

## ABSTRACT

### WHOLEHEARTED LEADERS: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN LEADERS IN SACRED HEART SCHOOLS

by

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A rich tradition of leadership with women at the helm existed within a Network of Schools formed and bound together by the charism of foundress, Saint Madeline Sophie Barat of France. Despite being in North America for 200 years, the Network of Sacred Heart Schools have not found a prominent place in educational leadership literature. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of five women who successfully navigated a path to Head of School leadership in Sacred Heart Schools. In-depth interviews were used to capture the essence of their lived experience of leadership formation and how they made sense out of those formational experiences. The findings of the study were presented in four themes: exposure to leadership, formation as a leader, heart habits of leadership, and leaders as agents of transformation. The participants in this study provided valuable insights based on their many years of experience as Heads of Schools that will assist women in emerging leadership roles that are interested in a Head of School position. Their experience, advice and hope revealed a candid reality that leading an independent school can be achieved by way of many journeys with purpose, passion, and habits of heart. This study concludes with the recommendation for both practitioners and researchers to explore the transition of religious-to-lay leadership in independent faith-based schools. Analysis of

leadership through various theoretical lenses including, spiritual, transformational, servant, trustworthy, authentic, feminist standpoint lead to further recommendations for practitioners and scholars.