



August 2006

Development Directions

A free resource for pastors, principals, development directors, volunteers and anyone engaged in the ministry of Catholic development.

"The Value of Creativity"

Those who work in Catholic development, whether with a parish or a Catholic school, know that many times we are called upon to "pull the rabbit from the hat." Our ability to adjust to change, create new processes, look at things from a different perspective, and make sure we do not fall into old ways of thinking often mean the difference between success and failure.

By its very definition, the word *development* means *change*. If you are going to *develop* the future of your Catholic institution and secure its position in the marketplace, you must always be receptive to change. *Insanity is always doing the same thing over and over again and expecting the results to be different.*

A number of years ago, we came across a book by Robert McCammon entitled *Boy's Life*. The opening chapter talked about the value of creativity and adapting to change. Here at ISPD, we have used this passage over and over again to illustrate the value of looking at things from a different perspective. In addition to this paraphrase from McCammon, we have attached some case examples of Catholic institutions who have adapted, created and moved forward with dynamic changes. We hope you enjoy these examples of creativity; we need to be reminded of its value.

McCammon Passage and Our ISPD Perspective

...You know, I do believe in the magic of creativity. I was born and raised in a magic time, in a magic town, among magicians. Oh, most everybody didn't realize we lived in that web of magic, connected by the silver filaments of chance and circumstance. But I knew it all along. When I was twelve years old, the world was my magic lantern, and by its green spirit glow I saw the past, the present and into the future. You probably did too; you just don't recall it all. See, this is my opinion: we all start out knowing magic and being creative. We are born with whirlwinds, forest fires, and comets inside of us. We are born able to sing to birds and read the clouds and see our destiny in grains of sand. But then we get the magic educated right out of our souls. We get it church-ed out, spanked out, washed out and combed out. We get put on the straight and narrow and told to be responsible. Told to act our age. Told to

grow up, for God's sake. And you know why we were told that? Because the people doing the telling were afraid of our wildness and youth, and because this creativity we knew made them ashamed and sad of what they'd allowed to wither away inside themselves.

After you go far away from it, though, you really can't get it all back. You can have seconds of it. Just seconds of knowing and remembering. When people get weepy at movies, it's because in that dark theatre the golden pool of creativity is touched, just briefly. Then they come out into the hard sun of logic and reason again and it dries up, and they're left feeling a little heart sad and not knowing why. When a song stirs a memory, when motes of dust turning in a shaft of light takes your attention from the world, when you listen to a train passing on a track at night in the distance and wonder where it might be going, you step beyond who you are and where you are. For the briefest of instants, you have stepped into this magical and creative realm.

That's what I believe...

The truth of life is that every year we get farther away from the essence that is born within us. We get shouldered with burdens, some of them good, some of them not so good. Things happen to us. Loved ones die. People get in trouble and lose their way, for one reason or another. It's not hard to do, in this world of crazy mazes. Life itself does its best to take that memory of creativity away from us. You really don't know it's happening until one day you feel you've lost something but you're not quite sure what it is.

How many times in the past year have we found ourselves slipping slowly away from the magic? It happens so gradually that we never even notice. We get trapped into ways of thinking and when presented with new challenges and new ideas and new dreams that used to excite us so much, we seem to come back to the same old answers. Does any of this sound familiar?

- "That'll never work here. We're different."
- "We know what's best for us - we don't need anybody coming in here and telling us how to run this place."
- "It will cost how much?"
- "Let's get a committee to study it."
- "But we've always done it this way."
- "Why change something that has always worked?"
- "That'll take way too much time and effort."
- "You know, we tried something like that once before and it didn't work then and it won't work now."
- "I know my people -they'll never go for something like that."
- "So you think you're really going to tell me something that I don't already know."
- "Listen, why open up a whole new can of worms - nobody's interested."
- "We can't do something like that."
- "Father will never approve."

Sound familiar at all?

You know, we all need the magic of creativity if we really are going to prevail and not just survive. We need the ability to open up and maybe even go back - go back to those magical times in our life where we were most alive and creative and we saw the world through the eyes of a dreamer. Many people see things as they are and ask

why; why not dream of things that never were and ask why not?

Case #1

In a semi-rural Catholic high school in the Midwest, the School Board searched for ways to improve the science program at this coed school. Besides some curriculum changes and new textbooks, the school created an outdoor Science & Nature Classroom not far from the school's campus. Located on five wooded acres at the southern edge of the school property, the outdoor classroom has a variety of flora, a self-guiding 1/2 mile nature trail, a stocked pond, and a seating area for forty individuals. The outdoor classroom is available for use by all departments of the high school, the feeder grade schools, and the south side community. The result? Heightened interest, immediate funding for an innovative project, and a strong sense of pride that permeates the entire school community - especially as it shares its success with other schools in the state.

