



# Preparing Catholic Educators for Flourishing in a Secularized Society: A Case Study

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**Abstract:** As culture experiences secularization, and the importance of religion and prevalence of people holding religious worldviews diminishes, the work of forming Catholics who can live out their professional and Christian vocations as teachers in different types of schools becomes simultaneously more crucial and more complex. This article explores the importance of preparing Catholic teachers for employment in contemporary educational settings in the United States to respond to accelerating secularization. It argues that the Catholic Church's vision for education can be implemented within the limitations of US education policy, especially through the careful preparation of Catholic teachers in Catholic Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs). First, it presents the unique context of US education, illustrating the setting in which such programs function and the associated challenges. Next, it shares the Church's vision for well-prepared Catholic educators, identifying three key anthropological conflicts linked to secularization and explaining how the Church's teaching on Catholic education as presented by Archbishop Michael Miller's "Five Essential Marks of Catholic Schools" provides needed guidance for EPPs located in Catholic universities. Next, it offers a case study presenting one EPP's efforts to respond to secularization through its program redesign according to a framework that integrates Miller's Five Marks. Finally, it explains the difficulties facing Catholic EPPs as they integrate their mission with the demands of professional preparation.

**Keywords:** secularization, anthropology, Catholic education, education, Catholic teacher preparation

## 1. Introduction and Method

As culture experiences secularization, and the importance of religion and prevalence of people holding religious worldviews diminishes, the work of forming Catholics who can live out their professional and Christian vocations as teachers in different types of schools becomes all the more crucial, and yet, it also becomes more complex. This article explores the importance of preparing Catholic teachers for employment in contemporary educational settings in the United States along with the developing understanding and response of its authors (as practitioners) to the reform of Catholic Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) in the face of an aggressive secularization.

Because EPPs in Catholic institutions of higher education (IHEs) serve the larger mission of the Church to proclaim the gospel to all nations (John Paul II 1998a, no. 2) they bear responsibility for producing graduates who can serve as both effective teachers and Christian witnesses (i.e., “educator-witnesses”). It argues that the Catholic Church’s vision for education can be implemented within the limitations of US education policy, especially through the careful preparation of Catholic teachers in Catholic EPPs. First, it presents the unique context of US education, illustrating the setting in which EPPs function. Next, it shares the Church’s vision for well-prepared Catholic educators, identifying key anthropological conflicts linked to secularization and explaining how the Church’s teaching on Catholic education as presented by Archbishop Michael Miller’s “Five Essential Marks of Catholic Schools” offers guidance for EPPs located in Catholic IHEs. Next, it offers a case study presenting one EPP’s efforts to respond to secularization through its program redesign. Finally, it explains the difficulties facing EPPs at Catholic IHEs as they balance and integrate their mission with the demands of professional preparation.

## **2. The Context of Education in the US**

EPPs in the US exist in and prepare teachers for employment in a unique educational context, particularly regarding personal liberty and limited government. The nation’s colonial legacy and the ideals important at its founding are distinct and deeply engrained in US law, culture, and citizens. They have shaped and continue to influence all aspects of education, including the variety of schools that exist, and also how they are organized, financed, and administered. Additionally, they factor into the singular experience of secularization in the US and its effects on educational policy, curriculum, and instruction. The following sections briefly explore these ideals to demonstrate the context in which Catholic EPPs and their graduates function and the obstacles they must negotiate.

### **2.1. The Ideal of Personal Liberty**

From its inception, the US has valued personal liberty, aspiring to create a society where citizens are free from oppressive restrictions imposed by authority on their way of life, behavior, or political views. Because education was considered a liberating force for citizens and therefore a universal right, government-sponsored, “public” schools were established and continue to be open to all citizens. Elementary and secondary tuition is free, due to government funding, with 48.6% from the state, 36.6% from local municipalities, and the remainder from federal and private sources (NCES 2020). Post-secondary attendance, though not free, is highly subsidized. As of

fall 2019, 91% of the 53 million school-aged students in the US were enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools, while 13.5 million or 72.5% of all post-secondary students attend public institutions (NCES 2023).

Ensuring personal liberty involves protecting certain freedoms even when these could conflict between individuals. This is especially evident in US education concerning religious freedom. Extensive investment creates public education systems where students of many different religions (and none at all) can coexist. Consequently, there is a constant struggle to ensure that curriculum, instruction, and policy remain “religiously neutral.” Religious freedom also permits the establishment of other types of schools, including those with religious charters. This includes Catholic schools, which make up the largest network of non-public schools in the nation. In 2022–23, some 1,693,493 students were educated in 5,920 schools across all 50 states (NCEA 2023). The majority of the 5.1 million or 27.4% of postsecondary students who attend private institutions attend Catholic ones (Education Data Initiative 2023). Unlike private schools in other countries, those in the US at all levels are not government-sponsored or financed. Instead, they depend almost entirely on revenue from student tuition. However, the “school choice” movement, which advocates for government dollars to “follow” students to any school chosen by students’ parents (in the name of religious freedom), is currently challenging this long-standing policy. In many US states, public support for private education is growing due to widespread dissatisfaction with public education (Porter-Magee, Smith, and Klausmeier 2022). Poor management of public schools during the Covid-19 pandemic and the incursion of controversial ideologies (e.g., critical race theory, gender theory, ideas about the role of parents) in their curriculum and policy prompted many parents to seek educational alternatives (see Robinson 2023).

## 2.2. The Ideal of Limited Government

The ideal of limited government influences US education and its experience of secularization. In striving for this ideal, the force of government is restricted and it has no more power than is indicated by the constitution or law. The 10th Amendment to the US Constitution reserves the administration of education to the states rather than the federal government, allowing them to oversee it in ways appropriate for their citizens. Each state’s distinctiveness in its history, geography, economy, population, and more creates varying needs and approaches to teacher licensure, elementary and secondary curriculum, pupil assessment, and school finance. However, all State Education Agencies (SEAs) cooperate with Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) or local school “districts” organized geographically by city, county, and other civic boundaries. Each LEA has its own administration which oversees school finance, personnel, facilities management, school operations, and strategic planning. Additionally, they involve community members on elected or appointed school “boards.”

