



August 2009

Development Directions

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

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What Will It Take to Change the Culture and Shift the Paradigm?

By Frank Donaldson, President

In a study that was done a little over a year ago by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute entitled *Who Will Save America's Urban Catholic Schools*, there is a startling statistic that I am sure many of you have already seen. "This report finds that over 1,300 Catholic schools have shut down since 1990, mostly in our cities. As a result, some 300,000 students have been displaced - forced to attend other public, private or parochial schools. The school closures have cost taxpayers more than \$20 billion to accommodate the additional students that public schools have had to absorb. Is this crisis worth addressing? Are further closures inevitable, or can Church leaders, parishioners, philanthropists and/or public policymakers reverse these trends? Should they try?"

It is an excellent report - all 121 pages - with many answers, suggestions, and solutions.

On my second reading of the report, and after getting past the continued recognition of the shock of losing Catholic schools - mainly in urban America - I could not help but focus beyond that to a question or even a belief that I have long had, one which I have seen ring true time and time again. How many of these 1,300 schools saw their fate coming 5-10-15-20 years ago? Granted, I am sure, some did - simply because of the changing demographics. But, I am willing to bet that there are those that did not. Perhaps some thought that life would continue as usual: the classrooms would be full; people would be able to afford tuition; the parish would be able to provide subsidy; parents would support the fund-raisers; the same families would continue to stay in those neighborhoods; some state money might be available; a few donors would step up in time of crisis; and, they could continue along year to year with a few tweaks here and a few tweaks there. Maybe they were the only game in town and a quality public school system was never an option, or maybe there was no competition that moved into the community via a charter school or

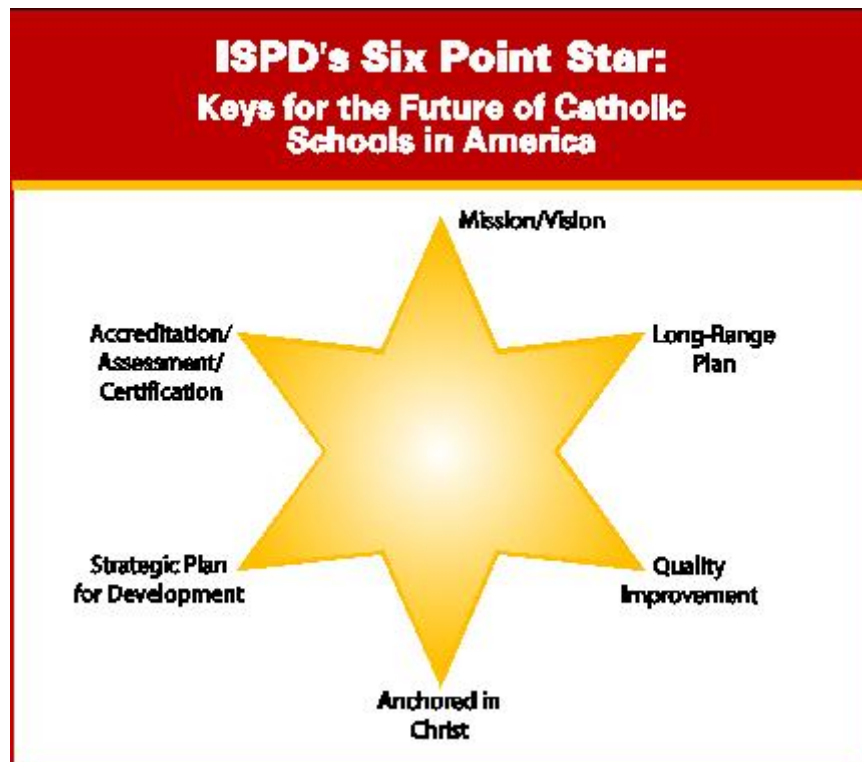
another Catholic school or a private school close by. Or maybe some of the above happened and they were too late to shift their modus operandi and the "bleeding" never could be stopped.

There are many reasons, I am sure. In fact, the Fordham Institute goes on in the report to state their findings:

- The primary cause of massive Catholic school closures have been demographics and economics.
- Catholic schools are showing signs of life in a handful of strongly led dioceses.
- Networks of schools run by independent religious orders demonstrate real energy and potential.
- Vouchers are no panacea.
- Catholic colleges and universities can play a constructive role.

