



INSTITUTE OF SCHOOL & PARISH DEVELOPMENT

*Bringing People, Process, and Ministry Together to Build the  
Kingdom of God.*

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## **Enrollment Talk Newsletter**

By

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### **The #1 Question on Every Catholic School's Mind Right Now**

If you are a Catholic elementary or high school that needs more families to register, then I know the number one question on your mind right now. You are asking, "How can I find more students/families like the ones I already have?" It is likely that a Catholic school like yours will continue to ask this question in the days, months, and years ahead. Gone are the days when it was easier to identify the "good Catholics" who would never think twice about choosing the Catholic school option.

#### **Here's An Approach That Might Help Your School to Predict and Target Its Best Prospects**

Catholic schools could use a "play" from the college enrollment management playbook. For years now, colleges have been using market research to better predict and focus resources on students who are more likely to be interested in them. The business world has been using this kind of research even longer. How does it work?

To be more effective in marketing, Catholic schools need to better understand the demographic/psychographics of their current students/families. Back in the days (prior to the 1960's) of what some refer to as "Ghetto Catholicism," Catholic schools knew the psycho-socio-economic make up of their student bodies very well. Large Catholic families with the same ethnicity, from the same neighborhood, attended Catholic schools that were within walking distance from their homes. Today our Catholic schools are made up of families with wide-ranging characteristics that are diverse and difficult to identify.

It's not enough just to know these characteristics of our current students and families; we have to know where to find more people like them. Within a given zip code there can be a wide

diversity of individuals. Common sense fails to help us understand why a Catholic family living a block away from the school chooses not to enroll, when a Catholic family living twenty minutes away enrolls. Financially strapped Catholic schools don't have the kind of recruitment budgets to do "blanket" marketing campaigns. With limited resources, Catholic schools must target their direct marketing efforts as much as possible.

Enter a database like PRIZM that is a demographic/psychographic-clustering product developed by Claritas, Inc. The word PRIZM is an acronym that stands for Potential Rating Index by Zip Code Market. Claritas developed PRIZM to segment the United States population into unique "cluster groups." It is likely that everyone reading this newsletter is segmented into one of PRIZM's 66 individual cluster groups based on such factors as household composition, tenure/housing type, educational attainment, race/ethnicity, predominant age range, and proximity to the downtown core of a metropolitan area. Databases like PRIZM incorporate census data, card swipes at the supermarket, auto and home purchases, and more.

Here's how a college might use the PRIZM database. Let's say the college is on the east coast and wants to recruit more students from a state like California. It would be cost prohibitive for the college to devote both the human and fiscal resources necessary to tackle and penetrate a market as large as the state of California. The college in question then takes the home of origin addresses of its current students and analyzes them using the PRIZM database. The database identifies which of the 66 marketing clusters the college is most successful in enrolling. Let's say 8 predominant cluster groups emerge as this college's primary demographic population. The college not only learns more about the characteristics of the clusters that it has been most successful in recruiting, it also can then target similar cluster groups within the state of California.

You might be saying that this is all well and good for a college that is trying to penetrate a large market, but how can this help my Catholic school which is lucky to pull from more than one zip code? The PRIZM database can drill down into target block areas of every 300 households within a given zip code using zip + 4 + 2 digits. It is important to realize that within a zip code there are often huge differences in psycho-socio-economic demographics.

How can this market segmentation analysis be applied? Individual schools, school systems, clusters of schools, or dioceses could use this predictive modeling approach to fine tune its direct marketing efforts. Rather than simply relying on parish baptismal records or 8<sup>th</sup> grade students from feeder schools, elementary and high schools would have an additional route to take in identifying prospective families. It would allow schools to reach beyond practicing Catholics to fallen away Catholics as well as non-Catholics who share the same psycho-socio-economic attributes of current school population. If your school is concerned about diversity, then this

analysis also allows your school to target and reach beyond the predominant cluster groups already enrolled.

This research need not be applied every year. The analysis could be done at regular intervals or when a perceived demographic shift has occurred. When conducted periodically, benchmarks could be established and monitored.

There are companies that are licensed by Claritas to use the PRIZM database. ISPD is not one of those companies. In its consulting work with Catholic schools, ISPD has connected schools with licensed PRIZM users. We have helped formulate strategies based on the analysis.

Not every school can afford to have predictive modeling analysis completed. However, no matter what your school's enrollment size or budget, it needs to better understand its market. Several years ago an elementary school principal told me that at the beginning of his school's recruitment season, he sat down with his enrollment team and discussed the families in his parish that had children kindergarten age for the upcoming year. Who were these families? What did these families need to hear, see, experience before deciding to enroll? How should they be approached? Who should approach them? He may not have called this predictive modeling, but his approach of using strategy ahead of tactics was right on the mark.

### **Spiritual Thought**

I wish I could have been present in the communities that St. Paul converted 2000 years ago. Did all those converts just miraculously appear to hear and respond to St. Paul's call? Or did St. Paul carefully attempt to identify those who might be most receptive to his Christian message based on his prior experience of the types of persons he was most successful in converting? When St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Julie Billiart and Blessed Teresa of Calcutta began looking for vocations to their new religious orders, do you think they learned from those who were already gravitating to their charisms? May the good God bless you in finding those new recruits guided by the Holy Spirit in the most educated way that you can!