Schools that are not public, called “private” schools (which include Catholic schools), participate within this larger ecosystem and are inevitably influenced by them because policy, administration, and oversight are primarily geared toward public education. Though they function independently and have more freedom, private schools are typically subject to state operation guidelines for aspects such as educational curriculum and teacher credentialing. They must comply with government requirements to monitor pupil attendance, assess their progress, and more. Private schools are under federal oversight with the “equal protection clause” of the 14th Amendment that states, “no state can deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” This means that federal laws, including those outlined by constitutional amendments and decisions of the Supreme Court, apply to them. For example, given that US law outlaws discrimination based on race, private schools must adhere. As secularization intrudes more into American life, law, and public education, private schools can expect its influences to become more frequent, severe, and restrictive.

As EPPs prepare future US teachers, they must do so in ways that correspond to this unique educational context and the ways secularization manifests in different types of schools. Although public and Catholic schools each have a distinct mission, they have historically been similar regarding teacher licensure, curriculum, and instruction, as well as with many policies and practices. As secularization progresses and a religious worldview diminishes, public and Catholic schools that intend to remain true to their mission will become increasingly distinct from one another. Catholic EPPs need a clear vision for the effective preparation of educators to appropriately fulfill the mission of the school where they are employed.

### **3. A Catholic Vision for Educator Preparation**

The Catholic Church offers an efficacious vision for education that applies to all schools, not just Catholic ones. Education, a universal and inalienable right, “aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and the good of the societies of which...he is a member” (Paul VI 1965, no. 1). The Church’s educational mission originated with Jesus’ Great Commission and assists her members with their whole life, “even the secular part of it insofar as it has a bearing on [their] heavenly calling” (Paul VI 1965, Introduction). Schools “offer a culture aimed at the integral formation of individuals...develop with special care the intellectual faculties...form the ability to judge rightly, hand on the cultural legacy of previous generations, foster a sense of values, prepare for professional life” (Congregation for Catholic Education 2022, no. 19). Through these tasks, educators do not simply hand on information, they form persons (Congregation for Catholic Education 1982,

no. 16). The social setting of a school forms students in human relationships so that they can “become a person capable of building a society based on justice and solidarity” (Congregation for Catholic Education 2022, no. 19). This educational outcome requires the formative encounter, dialogue, and search for truth between people of different cultures inherent to the school setting and educational project (see Congregation for Catholic Education 2013, nos. 32–33, 61). The desired end is not consensus leading to relativism, but simultaneous respect for others and respect for truth (Congregation for Catholic Education 2013, Conclusion; Benedict XVI 2008). How Catholic educators carry out the Church’s vision varies according to whether they teach in a Catholic or public school, but a Catholic EPP can prepare teachers to function effectively in both.

Catholic educators must work effectively with students and colleagues who hold differing beliefs about reality and the human person, especially if they work in US schools that do not have a Catholic mission (or “secular schools,” which include public and some private schools). Those working in Catholic schools must understand how to actively monitor and carefully respond when compromising secular influences intrude through curriculum standards, instructional materials, or the constituents’ expectations. Given that most pre-service teachers<sup>1</sup> are uncertain where they will be employed until after their program is completed, EPPs must design programs in a way that communicates the truth about the human person in both types of schools.

### 3.1. Anthropological Conflicts Significantly Impacting Education

Catholic EPPs can prepare pre-service teachers by teaching them the truth of the human person so that they can navigate the challenges arising from conflicts between Christian anthropology and the loose assemblage of popular understandings that might be called a “secular anthropology.” An educator’s tacit anthropology impacts the way he or she educates (Congregation for Catholic Education 1997, no. 10; 1988, no. 63). Consequently, educators must become aware of and refine their own through an intentional and ongoing formation in Christian anthropology and truth to counteract faulty influences from secular culture. Without doing so they could educate according to the culture’s erroneous and incomplete understanding of the human person and reality. Three key anthropological conflicts that present singular challenges for Catholic educators include the relationship between the material and the spiritual in the human person, the relationship of the human person to other persons, and the purpose of education in developing the human faculties. Catholic EPPs can form pre-service teachers as “educator-witnesses,” professionals

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<sup>1</sup> The term pre-service is used to indicate a student in the process of formation for being a teacher.

who live and teach according to the truth of the human person amid advancing secularization.

### **3.1.1. Focus On the Material Apart from the Spiritual**

Although Christian anthropology holds that the human person is a union of the material and spiritual, secular anthropology commonly focuses on the material without accounting for the spiritual (CCC 362–365; O’Shea 2012, 2–3). Even if the person’s spiritual dimension may not be explicitly denied in an educational setting, its neglect eliminates the possibility of discussing its existence and importance. The implications of this are apparent in legal trends that restrict teachers’ ability to speak or teach evangelistically about God. This restriction strips the educational endeavor of its potential to form students according to their eternal destiny. Moreover, ignoring reality’s spiritual dimension fails to help students recognize how material and temporal reality point to an analogous transcendent and supernatural one (O’Shea 2018, 9). Although students can receive formation for their spiritual life outside of school (e.g., in their family), innumerable opportunities for human formation arise during the school day. If these are devoid of reference to spiritual truths, students’ time spent at school could reasonably prevent them from learning how to integrate their spiritual and temporal lives. Lack of experiences that assist a young person in integrating the spiritual and temporal aspects of themselves can lead them to regard matters of God and faith as ancillary to their lives and relegated to “Sunday” or “church,” experiences added to the rest of life (if desired) but not necessarily relevant to it.

