

Fostering Faith and Flourishing: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Lived Experiences of Non-Catholic Students in a Catholic University

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Introduction: Catholic universities play a vital role in fostering inclusive academic environments where students can freely express their faith. However, because research regarding the spiritual well-being of non-Catholic students in these settings remains mixed, this study examines their lived experiences to amplify their voices and better understand how they navigate a Catholic university setting.

Methodology: Utilizing a descriptive phenomenological approach, this study explored the lived experiences of eight non-Catholic graduating students at a Catholic university. Participants of diverse religious backgrounds were selected via purposive and snowball sampling for unstructured, in-depth interviews. Data were subsequently processed using Lichtman's recursive textual analysis (the three C's) to identify emerging themes.

Results: The study identified four major themes and fourteen subthemes illustrating significant personal, spiritual, and academic growth. Fostered by an inclusive environment, interfaith dialogue, and a strong sense of community, this supportive atmosphere empowered students to embrace service and engagement. Ultimately, these results highlight the transformative potential of inclusive education within a Catholic context.

Conclusion: Integrating non-Catholic students into Catholic schools demonstrates education's power to transcend religious boundaries and foster inclusivity. Through open dialogue and exposure to diverse traditions, these students deepen their understanding of faith while undergoing personal growth. Ultimately, this environment proves that individuals of all backgrounds can flourish academically, spiritually, and personally within a faith-based setting.

Practical Value: The findings serve as a foundation for enhancing inclusivity policies and practices across various university departments. By addressing the specific needs of non-Catholic students, the university can foster a more welcoming and supportive environment that enriches the educational experience for all. The study's practical implications extend to curriculum development, student support services, and campus-wide initiatives where students of all faiths feel valued and empowered to thrive academically, spiritually, and personally.

Direction for Future Research: Future research could explore the lived experiences of Catholic students in non-Catholic or non-sectarian schools, offering a comparative perspective. Additionally, detailed case studies could offer rich, contextualized insights into the unique experiences and coping strategies of these students. Quantitative surveys could measure various dimensions of student development, including spiritual growth, academic achievement, and well-being. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could provide a comprehensive view of the long-term impact of these experiences.

Keywords: inclusive education, non-Catholic students, phenomenological, Philippines

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