



INSTITUTE OF SCHOOL & PARISH DEVELOPMENT

Bringing People, Process, and Ministry Together to Build the

Kingdom of God.

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Development Directions

*Catholic Challenges, the Who Dat Nation, and
the “12th Man” in Parishes and Schools*

by

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As Jim Henderson from WWL Sports Radio here in New Orleans said on Sunday night, “Pigs have flown; hell has frozen over, Buddy D is taking dress measurements in heaven, ‘cause the Saints are going to the Super Bowl!”

A lot has been written in the past few days about the incredible overtime win the New Orleans Saints had over the Minnesota Vikings this past Sunday, January 24th. Being a long-time Saints fan for 43 years, when Hartley’s field goal sailed between the uprights, even though my head was down and my eyes were closed, I felt part of something that was indeed hard to describe. Like all Saints’ fans, everybody’s got a story.

Our family’s history goes back to that first game at Tulane Stadium on September 17, 1967, when, on the opening kickoff, John Gilliam ran the ball back 94 yards for the first Saints’ score. That was probably the only highlight we could point to for years and years. We endured season after season of disappointments, and our only mantra was, “Maybe next year.” We did get excited when Archie Manning rolled out to pass, and Dalton Hilliard slashed through the line. We even yelled and screamed when the Saints, under Jim Mora, started out one year on a seven game winning streak. But hopes were dashed so many times, because at the end of the season we were never in that number. We even took to wearing paper bags on our heads, and our beloved sports announcer Buddy Diliberto (Buddy D) said he would wear a dress if the Saints ever made it to the Super Bowl. (Buddy recently passed away, and Bobby Hebert – a former Saint and now radio personality – will step in and step forward in a black and gold tutu this Sunday).

And so, in this town of so many Catholics, the Saints (so named because of its birthday being on All Saints Day) through good and bad, terrible and atrocious, became interwoven into the fabric of the people of this region. We all felt we belonged to a team that was like our problem child – false promises at best, catastrophic disappointments at worst. And when we were down the most, Katrina came.

The New Orleans Superdome, the very place of despair, death and destruction 4 ½ years ago, became a lighthouse on Poydras Street this past Sunday – where we were led

out of the storm, invited to be the 12th man in the stands, and then brought forth to bathe in the glory of victory on a Sunday night when many thought defeat was still hanging around knocking at our door. The Saints are really going to the Super Bowl.

It is this feeling, this connection, this bond that I wish to talk about in this issue of *Development Directions*. Over the past 48 hours, I have asked myself over and over again, “What makes this relationship so special? Why do so many people feel like they belong to the New Orleans Saints? Why is this team fast becoming America’s team with fans throughout the world? Why was this game the most watched TV program since the last Seinfeld show?”

There are many answers, and many conjectures, but I’ve got my beliefs. I strongly believe that people – young and old; rich and poor; Asian and Hispanic; black and white; Cajun and Creole – really feel an integral part of this team. The team belongs to us, and we belong to the team; we are the 12th man – whether in the stands, hosting a party at home, sitting in a bar on Bourbon Street, or quietly watching and screaming at the TV or radio by ourselves at home. *Belonging leads to believing*, and we believe.

As we begin 2010, Catholic parishes and schools face many challenges. In our long-range planning sessions, input sessions, in-services with boards and council, and work with administrators and development/advancement stewardship officers, it usually all comes down to the following seven areas Catholic leaders are most concerned about:

- How to **engage young people** into the life of our Catholic parishes;
- How to **maintain and/or increase enrollment** in our Catholic schools;
- How to **involve the 70% not involved** in the life of our Catholic parishes;
- How to **balance the budget** – for parishes and schools;
- How to develop and **create new sources of revenue** so our Catholic parishes and schools can advance and grow;
- How to **identify, educate and integrate new leaders** into the life of our Catholic parishes and schools;
- How to **integrate a vibrant Total Stewardship process** into the life of our parishes.

If we look at all of these challenges -- and they are quite daunting when viewed as an entire list -- what goes to the heart of solving them? Using the Saints’ analogy, all Catholic parishes and schools need a “12th man.” We are not going to fully engage young people unless we can reach them with and through their peers; we are not going to attract enough new families without Parent, Student and Alumni Ambassador Teams that make those looking at us feel wanted and needed; we are not going to engage the 70% uninvolved without inviting the 30% involved to help us and work with us; we will not be able to balance the budget unless people – involved and those yet to be engaged with us – believe in our mission, vision and values; we will not be able to encourage people to objectively view new sources of revenue unless they begin to view themselves as stewards of their Catholic school or parish; we will not be able to identify and engage new leaders unless the present ones open the doors and really invite others’ input and wisdom; and, we will not be able to have our parish families live a life of True

Stewardship unless we have an educational, planning and invitation process that allows them to see themselves as the “12th” man on the parish and/or Catholic school Team.

With our e-mail newsletter *Development Directions*, we will be taking these 7 Challenges listed above and doing two things: 1. Explaining what they are and what they mean to Catholic institutions; and 2. Offering solutions that are relevant, creative and being used by some parishes and schools throughout the country. Here is the schedule:

- February 2010: Creating New Sources of Revenue for Catholic Parishes and Schools -- Part I
- March 2010: Creating New Sources of Revenue for Catholic Parishes and Schools: Part II
- April 2010: Maintaining and/or Increasing Enrollment in Your Catholic School
- May 2010: Engaging Young People into the Life of Our Catholic Parishes
- June 2010: Integrating a Vibrant Total Stewardship Process in Our Catholic Parishes – Part I
- July 2010: Integrating a Vibrant Total Stewardship Process in Our Catholic Schools – Part II
- August 2010: Involving the 70% Not Involved in Our Catholic Parishes
- September 2010: Identifying, Educating and Integrating New Leaders in Our Catholic Schools and Parishes – Part I
- October 2010: Identifying, Educating and Integrating New Leaders in Our Catholic Schools and Parishes – Part II
- November 2010: Balancing the Parish Budget – A New Look
- December 2010: Balancing the Catholic School Budget – Breaking Old Habits

(If you know of other Catholic leaders who would benefit from any of the above topics, please invite to go to our website (www.ispd.com) and sign up for our free newsletters).

As I sit here this morning, after listening to talk radio for an hour on my drive into the office and then to the airport, I am reminded once again of the power of inclusion. I listened to twenty people call in this morning and address the two questions that were on the morning line: “How far back does your family’s history go with the New Orleans Saints?” And, “When Hartley’s kick sailed through the uprights, what did/does this victory mean to you and your family?” Many of the answers were emotional because they reflected on a time in the past when moms and dads and brothers and sisters were alive – mostly pre-Katrina. And, through it all, many showing the cultural mix of this New Orleans melting pot, there was that bond, that relationship, where they were part of the team and the team was part of them – intricately woven into the threads of both tapestries. If only more Catholic institutions could *develop* that bond . . .