An effective Catholic formation involves directing educators’ attention and efforts to their own spiritual lives and destiny, not just that of their students (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020, nos. 121, 135; Congregation for Catholic Education 2007, no. 26; 1982, no. 60). Otherwise, they may not realize their call to unite with God and offer themselves as a gift to their students, regarding teaching as a job that provides for their material needs, but not necessarily their spiritual ones. They may not recognize the sacredness of their vocation as a teacher—forming fallen immortal persons called to a life vivified by God’s grace. Although Catholic educators in public schools may not be free to promote students’ spiritual formation as explicitly as those in Catholic schools, they seem more likely to do the hard work of human formation if they regard their students as images of God who are called to eternal union with him than they would be if they see their students as just another entity to push through the system. A Catholic EPP can prepare educator-witnesses to address both dimensions of the person.

### **3.1.2. Focus on the Person as “Individual” Rather than “Relation”**

The second, common deviation from Christian anthropology in the secularized culture’s functional anthropology treats a person as removed from his fundamental identity as relation (Ratzinger 1990, 444; 1970, 132 and 137). Christian anthropology

understands the human person as an image of God, reflecting his nature as a communion of Persons by analogously existing in communion with God and others (CCC 356–357). In God’s plan, a person first experiences communion in the family, with parents as principal educators who lay the foundation for her future communion with God. Schools, as communities of learners, should assist parents in educating students for community and analogous communion with God and others. This understanding of identity as a gift from God contrasts with the tendency in a secular society to encourage individuals to construct their own identity apart from God, from loving commitment to persons, from the evidence provided by their own bodies (Ouellet 2015, 213–15). The person holding a secular understanding of the person as being primarily an individual may look for “freedom from” religion, social norms, and responsibilities rather than “freedom for” communion, gift of self for others’ enrichment, and personal enrichment through relationship and loving self-gift (Benedict XVI 2008; Francis 2013, no. 10). The corresponding implications for schools include filling the gap when some parents choose personal gratification over the fulfillment of parental responsibilities in self-gift to their children, or rectifying students’ secular views of the human person. A Catholic EPP can provide the formation educator-witnesses need to teach according to the communal order established by God’s plan, in harmony with the identity given by God, expressed by and gifted through the human body.

### 3.1.3. Focus on Prosperity and Success over the Discovery of Truth

A third deviation from Christian anthropology directs the cultivation of the human faculties toward material prosperity and societal improvement, rather than the pursuit of truth and sanctity (Benedict XVI 2008; John Paul II 1998b, no. 5). In particular, the influential American educational philosopher John Dewey applied Darwin’s theory of evolution to truth and learning. Doing so led to his view of education suggesting that truth evolves under the influence of the learner’s environment (Dewey 1965b, 1–2). In this view, truth is subjective and determined by experience and empirical methods rather than existing objectively and being discovered through them (Dewey 1965a, 94–95). If truth must be determined, it can change or can vary from person to person and is, therefore, less likely to lead students to God who is Truth (CCC 144, 214). In this context, education strives to make students productive members of society, with “success” defined in terms of grades, test scores, financial earnings, or worldly achievements.

As One, Good, Truth, and Beauty, God creates everything to manifest these imprints of him in integrated ways (O’Shea 2018, 13). The person’s engagement with the transcendentals enables him to encounter not only the created manifestations but, analogously, God himself (O’Shea 2018, 9). In this context, education forms the human powers so that they lead the person to union and communion with God, a higher good than material prosperity. In particular, the student can discover



objective truth as a stable reality that includes the material and the spiritual (John Paul II 1998a, no. 3). Efforts to discover truth lead the student to an encounter with God who is Truth (John 8:36; 14:6). But the student does not discover truth by exercising the intellect alone. Discovering truth requires all the human faculties working together (Taylor 1998, 41; cf. Rowland 2017, 19–20). To this end, teachers can direct students to evaluate ethical questions in light of their conformity to God’s goodness. They can assign works of art that, even if they do not explicitly mention God or matters of faith, nevertheless attract students to the truth and goodness the works convey. A Catholic EPP can model the discovery of truth using all the human faculties and show educators that doing so can lead to God.

### 3.2. The Church’s Vision for Education amid Anthropological Conflicts

The Church’s vision for education corresponds to the truth of the human person, although the vision can be implemented more fully in Catholic schools than in public ones. Catholic schools (including IHEs) can simultaneously “promot[e] the formation of the whole man” and fulfill “the saving mission of the Church” (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education 1977, nos. 8–9) precisely because educators are free to teach about the Church and their own faith through overt words and actions. By integrating evangelization and human formation, its educators can form students to “imbue their whole life” with a Christian spirit (Congregation for Catholic Education 2022, no. 13). This task necessitates navigating the pressures on Catholic schools from secularization, for the temporal and eternal good of the whole educated person. Catholic educators in public and other types of schools that might be referred to as “secular” implement the Church’s vision for education analogously. Despite working “within the limitations proper to a school that makes no attempt to educate in the faith,” they nevertheless can “help students to discover true human values” (Congregation for Catholic Education 1982, no. 49). Catholic EPPs can prepare Catholic school teachers to fulfill this vision and to effectively respond to the challenges that secular culture inevitably presents.

Archbishop J. Michael Miller, CSB, former Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education, distilled the post-conciliar documents on Catholic education into “Five Essential Marks of Catholic Schools” (Miller 2006, 17–19). Although not an exhaustive expression of Catholic educational philosophy, the points identified offer a succinct articulation of the Church’s vision that Catholic EPPs can communicate to pre-service teachers. These marks can also function as a barometer for Catholic IHEs and EPPs to assess their effectiveness in implementing the Church’s vision. Miller articulates these as: inspired by a supernatural vision, founded on a Christian anthropology, animated by communion and community, imbued with a Catholic worldview throughout the curriculum, and sustained by Gospel witness (Miller 2006, 17).



A Catholic school is first and foremost “inspired by a supernatural vision” (Miller 2006, 20). In contrast to the secular school which must ignore the spiritual and supernatural dimension of the human person, a Catholic school’s fundamental mission is forming students to live on earth so that they can spend eternity with God. A Catholic school can require students to take religion classes, schedule liturgies for the entire school community, and decorate with explicitly religious artwork. A Catholic school can enact discipline to point students to their eternal destiny and teach students that living as a member of the school community helps them live as a member of the Body of Christ. Holding a supernatural vision empowers the Catholic school to respond to the limited and short-sighted view of a secular anthropology.

