



December 2006

## ***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 & the Joyful Mysteries of Advent & Christmas**

**By John Cooper, ISPD Enrollment Specialist**

Success with Catholic school enrollment requires that we search for answers from within the scripture and tradition of the Catholic faith and in the best business and marketing practices available to us. Faith leads us to those conversions, epiphanies, or breakthrough moments and marketing is the conduit through which we act. Let's look at how the joyful mysteries of the rosary are illuminating this to us as we celebrate Advent and Christmas.

#### **1. The Annunciation**

- **Then:** In the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel asks Mary to do the impossible. He asks her to bring the Son of God into the world. Her response is unconditional acceptance. Mary **identifies** with Gabriel's message as part of her Jewish faith. She knows that the Messiah's coming is the promised fulfillment of her faith.
- **Now:** Those of us who work with Catholic school enrollment are like the angel Gabriel for our prospective students/families. We are asking families to bring the Son of God more fully into their children's lives through a Catholic school education. Marketing tells us that their response depends, in part, on how much they identify our message with Catholic/Christian faith. People tend to identify with the benefits they will receive. One of our marketing goals is to help them identify the benefits that our faith promises with the outcomes they can expect to receive in choosing to educate their children in a Catholic school. If we do this, they are more likely to enroll.

#### **2. The Visitation**

- **Then:** In the visitation, we see Mary and Elizabeth overwhelmed by **anticipation** of the good news that each of them has to share. Mary cannot contain her enthusiasm for what Gabriel has shared with her as she goes in "haste" to visit Elizabeth. In their exchange (with the hidden presence of Jesus and John) the Christian community is formed

and in that moment they begin Christian education through the words they utter to one another. This educational exchange that they share is filled with anticipating the possibilities that Jesus and his cousin John possess for the salvation of the world.

- **Now:** Those of us who work with Catholic school enrollment must create that same level of anticipation for prospective students/families from that first moment of contact. How are we greeting those who visit our schools (on the web, over the phone, through email, in person)? Do we encourage their anticipation by moving in "haste" to connect with them as Mary does with Elizabeth? Do we communicate with prospective parents in a way that has them anticipating what their children will do for the world as a result of an education in our Catholic schools? To effectively market our schools, we must help people to anticipate what they will receive.

### 3. The Nativity

- **Then:** In the Nativity, we are presented with the full experience – Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus in a scene that differs dramatically from the way the world envisions the birth of a king. The image of the Holy Family in this humble beginning surrounded by farm animals is the **consistent experience** we carry with us throughout the Gospels. Visits to this Nativity by both shepherds and Wise Men provide us with a **created experience** that completes the mystery of the birth of Jesus. The power of this experience surrounds us 2000 years later in the countless Nativity scenes that fill the Christmas season.
- **Now:** It is the task of those of us who are involved in Catholic school enrollment to tell the story of our schools in such a way that the mystery of educating children is penetrated through our marketing and recruitment efforts. We do this through both the consistent and created experiences we offer prospects during the inquiry, applicant, and enrollment phases. The Gospel writers (Matthew and Luke) explain vividly the mystery of how the Son of God entered humanity through their Nativity narratives. What is the consistent experience you offer to prospective students/families? What are the created experiences you offer to prospective students/families? One thing is sure. These experiences can always be improved. It is through the experiences we offer that we most distinguish and position our schools.

### 4. Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple

- **Then:** Mary and Joseph present the baby Jesus to Simeon in the Temple. In this moment of joy, Simeon tells Mary that a sword of sorrow will pierce her heart. Mary does not allow Simeon's words of future suffering to deter her from **aspiring** to the words of the Angel Gabriel, "The Lord is with you." Mary knows that God's promise, "I am with you always" is greater than any human pain she must endure.
- **Now:** Catholic schools in their efforts at enrollment must help prospective students/families to aspire to the presence of God that permeates their school. Aspiration is the single greatest factor in general sales. It can lead prospective students/families through the immediate pain of paying for an elementary and high school education because it keeps them (like Mary) focused on the promise that God and

the community will support them. Do you present your school with the same confidence that Mary presented Jesus to Simeon in the Temple? Help your prospects to aspire (like Mary) and the presentation will be much more successful, especially when you have to talk about the financial implications.

5. **Finding of Jesus in the Temple**

- o **Then:** In choosing to accept God's invitation to bring His Son into the world, Mary chose the "road less traveled." Her experience of losing Jesus and then finding Him in the Temple must have confirmed that she was on a journey that was different from other parents. And yet, when she hears (**word of mouth**) that the teachers in the Temple could not explain Jesus' intelligence, she must have felt comforted.
  
- o **Now:** When prospective students/families are choosing a Catholic school education, we must realize that like Mary, they are taking the "road less traveled." These prospective students/families are going to need "word of mouth" recommendations to affirm why they should enroll. We can't allow these word of mouth recommendations to just happen by chance. Our marketing and recruitment efforts must proactively cultivate these word of mouth recommendations and then we must help prospects to find them.

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## ISPD Enrollment Blog for Catholic Schools

### General Invitation to Blog About Enrollment

We welcome your thoughts, insights, or questions on any of the topics raised in this newsletter or relating to Catholic school enrollment in general.

Email your feedback confidentially to me at [jcooperispd@aol.com](mailto:jcooperispd@aol.com) or share your thoughts with other Catholic school leaders by joining our blog.

- [Click here to join the ISPD Enrollment Solutions Blog](#)

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## A Catholic School Web Site to Watch

### Nativity School in Cincinnati, Ohio

[www.nativity-cincinnati.org](http://www.nativity-cincinnati.org)

This month's featured web site is Nativity School in Cincinnati, Ohio. Catholic school web sites should be constructed as a series of on-line magazines directed at specific school constituencies (prospective students/families, current students, and alumni). The most important constituency is your prospective constituency because they know you the least and you know them the least. When you go to the Nativity home page as a prospect, you can't miss the creative and thoughtful magazine that has been placed there for you. Every time I go to the Nativity site, I find something new that has been added to the "table of contents" on the prospective site. They understand that a web site is a work in the progress.

- [Click here to visit Nativity School](#)

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## Spiritual Thought

In Luke 3:4 we hear the words of Isaiah the prophet, "prepare the way of the Lord." There is no greater way to educate children in preparing the way of the Lord than your Catholic elementary or high school. Ponder more deeply your Catholic faith over the Christmas break. The answers to Catholic school enrollment are right there waiting for you. Merry Christmas!

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