In their recommendation section, one jumps off the page to me when they say that it is so important to collect data through open and honest communication, to foster transparency, and to astutely market Catholic schools.

Many Catholic schools across America are doing an outstanding job on all six areas of what we call the ISPD Six Point Star:



Anchored in Christ with a solid Catholic identity, there is a dynamic and visionary Long-Range Plan in place - one that has been created through the involvement of people. This Plan grows out of the mission of the school and the leaders understand and can articulate the vision of where the school is headed. There is a culture of "customer-service" and "quality improvement" where the prevailing attitude is one of, "We can always get better." There is a written Strategic Plan for the Development and Advancement efforts of that Catholic school. And, obviously, there is some kind of accreditation, assessment, certification process that comes to the forefront every 3-5 years.

Here at ISPD, we strongly believe that all six of the points on the Star need to be in place and systemically integrated throughout the school in order for the school to prevail - and not just survive -- for many, many years.

In working with many Catholic schools throughout the country, we find that some of these elements are in place, and they are working well. There is strong Catholic identity with a clear mission and vision. There is a long-range plan in place that many times has been tied into certification and/or assessment. However, in many Catholic schools, when we have pushed for an answer to all six, many schools come up short - usually in two areas:

1. There is no written, strategic plan for development and/or advancement;
2. There is no quality improvement/ "customer-service" plan in place. In fact, in many Catholic schools, the very mention of a "customer- oriented" culture often causes heads to turn and a quizzical look of disbelief to come onto the faces of administrators and/or faculty and staff.

Again, we have always encouraged and strongly believed in the full implementation of all six points of the Star. These six points cover all the bases of solidity, longevity, and accountability. Fully functioning, the Catholic schools where the six points are shining brightly are way ahead of the pack and clicking on all cylinders. They are a pleasure to see in action.

Recently, a friend of mine whose children had gone to a Catholic school in the south for years called to say that she and her husband had pulled their daughter out of the school that she had been attending since pre-K. The child was starting the 6th grade. They had decided to opt out for a public school, and finances had nothing to do with it. I was totally shocked. This family had been one of the mainstays of the school for a number of years - one of those families that lived their Catholic faith. The husband had been a Catholic school teacher; the mother is a religious education teacher with the parish, and every Sunday the family was there in worship - all of them.

"What happened?" I inquired.

"Well, when Rachel went to school last week to start the new school year, she came home and told us that she was not involved in any of the Honors classes that others in her class had been accepted into. As you know, she had taken Advanced classes in the lower elementary grades, but with Middle School starting, the school evidently has a different set of guidelines for admittance into those Honors classes. After waiting for 2-3 days to get an explanation, we were told that she simply did not qualify. Now, Frank, this is a kid who has never made below a 90 in her life; has excellent test scores, was on the Alpha Honor Roll since first grade, was highly recommended by her past teachers on her report cards at the end of the year, and never had one hint of misconduct. But, it is something that we were told we could do nothing about."

"Did anyone explain these qualifications and requirements when you wrapped up the fifth grade last May?" I asked.

"No. The school said nothing."

"What happened when you called the school and asked to speak with someone about the situation?" I asked.

"We were told that we would have to stand in line, that there were other people with the same problem," my friend answered.

"Let me get this straight," I said. "You knew nothing about this, even when you went for orientation the first day? It took you 2-3 days to get some kind of answer? There was no hint of trying to work something out, or at the very least having the principal come forth and explain what the criteria was and make sure that you received the personal attention that a "paying customer" should

receive? When you went to say that you were withdrawing from the school, there was no conference or personal outreach to smooth things over and work out a solution? You, with your daughter in Advanced classes for the past years, always expected that she was going to be in Honors in Middle School? There was no exit interview when you decided to pull her out? There was no outreach of comfort from anyone in the front office or from the administration? And, the bottom line is that you left a school that your whole family has been involved with for over 7-8 years - one that you have given hundreds of hours to as a volunteer -- and no one has said a word to you? Almost like you were a number on a chart that is now checked off? Is that what you are telling me? Is that what went down?" I asked in disbelief.

"Yes, you nailed it. And, Frank, here is our main point. Although tough to swallow, we know we could have handled our daughter not being in Honors this year. We're not dumb; we understood the criteria, but it was the way we were treated. Two things stood out for us: In our opinion, the school really did not care about us. They really did not know our child. It is a shame."