Second, Catholic schools are “founded on a Christian anthropology” (Miller 2006, 22). While the secular school ignores the students’ spiritual dimension and proposes that they can define themselves even to the point of contradicting reality, a Catholic school can explicitly teach students that their identity flows from their creation in God’s image and is formed by responding to his call to be holy as he is holy. The Catholic school can openly acknowledge the wound of original sin with its implications for students’ identity. It can announce the good news that Jesus Christ has redeemed them and called them to be saints. It can cultivate students’ intellects and wills as a means of “enabling each [student] to attain an integral formation that includes the Christian dimension and recognizes the help of grace” (Congregation for Catholic Education 1988, no. 99). By operating from a Christian anthropology, a Catholic school opens possibilities for students’ prosperity in ways that a secular anthropology cannot.

The third mark, “animated by communion and community” (Miller 2006, 28), naturally flows from the first two. Like all schools, a Catholic school is a community; students and teachers alike image God as being made for communion with other persons. This communion “always involves a double dimension...vertical (communion with God) and horizontal (communion with people)” (Congregation for Catholic Education 2007, no. 8). Through Mass and other liturgical offerings, through school prayer, through religion classes, Catholic schools can cultivate the vertical dimension of communion in a way not available to secular schools. When teaching students how to behave toward others, a Catholic school can speak about the dignity of every person as an image of God and the responsibility to treat all persons accordingly. In contrast to the secular view of “individualism” that encourages students to define themselves apart from “relation,” the Catholic school can point students to discover their mission from God and the ways he invites them to make a gift of themselves to others, and thereby discover their identity.

Fourth, a Catholic worldview must imbue the whole curriculum in a Catholic school, not just religion class (Miller 2006, 42; Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education 1977, no. 50). Secular schools, ignoring God and the spiritual dimension

of the person, educate to worldly success rather than to the discovery of truth. Catholic schools do not dismiss their role in educating students for success and financial provision in this life, but they subordinate that good to the higher good of knowing truth and its Source. The various subjects of study together form an integrated whole because they all come from the Creator of every academic discipline. The efforts of students and teachers alike to discover truth “become the path for a personal encounter with the truth, a ‘place’ of encounter with God himself” (Congregation for Catholic Education 2002, no. 39). In a Catholic school, encounter with God is not limited to religion class or liturgies, though these are indispensable. Rather, in the hands of teachers who adhere to the principle of “truth cannot contradict truth,” who understand curriculum as an integrated whole originating in God, and who conduct their classes accordingly, the whole educative process can direct students to encounter God.

Finally, the entire endeavor of a Catholic school is sustained by Gospel witness (Miller 2006, 53). Recalling that “the Catholic school depends upon [teachers] almost entirely for the accomplishment” of its mission because “teachers by their life as much as by their instruction bear witness to Christ, the unique Teacher” (Paul VI 1965, no. 8), teachers model for their students each of the marks. A Catholic school cannot manifest these marks without teachers who implement them, and a school can hardly be Catholic without the commitment and witness of its teachers (Congregation for Catholic Education 1988, no. 26).

Although Archbishop Miller articulated the Marks for Catholic schools, his fifth Mark indicates that each must be applied and embodied by the teachers themselves. Even if Catholic EPPs must demonstrate how to adapt the Marks to the limitations of the secular educational setting, it seems reasonable to apply Miller’s Five Marks to Catholic educators themselves to identify the essential qualities needed in educator-witnesses responding to secularization. Consequently, a Catholic EPP needs to instill and cultivate these Marks in pre-service teachers so that they are hallmarks by which to live out their teaching vocation whether employed in Catholic or secular schools. Graduates of Catholic EPPs can then flourish as educator-witnesses who will evoke a response from those influenced by secularization (Paul VI 1975, no. 41).

An educator-witness in a secular school cannot teach openly about the Catholic faith, but with a “supernatural vision,” he can evangelize through his joyful witness, pray for his students’ salvation, conscientiously fulfill his duties (rather than just “checking the box”), and demonstrate sacrificial concern for his students’ welfare. He can educate the students’ spiritual dimension even if only preparing them for analogous encounters with God through discovering truth. He cannot proclaim that students are created in God’s image, wounded by the Fall but called to sanctity with the grace of Christ. However, by operating from a Christian anthropology he can treat students with the dignity they deserve as images of God and potential saints. Although disciplinary measures in a secular school cannot reference any religious

or moral standards, an educator-witness can forego convenience or popularity to provide the human formation every student needs to become “strong and responsible individuals, capable of making free and correct choices” that build communion and community through authentic self-gift (Congregation for Catholic Education 1982, nos. 17–19). If educator-witnesses in secular schools cannot explicitly teach their students how to share their lives with God (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education 1977, no. 45), they can still form them in the virtues needed to relate to others in healthy and mutually interdependent ways. Educator-witnesses realize that “whatever is true is a participation in Him who is the Truth” so they direct their students to discover truth, which communicates a Catholic worldview (Congregation for Catholic Education 1982, no. 16). In a secular school, the Catholic educator can lead students in the quest for truth across the curriculum, can form students in justice and goodness, can facilitate dialogue among those of differing viewpoints to strengthen community. Although “religiously neutral” education does not legally permit an evangelistic proclamation of the Gospel or education in matters of faith, because God is himself One, Truth, Goodness, Beauty, the pursuit of these values that occur in any school lays foundations that can ultimately lead people of goodwill to him without “overstepping” imposed boundaries. Educator-witnesses model professional dedication (Congregation for Catholic Education 1982, no. 17; 2022, no. 14), personal integrity, ethical behavior, and generous service among other Gospel values to inspire their students to imitate.

A Catholic EPP is well-positioned to form educators as professionals (Congregation for Catholic Education 1982, no. 17) and as witnesses. It can equip graduates in these and other ways to carefully navigate the pressures of secularization and even mitigate its influences. The following section presents a case study featuring a Catholic EPP and its innovative response to the challenges of Catholic teacher preparation in the context of dynamic secularization.