Case # 2

In a Catholic elementary school in the south, the faculty wanted to improve not only the image of the school but also the image of the quality of the faculty. A beginning step to address this was taken by the faculty and the Board. They started a "Teaching Methods" Workshop that is now hosted on their campus twice per year. Held on a Saturday in the Fall and a Saturday in the Spring, teachers from Catholic, private, and public schools get together by grade level and subject level and share their most successful and innovative methods to reach young people. In just two years, over 200 teachers from a five county region attended these Workshops. The result? A positive image for the school and the faculty and the view that this school is willing to take a chance and reach out to all people. They established themselves as a leader and a winner.

Case # 3

Realizing that alumni were not very involved in the school after they left, a coed school in New Orleans began a program called "Second Home with an Alum." Organizing and updating their data base, the school located alums in all the major cities where their graduates attended colleges and universities. Through coordination with the alums in those cities, students that graduated from the Catholic high school had "second homes" with as many as 5-10 alums and their families. The results? This led to a greater connection with and understanding of the high school and it brought about a greater sense of bonding between recent graduates and alums. It also led to the establishment of out-of-town alumni associations in various cities, hence greater commitment and involvement in the school's future.

Case # 4

Needing to boost enrollment and also establish a meaningful service program that would reach out to elementary school students, a Catholic coed high school in the northeast began to offer a Dial-for-Homework-Help program from 5-8 PM in which elementary school students (grades 3-7)--Catholic, public, private-- could dial a number and receive help with their homework from one of a number of students who attended that Catholic high school. The results? A greater understanding of the elementary school offerings, excellent communications between the Catholic high school and the elementary schools, increased awareness in the quality of the academic program at the high school, and a heightened interest in the high school. Over a two year period, enrollment increased by 12%.

Case # 5

Wanting to involve the business community, plus beef up the Creative and Performing Arts program and the Student Leadership program, and also give parents a break on

tuition, a Catholic school in the Southwest went to 20 businesses over a three year period and invited these businesses to invest \$500 per year for four years. The school then awarded \$500 grants each year to twenty of its students in the areas of creative arts, performing arts, and student leadership. At the end of four years, the business awarded the high school diploma on stage at graduation. The result? A tuition break for those families who might not have sent their children to a Catholic school as well as an emphasis on leadership and the arts, and key business involvement and resources.

Case # 6

Believing that if given the choice, parents will always opt to send their children to the schools that offer the best quality education, several visionary leaders in the city of Milwaukee began an organization called PAVE - Partners for the Advancement of Voluntary Education. Started by Dan McKinley in 1991, this Board reached out and involved business leaders from throughout the city. The overall goal was to raise enough money through the corporate and foundation world in order to give tuition-free scholarships to inner city families who could not afford Catholic or private education. Inter-denominational, in its first year of operation, PAVE has raised millions of dollars. Annually, they continue to announce the hundreds of families who are awarded the tuition-free scholarships to 22 inner-city Catholic and private schools in Milwaukee.

Case # 7

At a coed school in the Midwest, enrollment was slowly dwindling. Several new programs were put in place, but the one that made the most difference was a program called Super Saturdays. 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade boys and girls from Catholic, public and private schools were invited to the campus to take mini-courses for two consecutive Saturdays. The courses offered were Cheerleading, Science Experiments, Singing, How to Make Christmas Ornaments, Cooking, Aerobics, Photography, Computer Games, Student Leadership, Journalism, Dance Team, Jazz Dance, and Baby-sitting Skills. Students signed up for three classes each Saturday. The courses were taught with faculty and community resources - the science teacher taught the Science Experiments class; the owner of a dance studio taught the jazz dance class; a chef at a local restaurant taught the cooking; the university cheerleaders taught the cheerleading class; another university dance team instructor taught the Dance Team class; the reporter from a local newspaper taught the Journalism Class and so on. On the second Saturday, students took the same three classes, except the classes ended at 12 noon. At that time, parents were invited to the gym to watch the dance team dance; the aerobics class aerobicize; the singing class sing, and so on. The results? Over 200 people the first year, over 300 the second, and over 400 the third. Great PR for the school and all names were put on database for the school to begin communicating. After two years, the freshman class had 14 students in it that come from public schools or private schools - 14 students who never would have considered this Catholic school unless they had been invited on campus.

The magic of creativity - it is amazing what can happen when we let down our defenses, open up your minds and dream.



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E-mail: ispd@bellsouth.net
Phone: 800-299-2393
Website: <http://www.ispd.com>

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