I worked in Catholic schools for years, and I do understand guidelines and criteria and objectivity. But what I do not understand is the lack of any Catholic school to not personally reach out to a family like the one I am describing above. Child does not qualify for Honors classes based upon the school's criteria? I get it. Family is not given the personal attention, the necessary nurturing, and the open-arm invitation to stay with that Catholic school? I do not get it.

It is called CUSTOMER SERVICE! Every Catholic school needs to have a Customer Service Plan in place because it all reflects on the quality of that school. It is not one person's job; it is everyone's job. Customer Service should be systemic - a culture of quality that permeates every classroom, every hallway, every office, every activity, everything and everybody.

What will it take to change the culture, shift the paradigm and save America's Catholic schools? The Six Point Star needs to shine brightly in all areas.

ISPD Announces New Webinar Series

Beginning in July, ISPD will offer a year-long series of \$39 Webinars on Catholic Development. There will be one Webinar held each month.

Listed here are our scheduled topics:

- **"The Value and Roles of the Development Core Team"**
September 22, 2009
- **"Organizing and Implementing a World Class Annual Fund for Your Catholic School and/or Parish"**
October 26, 2009
- **"Enrollment Management: Attracting and Retaining Students in Your Catholic School"**,
November 18, 2009
- **"25 Ways to Engage People into the Life of Your Catholic Institution"**
December 8, 2009
- **"Organizing and Implementing the Total Stewardship Process"**
January 14, 2010
- **"How to Invite the Gifts"**
February 22, 2010
- **"Getting Your Parish and/or School Ready for a Capital Campaign"**

March 9, 2010

- **"Integrating Total Quality and Customer Service into Your Catholic Development Efforts"**

April 22, 2010

- **"Hosting a Gift Reception"**

May 5, 2010

- **"How to Effectively Host Input Sessions and Town Hall Meetings"**

June 8, 2010

- [Register for a Webinar Now!](#)

ISPD Announces Premium Plus Membership Plan

Because of the increasing demand for better direction in Catholic Development, Total Stewardship, and Enrollment Management, ISPD announces our **Premium Plus Membership Plan**.

A **Premium Plus Membership** provides unique access to a range of ISPD services and information delivered personally to you and your desktop. **Premium Plus** provides creative ideas, expertise and proven approaches/instruments designed to help address the challenges you face in your parish and/or school's Development/Advancement/Total Stewardship/Enrollment Management efforts.

Educational Webinars, personal conversations with an ISPD associate, assessment of your efforts, on-line monitoring with you and your Catholic leaders, and much more are all part of a **Premium Plus Membership** package, helping you achieve your goals in an effective, cost-efficient way.

Premium Plus details and registration information are available by visiting our website. We're excited to offer this Plan and look forward to helping you with your efforts!

- [Learn more about our Premium Plus Membership Plan](#)

FALL 2009 WORKSHOPS

ISPD Workshops Delve into Depth

The one and two day workshops presented by ISPD offer Catholic leaders throughout the country an in-depth experience on a specific topic. For more than twenty years, ISPD has been this country's leader in offering process-driven workshops that are practical, affordable, and interactive. 98% of all ISPD workshops receive a rating of 4 or 5 (out of a 1-5 rating system) by those in attendance.

Fall Workshop Schedule

Become a More Welcoming, Engaging & Affirming Parish

September 17th in Philadelphia, PA

Building a Strong Catholic Development Effort in Tough Economic Times

October 21st in Cincinnati, OH

Long Range Strategic Plan

November 3rd in Lafayette, LA

Long Range Planning for Catholic Parishes & Schools

November 18th in Chicago, IL

ISPD Also Conducts On-Site Workshops

Offered to Catholic schools and parishes within a single diocese, these workshops are designed to meet your specific needs. Contact us for details.

- [Check Here for More Information on ISPD Development Workshops](#)

CATHOLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT TALK

ISPD is your Catholic School Enrollment Solution for maintaining and/or increasing the quantity, quality, or diversity of your elementary or secondary Catholic school enrollment. *Catholic School Enrollment Talk* is our free monthly online newsletter for anyone interested in Catholic school enrollment solutions.

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The Institute of School and Parish Development (ISPD) is a national, Catholic development consulting firm created to serve Catholic schools, parishes and dioceses in the areas of planning, marketing, fund-raising, and resource development.

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to anyone you think could benefit from this information. If there are any topics you would like to see covered in a future newsletter, please contact us.

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