#### **4. Redesigning a Catholic EPP to Prepare Educators for Work in a Secularized Society: A Case Study**

The EPP featured in this case study exists within a small, private IHE with a Catholic mission located in a small, midwestern city in the US. It enrolls approximately 3,700 students annually, representing all 50 states and numerous countries. The IHE is designated as a “Faithfully Catholic” institution by the Cardinal Newman Society, meeting criteria related to its Catholic identity. 94% of its faculty identify as Catholic and 96% all of its undergraduate students. The EPP employs seven full-time faculty and nine part-time faculty and practicum advisors. Annually, the program graduates

approximately 40 teachers per year completing licensure teaching tracks for elementary, middle, and secondary placements.

Existing in an IHE, like most US EPPs, it has two major duties: to educate students in an approved program of study in accordance with its particular institutional mission and to prepare students to meet the professional requirements governing teacher credentialing set by the state. Its redesign was intended to respond more efficaciously to both. It aimed to enhance the EPP's fidelity to its mission in a Catholic university, improving its formation of "men and women to serve God and one another so they can be a transforming Christian presence in the world" (Franciscan University of Steubenville, n.d.). It aspired to enhance the preparation of faithful Catholics for work in different types of schools that are increasingly influenced by secularization so that they could be educator-witnesses.

#### **4.1. Redesign Efforts**

The EPP redesign reported here progressed over five years and continues to date. Although it began incidentally, it has become more intentional and strategic over time as those involved have expanded their knowledge and deepened their commitment to its goals and as the effects of secularization have become more problematic. Its most important features have involved the development of a conceptual framework, support for its faculty, course redesign, learning from graduates, and leveraging supplemental support from other university experiences as the following sections explain.

##### **4.1.1. The PROFEss Framework and Its Enhancement with the Five Marks**

The redesign was initiated when the PROFEss<sup>2</sup> framework (McVey and Poyo 2019), a model for preparing Catholic educators, was developed by two faculty members. Its four domains view the Christian educator as one who: provides professional and pedagogical expertise (P), exercises relational charity (RO), offers formational guidance (F), and facilitates evangelistic education (Ess) for students (See Figure 1).

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<sup>2</sup> An acronym for the conceptual framework employed by the EPP in this study. This framework views the Christian educator as one who provides professional and pedagogical expertise (P), exercises relational charity (RO), offers formational guidance (F), and facilitates evangelistic education (Ess) for students.

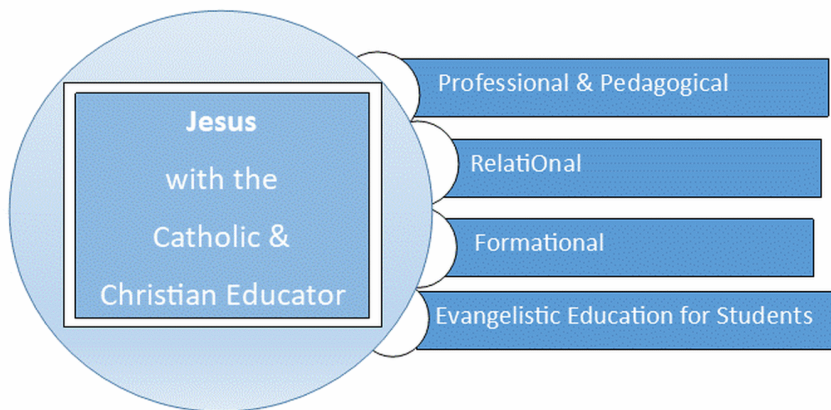


Figure 1. The PROFEss Framework

PROFEss became the EPP’s guiding conceptual framework in 2020. In 2021, the enrollment of several religious sisters and a need to mitigate the increasing influence of secularization on the state’s educator licensure standards led to the EPP’s efforts to enhance this framework, increasing its potency. University leadership became engaged at this time, offering support that enabled the involvement of a faculty member in the university’s Theology/Catechetics department and a consultant from the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame. In a series of meetings, this leadership team applied Miller’s Five Marks to each domain to create the Enhanced PROFEss Framework, enabling it to serve as the foundational document for the EPP redesign. Later, the EPP outlined more specific expectations for the preparation of graduates for work in public and Catholic schools as educator-witnesses by developing actionable goals for each domain as demonstrated in Table 1. The enhancements to the PROFEss framework better positioned the program to prepare pre-service teachers for the challenges of secularization.

Table 1. EPP Goals for the PROFess Domains

Domain	Goals
Professional & Pedagogical	<p>Pre-service teachers will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• possess expertise within their teaching areas and understand how to frame their students’ acquisition of professional skills, knowledge, and dispositions within a Catholic framework, considering: a) what the topic under study suggests about the full development of the human person, b) the meaning, purpose, and fulfillment of his or her life, c) civic participation, and d) sustained employment.</li> <li>• understand secular and Catholic understandings of what “the curriculum is” and be able to function effectively within communities with different understandings.</li> <li>• be aware of current issues in the profession that relate to student support (e.g., gender confusion, same-sex attraction, etc.), curriculum &amp; instruction (e.g., common core, liberal education, constructivism, etc.) classroom management, and school discipline (e.g., trauma-informed practices) and other aspects of professional work which might professionally challenge teachers of faith and be able to recommend appropriate means for negotiating these.</li> </ul>
Relational	<p>Pre-service teachers will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cooperate effectively with all of their professional colleagues (in the school and through professional associations beyond), striving to cultivate strong relationships and a sense of communion around the values and other aspects of the mission they share.</li> <li>• honor parents as “primary teachers” and assist them in understanding their role as head of the “domestic Church,” equipping them with the resources to fulfill it.</li> <li>• develop authentic, personal relationships with their students and strive to maintain these relationships beyond their immediate connection (e.g., a school year), demonstrating a true concern for their person and future.</li> <li>• understand the distinct way that relationships, community, instruction, curriculum, other learning experiences, and student development are understood in a Catholic school and appreciate how these, along with the school’s procedures, practices, policies, and environments affect students.</li> </ul>
Formational	<p>Pre-service teachers will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• possess an understanding of Catholic anthropology and its relationship to the Catholic philosophy of education which seeks to promote the development of the whole child as it relates to his/her physical, social, emotional, psychological, intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions.</li> <li>• be proficient in integrating issues of life and human dignity along with other aspects of the Catholic worldview and moral teachings within the academic curriculum, allowing students to understand the world “by the light of faith.”</li> </ul>
Evangelistic	<p>Pre-service teachers will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• witness the hope experienced from their personal encounter with Christ and the knowledge of their salvation through this love to their students, school families, and the community beyond them.</li> </ul>

