



December 2008

## ***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.

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### **The Pastor's Role in Catholic School Enrollment Management**

**By John Cooper, ISPD Enrollment Specialist**

The month of January is filling up fast with enrollment management presentations and consults. Most of the presentations and consults will involve the usual cast of characters including school presidents, principals, priests, diocese personnel, board members, admission directors, development directors, secretaries, faculty, business managers, parents, and volunteers. One diocese presentation is going to include an unusual twist. The pastors in the diocese have been invited by the bishop to join us for an hour during the day long school workshop.

We are welcoming this special time to discuss with pastors the part they play in managing enrollment in Catholic schools. It is a hot topic around the country in our parish-based Catholic schools. With the increasing financial pressures associated with the administration of a Catholic school, this issue of pastoral support will likely become even more politicized in the days to come. Communication around expectations is vital in addressing this stressful reality.

### **Our Top 10 List that highlights "The Pastor's Role in Catholic School Enrollment Management"**

1. Pastoral leadership **needs to make the case** that the Catholic school is one of the most important **ministries** of the parish. Outside of Mass on Sunday, the Catholic School is probably the largest, most invested ministry of the parish. It certainly requires far greater resources than any other singular ministry of the parish. It is unfortunate that today many Catholic schools are not viewed as a ministry. It is vitally important that the pastor make it clear that the school is a profound ministry of the parish. When the school is not seen as a ministry, then the Catholic identity of the school is threatened.
2. Pastoral leadership should insure that enrollment management is embraced and practiced within the school and parish. Taken in its broadest context, enrollment management is the #1 priority of any Catholic school and therefore, it should be vigorously adopted. Our definition of enrollment management includes these four components:

- **Marketing**  
Marketing in a Catholic school is evangelization. Evangelization is at the heart of living out the Catholic faith. Taken in this context, evangelization is everything that a school and her many members do on a day to day basis. The school in all of her actions is the visible sign of the Church. There can't be a disconnect between marketing and evangelization.
  - **Visualize and Work the Funnel**  
Imagine the school as having a funnel into it. Proper enrollment management insures that the funnel is loaded with the right quality, quantity, and diversity of prospects. Taken a step further, the school implements strategies that squeeze these prospects through the funnel toward enrolling.
  - **It's all about Relationships**  
Relationship building can't be left up to chance. It was at the very center of Jesus' ministry and it must be the focus of every school's ministry with prospects and current students.
  - **Satisfaction is essential**  
Satisfaction must be measured every step of the way in a school's relationship with its students. Strong satisfaction leads to high levels of self-promotion, retention, and continued connection after graduation.
3. Pastoral leadership should tap into and support the right persons to lead the school. Pastoral leadership that micro-manages is counter productive. Macro-managing without a strong presence in the school leaves school administration without clear direction and this vacuum causes the parish to second guess pastoral commitment to the school.
  4. Financing tuition is the "silent killer" of Catholic school enrollment. Pastoral leadership should proactively approach the financing tuition issue rather than simply react to it. Pastoral leadership can help address the tuition issue by:
    - Regularly analyzing the effectiveness of how the school is helping families to finance tuition. Few Catholic schools are doing this in a meaningful way. The school's financial numbers tell a story that needs to be analyzed.
    - Pastors should engage the best business and financial minds in the school and parish community to help analyze financing tuition practices.
    - Pastors should help the school to be as transparent as possible regarding tuition assistance. This transparency creates hope among financially strapped families and it also provides better financial accountability.
  5. Pastoral leadership should provide the school administration full access to families utilizing the parish religious education program. Research demonstrates that the Catholic school is the best way to educate a child in the faith. The amount of resources devoted to supporting the ministry of the school reflects this belief within the parish. The school is a ministry that parish families need to be **continually** invited to join.
  6. Pastoral leadership should provide ample space in the parish bulletin to promote the school. Taken a step further, school families frequently indicate that they would like their pastor to publicly support the ministry of the school from the pulpit.
  7. Pastoral leadership should make sure that the link to the school's web site is prominently displayed on the parish web site's home page. Don't list the school's web site link in the category of "other links". Placement of the school on the parish web site speaks volumes about the importance of the school as a ministry of the parish.
  8. Where possible, pastoral leadership should be looking for cost effective ways to support the school's enrollment effort. How many additional students would need to be enrolled for a school to see a return on investment in enrollment strategies? Would an investment in a \_\_\_\_ hour a week enrollment management staff person help the school's bottom line financial picture? There are so many stay at home school parents that are looking for something part-time that allows them to put that MBA degree to use.

9. Pastoral leadership supports enrollment by opening the lines of communication between parish and school staff. Staffs should be regularly meeting to strategize around how to grow both parish membership and school enrollment. What agenda meeting item can be more important than, "How can we more fully invite and retain membership in our parish and school ministries?" Successfully answering this question might answer other questions on the agenda like, "How can we pay the parish fuel bill this month?"
10. Finally, pastoral leadership should help plant the seed of a Catholic education from the first moment of a child's baptism. Beginning with the baptism of a child, pastoral leadership can help make sure that the ministry of the school is being presented as the preferred way to share the faith. One pastor recently shared that when he finishes baptizing a child he presents to the community the child as its newest member and future student of the parish's school. This pastor really gets it!

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## Communication Preference Advice

*ExactTarget* recently produced a whitepaper based on research done with Ball State University's Center for Media Design. The whitepaper looks at communication preferences of persons ages 15-65. Catholic high schools are increasingly interested in how to best communicate with teenage prospects. This may come as a surprise to you, but this research showed that direct mail was the preferred mode of communication preferred by teens ages 15-17. This whitepaper addresses preferences relative to phone, email, and text messaging as well.

- [Click here to request this interesting whitepaper on communication preferences.](#)

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## Spiritual Thought

The liturgical seasons of the year like Advent and Christmas present those of us working in Catholic schools with a wonderful opportunity to connect in a meaningful way with both prospective and current families. Technology allows us to communicate in many different ways. Make sure that your Christmas communications are personalized, thought-provoking, and focused on the reason for the season. We pray that Mary inspires all of us to allow the Holy Spirit to work within us and by doing so enable us to bring forth Jesus to our world as she did more than 2000 years ago!

Christmas blessings to you and your family!

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