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Title: On the Way: Women's Leadership as Pilgrimage in Catholic Education

Abstract

This presentation proposes that pilgrimage, central to the 2025 Jubilee Year theme *Pilgrims of Hope*, offers a renewed theological and practical paradigm for women's leadership in Catholic education. Leadership is often framed in terms of position, function, or authority. Pilgrimage expands this lens by showing that effective leadership is always relational and reciprocal: women grow in leadership because they are walking alongside others, and in turn they call forth leadership in those they accompany. Such leadership is hope-filled, emerging not from isolation but from shared journey and mutual encouragement.

The argument is grounded in Mary's Visitation (Luke 1:39–56), where two women journey together, encouraging one another, discerning God's promise, and proclaiming a prophetic vision. In this encounter, leadership is not solitary but mutual. Mary and Elizabeth are each strengthened in their discipleship precisely through walking together; their prophetic witness emerges from accompaniment. This reflects the truth that God forms leaders *"on the way"* (Acts 9:2; cf. Luke 24:13–35). Pope Francis' call for a synodal Church that "listens, walks together and discerns communally" (*Preparatory Document for the Synod on Synodality*, 2021; *Evangelii Gaudium*, §169–173) echoes this vision, reframing leadership as communion, accompaniment, and shared discernment rather than command, opening pathways of hope for the Church and its ministries.

Drawing on *Lumen Gentium* (§31) and Sandra Schneiders' reminder that "maleness is in no way constitutive of 'Christ-ness,'" the presentation affirms that women's leadership is not peripheral but integral to the Church's life and mission. The pilgrimage paradigm highlights how women's baptismal authority is lived relationally, in the reciprocity of walking with others, thereby strengthening Catholic education and enriching the Church's imagination of leadership as synodal, relational, and hope-bearing.

This dynamic is visible in Catholic education through initiatives that build teacher efficacy. Growth in teacher competence and confidence is not only professional development but also a relational process of formation. As Dr Greg Elliott notes, such growth is sustained by intrinsic spirituality, nourished by prayer and sacrament, and shaped through high-quality education and formation. Women leaders embody this by mentoring colleagues, accompanying staff, and being formed themselves in the very act of calling forth leadership in others — creating a culture of mutual growth and shared hope.

The presentation concludes that pilgrimage leadership offers women in Catholic education a renewed paradigm: one in which leadership is formed through relationships of accompaniment and reciprocity. This paradigm sustains women's growth as leaders, empowers them to form others, and renews Catholic education's mission with hope. Positioned within the theme *Leadership in Context – Education*, it offers both a theological framework and a practical model for cultivating hope-filled women leaders who walk with others in faith and mission.