#### 4.1.2. Support for the Faculty

Reflecting the Mark of Gospel witness, EPP faculty members were understood as critical to the redesign's success. However, the leadership realized they would need special support to fulfill their important roles because none of them had benefitted from the study of Catholic educational philosophy or Church teachings on Catholic education. All had matriculated from doctoral programs in education at IHEs where there was a focus on US public education, and concomitantly a secular anthropology.

The leadership team developed and delivered four professional development sessions beginning in spring of 2021. During one 90-minute session each term, EPP faculty had an opportunity to learn and grow together, expand their understanding of the program's Catholic mission, and consider how to address the enhanced PROFESs framework in their courses and various aspects of the program. Each session cultivated greater solidarity and recognition of the EPP's mission, promoted dialogue, and enabled collaboration for program improvement according to Catholic anthropology.

The first professional development session in spring 2022 focused on the program's mission of forming Catholics for public and Catholic schools, exploring teaching as both a temporal and spiritual vocation. The group studied various excerpts from Church documents about how Christian educators are presented with special responsibilities and unique benefits, such as the opportunity to grow in personal holiness and loving relationships with their students, whom they teach and form through their witness to Christ in word and action. Emphasizing that the faculty were fulfilling their own vocations while preparing the EPP's pre-service teachers for theirs, this session signaled the importance of addressing the spiritual dimension of the person.

The second session in fall 2022 focused on the goals of Catholic education as distinct from those of public education. It addressed the importance, in light of secularization, of the EPP's formation of graduates. Before the session, faculty read an assigned article, and then discussed it together to stimulate deeper thinking about the Marks, how they distinguish Catholic educators, and ways Catholic educators can imbue their pedagogy and curriculum with a Catholic worldview. The group discussed soliciting the expertise of faculty colleagues from other departments (who teach EPP students in other degree coursework) in the redesign efforts, believing that doing so would increase the probability of an integrated search for truth rather than merely temporal success.

During the third session in spring 2023, EPP faculty who had begun engaging in course redesign presented their revisions to their colleagues to demonstrate the integration of the Marks. Faculty engaged in an activity to identify current methods for addressing the goals from the PROFESs Framework Relational Domain within the EPP courses, as well as to formulate additional methods for doing so.



During the fourth session in fall 2023, faculty explored the goals in the Relational Domain more deeply. Because of the significant role parents play in the child’s formation for communion and community, faculty focused on educating the EPP’s students to support the work of parents. The group discussed how secularization influences parental roles, rights, and responsibilities as understood in different types of schools, as Table 2 demonstrates.

Table 2. Example Comparing Roles of Parents in Public and Catholic Schools

Parents	Public Schools	Catholic Schools
Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents have a distinct role in caring for their children when compared with other adults, but it may or may not be considered a distinct and privileged role.</li> <li>• Public schools recognize that there are many types of families and therefore many types of parents and “parenting” situations. Some parents are legally married and committed to staying together for a lifetime. Others are not married. Some parents are unmarried, but parent together. Other parents are divorced and may or may not parent together. Some parents are male and female couples, some are of the same sex.</li> <li>• Many other adults may be acting in the place of parents- extended family members, guardians, foster parents, and other caregivers. Increasingly, the term “parents” is intentionally NOT USED to refer to the adults who are responsible for students. The term “caregiver” or “guardian” might be used instead.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catholic schools ascribe to <i>Gravissimum Educationis</i>, which explains the distinct and important role of parents: “Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators. This role in education is so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking. Parents are the ones who must create a family atmosphere animated by love and respect for God and man, in which the well-rounded personal and social education of children is fostered. Hence the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs.”</li> <li>• Catholic schools also recognize there are different types of marriages, families, and different adults who may be caring for children. To live their Christianity, teachers need to be sensitive to the many different situations of those with whom they work. However, there is an appreciation that the ideal for parenting/family life exists and is worth striving for.</li> <li>• Catholic schools recognize that there is a special significance to parental love and the care that extends from it. It is more than a sentimental attachment-it wants the best for the child, not just now but for eternity. It is characterized by self-gift and personal sacrifice. This love animates, guides, and inspires all educational activities and is a natural outgrowth of the “sacred” role of parents.</li> </ul>

The group discussed existing and new plans for addressing different goals in this domain, such as “Pre-service teachers will honor parents as ‘primary educators’ and assist them in understanding their role as head of the ‘domestic Church,’ equipping them with the resources to fulfill it.” In addition, they considered methods for helping pre-service teachers recognize the sacred role of parents in their various pedagogy courses, personally reflecting on questions such as, “Do I strive to humanize parents by helping the pre-service teachers understand what parenting involves as well as its gifts and challenges? Do I cultivate their empathy for parents and inspire them to learn more about those they serve?” This activity stimulated discussion about means to better support parents as children’s primary educators and models of self-gift, in contrast to the secular view of parents’ role and personal identity.

