is where I need your help.

Please nominate one or more active lay leaders at UD, whom you consider as “best examples” of what it means to lead in a manner committed to Catholic and Marianist mission and identity. Your nominations will be collected anonymously and will be used to narrow down the search for prospective participants for this research study.

Click here to complete the online nomination form: http://link

If you have any questions, please get in touch with me (details below). The contact details of my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Molly Schaller, are also mentioned below.

I am immensely grateful for your help.

Kind regards,
Savio Dennis Franco

Doctoral Candidate, Ph.D. in Educational Leadership,
School of Education and Health Sciences, University of Dayton.

Dissertation Committee Chair:
Molly Schaller, Ph.D.,
College Student Personnel and Higher Education Administration, University of Dayton.
APPENDIX C

ONLINE SURVEY

Please nominate exemplary lay leaders at the University of Dayton (across any level, department, or role), whom you consider as “best examples” of what it means to lead in a manner committed to Catholic and Marianist mission and identity.*

Note: Your inputs will be saved anonymously.

1. You are a: (   ) Marianist Educational Associate  
   (   ) Lackner Award recipient  
   (   ) Marianist Religious

2. Your Gender: __________

3. Number of years you have worked at UD: __________

Nomination  
Full Name and Department/Role (should be presently active at UD)  
Number of years you have known this person  
Your Reasoning  
Your observations about how this lay leader practically lives out one’s commitment to Catholic and Marianist mission and identity. (Kindly provide adequate detail.)

1.  
2. (optional)  
3. (optional)

* Kindly nominate based on your personal understanding of what it means to lead in a manner committed to Catholic and Marianist mission and identity.

For your reference,
Common Themes in the Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton (https://www.udayton.edu/rector/_resources/img/Common%20Themes%20in%20the%20Mission%20and%20Identity%20of%20the%20University.pdf);

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON – CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**TITLE OF STUDY**: The interior lives of exemplary leaders: A phenomenological study of lay leadership commitment to mission and identity at a Catholic, Marianist university

You are invited to be a part of a research study conducted by Savio Dennis Franco, Doctoral Candidate, Ph.D. in Educational Leadership, School of Education and Health Sciences, University of Dayton. Participation is not required. Please read the information below to learn more about the study. Before participating, ask questions about anything you do not understand.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the research study is to understand and describe the phenomenon of leadership commitment to organizational mission and identity, as experienced interiorly by multiple exemplary lay higher educational leaders at the University of Dayton, a top-tier Catholic and Marianist research university in the United States.

**PROCEDURES**

If you decide to be a part of this study, you agree to do the following:

Participate in an in-depth interviewing process, consisting of one or more interviews, approximately 90 – 120 minutes in duration, and at a time and location of your choice. The number of interviews will be determined jointly between you and the researcher, depending on the amount of time you need to satisfactorily express your experiences and insights.

Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. You will be asked to review your interview transcripts, in order to ensure that the text adequately captures your intended meanings.

You will be required to sign this consent form prior to interviewing. You will be asked to fill an anonymous participant details form.
You may be asked to respond to follow-up/clarification questions posed by the researcher during the data analysis phase of the research.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The researcher does not anticipate any potential risks and discomforts. However, recollecting one’s experiences could be a source of emotional discomfort. You are free to choose the content and degree of your responses to the questions posed by the researcher.

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS

There are no direct (tangible) benefits to you. The intangible benefit of participation includes the opportunity and satisfaction of sharing your experiences, expertise, and insights for the benefit of leadership practice and leadership development in Catholic and Marianist higher education.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will not receive any payment for participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The researcher will not reveal who you are in any publications or presentations.

The researcher’s dissertation committee chair may need to review your research records in an official capacity. This is to confirm that the requirements of the study are met. The reviewer may be able to identify you, but will not reveal who you are to others.

In the use of audio recordings, your identity will be protected as much as possible. Your identity will be disguised in the interview transcripts and research report using a pseudonym to replace your name, as well as by excluding personally identifiable details.

Audio-recordings will be transcribed by the researcher alone, and will be deleted upon completion of the study. Paper-based forms will be shredded after they are scanned and transferred to the computer. All research related computer files (such as interview transcripts and data-analysis files) will be saved on the researcher’s computer in a secure, password-protected manner. Non-identifiable interview transcripts and data analysis files (using pseudonyms) will be retained for future research use by the researcher only.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You do not have to participate in this study. If you do not participate, your relationship with us is not affected. You may still receive other services if applicable. You may
stop participating at any time without penalty. You may be stopped from participating if the study is not good for you. You may also be stopped if study instructions are not followed.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

Please contact one of the investigators listed below if you have any questions about this research.

Savio Dennis Franco, Doctoral Candidate, University of Dayton, School of Education and Health Sciences, Doctor of Educational Leadership Program, (937) 239-8753, francos1@udayton.edu

Molly Schaller, Ph.D., Dissertation Committee Chair, University of Dayton, College Student Personnel and Higher Education Administration, (937) 229-3677, mschaller1@udayton.edu

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Dayton if you have questions about your rights as a research participant: Dr. Mary Connolly, (937) 229-3493, Mconnolly1@udayton.edu.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information above. I have had a chance to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

Name of Participant (please print) ____________________________________________
Address _________________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant ____________________________________________ Date _______

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

My signature as witness certifies that the Participant signed this consent form in my presence.

Name of Witness (please print) ____________________________________________
Signature of Witness ____________________________________________ Date _______

(Must be same as participant signature date)
APPENDIX E
PARTICIPANT DETAILS

1. Personal Details

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<th>Faith tradition:</th>
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2. Academic Background
   a. Discipline(s) of Master’s Degree(s):
   b. Discipline(s) of Doctoral Degree(s):

3. Career
   a. Total years of work experience:
   b. Total years of work experience in higher education:
   c. Total years of service at University of Dayton:
   d. Total years of connection with the Marianist family:

4. How do you spend your time in your current role (approximately)?

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<table>
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<table>
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