#### 4.1.3. Course Redesign

Overlapping with these professional sessions, the EPP began the process of redesigning its courses to correspond with the enhanced PROFess framework beginning in Summer 2022. Each faculty member met one-on-one with the leadership team, led by the consultant. This individualization fostered recognition of the unique interests and expertise of the faculty members and adjusted for the particular demands and conventions of the different course subjects.<sup>3</sup>

Across the courses however, the faculty identified three ways the integration of the enhanced PROFess Framework could impact a course: the pedagogical approaches employed in the course, the choice of content taught, and how the significance of the courses was addressed. If done properly, this integration continues to address licensure standards but also enhances the course by providing an additional dimension for EPP students to consider. For instance, a class preparing EPP students to teach mathematics (i.e., Math “methods”) would not alter the required content, but it might shift the instructional approach from teacher-centered lecturing to a more student-centered method of “guided discovery” to align with the Christian anthropological view that humans are made to seek and discover Truth.

During this process, each faculty member was asked to consider and communicate to their pre-service teachers how their course and the skills, knowledge, and dispositions it cultivates relate to the following four dimensions: employment, citizenship, human development/formation, and relationship with God and others. This approach was chosen to ensure that each course would continue to prepare pre-service teachers to meet state licensure standards but also extend their ability to teach according to Christian anthropology and a Catholic worldview as “educator-witnesses.”

In addition to redesigning its pedagogy courses, the faculty further enhanced courses by placing additional emphasis on integrative or interdisciplinary education

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<sup>3</sup> The EPP recognized the “right” way to integrate the Catholic faith and worldview differs by course.

that not only makes significant cross-curricular connections but also meaningfully addresses aspects of faith. This effort intended to further enrich the pre-service teachers' recognition of the unity of all truth and education as the pursuit of truth. Several approaches were used. In some instances, the EPP faculty invited a content specialist from another department to guest lecture in their class. For example, the instructor of "Classroom Organization and Management," invited an expert from the Theology/Catechetics Department to guest lecture on St. John Bosco's Preventive System. In other cases, a special, interdisciplinary section of a core course was developed so that it presented its content in alignment with the EPP redesign. For example, a special section of "Foundations of Catholicism" was developed to allow important anthropological questions to be discussed with their practical implications for the field of education. Pre-service teachers were challenged to apply the teaching that every human person is created in God's image and therefore with equal dignity to the educational setting to uproot unjust discrimination. Similarly, school policies on gender in public and Catholic schools were examined and discussed during classes teaching unity of the human person's body and soul. All these approaches helped equip the pre-service teachers with greater wisdom and strategies for serving as effective educator-witnesses.

#### **4.1.4. Learning from Program Graduates**

The leadership team believed that the redesign efforts would benefit if faculty members could understand the extent to which past EPP graduates felt prepared for their employment in public and Catholic schools. To gain these insights, members of the leadership team conducted a focus group interview with graduates working in these settings during Fall 2022. These were recorded and shared later with EPP faculty.

During the interview, the participating graduates with experience ranging from 3 to 20 years examined how they integrated their faith within their work as educators, what bearing it had on their classroom practices, the difficulties that confronted them, and their means for overcoming them. Key themes surfaced (Thomas 2006) to share with EPP faculty. Notably, all the graduates expressed the importance of their formation in virtue. They believed this crucial for witnessing their faith (both implicitly and explicitly) in the different types of school environments they inhabited. It contributed to their ability to negotiate challenges encountered working in this environment. Specifically, they pointed to the need for fortitude as they adhered to their values and beliefs when challenged by ideas and practices that are opposed to them. Their responses indicated the Five Marks were effective guidance for responding to encroaching secularizing influences.

One explained how her education had empowered her to robustly enrich that of her students. Now a teacher of English/Language Arts in a public secondary school, she was not only a successful professional, but one who felt confident functioning

in her role as an educator-witness who enabled interested students to explore ideas related to faith and religion where they occurred naturally in her subject area. She believed she could teach the works of Shakespeare more effectively because, “Without a strong Catholic education grounded in scripture, it would be very easy to skip over or dismiss Shakespeare’s scripture references. Instead, I see these references as an opportunity to invite my students to encounter God’s word as a form of literature and to let their minds be illuminated by the truth they encounter therein.” In this way, she facilitated her students’ discovery of the truth of God, the human person, and the spiritual dimension of reality.

The graduates discussed various ways that new ideologies infiltrated their school policies, curriculum standards, and in-service professional development experiences. Interviewees underscored the importance of the EPP redesign efforts to address advancing secularization. The themes that emerged, corresponding with the Marks and Christian anthropology, generated greater enthusiasm for the EPP redesign once shared with the EPP faculty.

#### **4.1.5. Leveraging Other Experiences to Prepare Pre-service Teachers**

To maximize the use of resources needed to prepare teachers according to the PRO-FEss Framework and recognize the finite impact possible within the EPP requirements, the faculty looked beyond the EPP confines to identify additional opportunities for pre-service teachers’ formation. They acknowledged the university’s core courses, including those in theology, philosophy, and the liberal arts, as contributing to cultivating educator-witnesses. Going beyond academics, they identified the formative benefits of co-curricular opportunities provided within the IHE’s offerings, including mission trips, pilgrimages, and participation in faith-centered athletic teams and households (intentional faith communities that emphasize regular participation in the sacraments as well as growth in Christian community and accountability). Co-curricular opportunities such as these cultivate habits of mind and action that strengthen one’s ability to be a living witness to the Gospel. They instill a supernatural vision integrated with temporal responsibilities, overcoming the secular divorce of the material and the spiritual as well as cultivating a facility for communion. These experiences each contribute to the education and formation of educator-witnesses so that they permeate their whole being rather than remaining an abstract academic exercise.

#### **4.2. The Challenges for Catholic EPPs in the US**

Because they exist in and for the larger educational “ecosystem” increasingly influenced by secularization, EPPs in the US face a host of challenges, especially prioritizing the mission over secularization’s influence through accreditation. Each challenge affects the EPP’s planning and operation as well as program redesign efforts. EPPs

in Catholic IHEs face additional challenges not faced by their secular counterparts but crucial to their mission and success. The leadership team of the EPP featured in the case study came to understand these challenges and share them here for their relevance to similar programs.

#### **4.2.1. The Challenges of Compliance and Accreditation**

The most significant challenges for all US EPPs involve compliance and accreditation. EPPs must not only comply with their university's requirements for conferring degrees but also the criteria and standards specific to professional teacher licensure programs overseen by the state. Licensure is important because teachers can only work in public schools if they possess a license specific to their area of concentration (e.g., level and subject) granted by the state where they are employed (Todd-Smith and Campana 2022). Furthermore, many Catholic schools likewise require teachers to possess a license (Catholic Conference of Ohio 2020; Zech 2016).

To ensure compliance, every EPP navigates a process called program accreditation. This periodic (every 7 years), rigorous, external review is demanding, but ensures the state will grant a license to students who complete the EPP's program. Most EPPs undergo a tiered process of accreditation that involves three levels of formal review: institutional accreditation by an accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, programmatic accreditation by a nationally recognized programmatic accrediting body, and state approval of the licensure programs. EPPs typically need these various levels of recognition to be eligible for federal funding (e.g. student access to federal financial aid for university tuition). The state review and program accreditation processes are lengthy and arduous, involving the production of detailed self-studies and the presentation of evidence that the program fulfills and is aligned with numerous standards. These standards inevitably become the primary focus of the EPP's course of study, as the state reviewers and programmatic accreditors monitor EPPs on a cyclical basis to ensure they are being met (Todd-Smith and Campana 2022). These standards can insert secular ideologies into EPP programs.

All EPPs experience difficulties when attempting to prepare pre-service teachers because accreditation can prove vital to a program's survival. It drives the EPP's curriculum, requires already limited resources (e.g., time, energy), and places demands on faculty. The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) overwhelmingly dominates EPP accreditation, with roughly 87% of accredited EPPs being CAEP-accredited (Todd-Smith and Campana 2022). Research demonstrates that fulfilling accreditation duties significantly impacts faculty workload and reduces the time available for investing in other important needs, such as scholarship, teaching, and undertaking innovative initiatives (Gillen 2020; Lewis 2016). In fact, time constrained the EPP featured in the case study, as the precedence of CAEP accreditation tasks prevented completion of the professional development activities related to

parents. However, constraints related to time are just one burden of accreditation. It also poses curricular challenges, as CAEP regulates the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions required from EPPs, who must evidence fulfillment of numerous standards related to these aspects through a prescribed set of procedures. This one-size-fits-all model of EPP standardization by accrediting bodies like the CAEP makes it difficult for EPPs to find room within their programs and curricula for addressing topics outside of those predetermined as essential by the accreditors (Graves 2021; Romanowski and Alkhateeb 2020).

#### 4.2.2. Special Challenges for Catholic EPPs

Accreditation presents challenges for all EPPs, but Catholic ones experience even more. EPPs at Catholic IHEs have fewer resources than those at public ones, for the latter receive significant financial support from the state whereas the former rely almost exclusively on student tuition revenue. This means that Catholic EPPs typically employ fewer faculty members to design and teach classes, oversee compliance, and manage accreditation. They also have fewer resources to support other aspects of their programs.

Although these difficulties are not insignificant, arguably the greatest challenge for Catholic EPPs is balancing the goals of their distinctive institutional mission with the prevailing goals and standards of the profession. Those EPPs that prioritize their Catholic mission must design programs that not only address the forces of secularization permeating all types of schools and professional standards but do so in a way that does not jeopardize their successful accreditation. In effect, these EPPs must prepare teachers for not just one but two types of school settings, and settings that are becoming increasingly different. Without adding additional time to degree completion, pre-service teachers in Catholic EPPs must learn more than their counterparts in public EPPs. This became apparent to the EPP faculty featured in the case study who had to develop a conceptual framework for their efforts, develop strategies for deployment, and employ creativity to negotiate the obstacle of time obstacles. They became more intentional about their goals, the models for course redesign, and leveraging pre-service teachers' other university experiences to supplement their formation and education.

Further, Catholic EPPs must equip their pre-service teachers to recognize and address the increasing conflicts between Catholic anthropology and the beliefs about reality that surface in a secularized culture. An analysis of the standards involved in teacher licensure makes some of these conflicts more evident. For example, the Catholic understanding of one's identity as a gift (including biological sex) contradicts the increasingly common understanding functioning in public schools that one self-authors one's identity. Those seeking a license as middle-level educators must meet a program standard that includes language about "affirming" the diversity of all young adolescents, including their sexual orientation (AMLE 2022). Negotiating

instances like this is a significant challenge for EPP faculty and pre-service teachers that will likely become more frequent.

Negotiating these challenges is difficult, especially with the increasing number and variety of secular influences making their way into various aspects of education. But it is precisely the widening and worsening effects of secularization that make it critical for Catholic EPPs to strategically redesign their programs. Such efforts provide pre-service teachers with the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed to flourish in any type of school setting where they live out their professional and Christian vocations. It is not only critical to pre-service teachers seeking to serve in Catholic schools but also to those hoping to stem the tide of secularization in public schools.

## Conclusions

Preparing Catholic teachers for employment in contemporary educational settings requires intentional program design to stem the tide of advancing secularization. Irrespective of the specific manifestations of secularization in any given nation or culture, Catholic EPPs must implement the Church's vision for education to form educator-witnesses who can skillfully use all the means at their disposal to proclaim the Gospel as appropriate to their educational settings. The EPP featured in this case study has begun a program redesign to apply this vision more fully. While benefiting from the American ideals of limited government and personal liberty that make implementing the Catholic vision possible to varying degrees in Catholic and secular schools, the EPPs face challenges when maintaining the professional standards demanded by accreditation and licensure, which can inject secular tenets into the program. Using Archbishop Miller's Five Marks, which conform to Christian anthropology and thereby counteract the effects of secular anthropological views, this EPP developed a framework (called PROFEss) that sets actionable goals to enhance pre-service teachers' formation. This work-in-progress continues to evolve to better integrate the Catholic mission with the demands of professional preparation. This article aims to encourage and assist faculty in other EPPs to implement the Catholic Church's vision for education through the careful preparation of Catholic teachers in Catholic EPPs.



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