



INSTITUTE OF SCHOOL & PARISH DEVELOPMENT

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Development Directions

WHAT IS YOUR "CULTURE OF GIVING?"

by

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Every Catholic institution has a *Culture of Giving* – whether they are five years old, twenty-five years old, fifty years old, or just establishing themselves in their community. We find that this *Culture of Giving* can alter and change and is usually established by the leaders in place (pastor, principal, president, board). Establishing this culture is not necessarily a conscious decision; many times it is “just the way we do things around here.” It really applies to three areas: how a Catholic institution invites the gifts, how it receives the gifts, and how the constituent base gives the gifts. All three – inviting, giving and receiving – go a long way in establishing that culture.

What is fascinating about this is that most Catholic institutions have not really defined their *Culture of Giving*. “The way we’ve always done things” is usually the answer we receive when we probe on the question. With the present situation of Catholic institutions throughout the country, there has never been a more important time than right now for Catholic institutions to define their culture. Eventually, with proper understanding, direction and process, a Catholic school and/or parish can evolve into a *Culture of Giving* that will allow it to soar and prevail and not just survive. The first step, however, is that we must understand the levels.

Over the past year, I have tried to find some language and levels that we could use to have us all understand what we mean by *Culture of Giving*. Until something better comes along, let’s use the following four categories:

Level 1: Little or No *Culture of Giving*

Level 2: Basic *Culture of Giving*

Level 3: Intermediate *Culture of Giving*

Level 4: Advanced *Culture of Giving*

Once again, it is important to understand that this culture refers to inviting, giving, and receiving – all important in establishing the best culture for your Catholic institution.

Let's talk about Level 1. Parishes and schools at this level seem to function almost "hand to mouth." On the school level, there is tuition, a fund-raiser or two or three, and maybe some subsidy; but the parents, alumni, parishioners, grandparents, past parents, and community have not been invited to become involved with the school – in a meaningful way. No one is really invited except maybe to buy a candy bar; giving is a second thought, and receiving is "catch as catch can." Sometimes at this level there is this "poor pitiful me Catholic syndrome" attitude that is working. "Please give to us because we are poor and cannot afford to do anything." There is no vision, no mission, no goals, no plans, no processes in place to invite, involve and engage people. On the parish level, survival is the word of the day. Sunday collections are what makes up the budget, and there may or may not be a fund-raiser or two. The parish has little energy and the day to day life kind of eases along based upon the direction set by the pastor. Parish Council and/or Finance Council meet once a month or every other month, and Mass is celebrated and geared to the 30% who are there every weekend. A *Culture of Giving* is hard to understand for those parishes and schools at Level 1. This can be summed up this way:

Level 1 Inviting: Nothing personalized

Level 1 Giving: Basic – What always has been done for years

Level 1 Receiving: Little acknowledgement

Level 2 is interesting. Most parishes and schools who are at this level are either caught in the "same old, same old" mode or else they have taken the bull by the horns and are consciously climbing out of Level 1 into Level 2 and upward. Parishes at this level do have some kind of leadership in place besides the pastor, and usually there is a mission statement and some kind of ministry organization. Parish Council meets regularly, and "Stewardship Sunday" is usually the main way the parish invites people to consider their gifts of "time, talent and treasure." The main thing lacking in Level 2 is energy and sense of vision – excitement for the future. Most parishes and schools at this level continue to deal with the 25-50-75 people who always do things at the parish and school, and they have not opened up the doorways, avenues and roadways to engage people in a meaningful way. They simply do not understand that component in terms of developing a parish. "Stewardship" is just what we said – "Stewardship Sunday" where most people think it is time to get out the

checkbook or else, knowing in advance, go to another parish that Sunday. Catholic schools at this level still depend upon tuition, subsidy and some fund-raising events. Maybe some may be climbing up toward the next level, but advancing the school is all done by the principal and any volunteer help she/he can muster. No one is out in the community and beyond talking about the school and its features, its vision and its positive impact on the community. People are invited by direct mail or through a form letter or a flyer; they give only the minimum in terms of Prayer, Service and Financial Contribution; and, the school receives the gifts as something “they” should be doing to keep the doors open. This is a very critical stage, because a Catholic school and/or parish can only go up or down. And, if they are heading to the Level 1 category then the handwriting is on the wall as far as the future. Level 2 can be summed up as follows:

- Level 2 Inviting: Quantity, not quality
- Level 2 Giving: Similar to Level 1 – What always has been done for years
- Level 2 Receiving: Some acknowledgement, appreciation and affirmation

With Level 3 – the Intermediate *Culture of Giving* – things begin to get exciting. Leaders don’t feel sorry for themselves. There is bounce in their step, because there is a finite sense of direction. There is an active, well thought out process to invite, involve and engage people into the life of that parish and/or Catholic school. Catholic institutions at this level are not looking for a handout. They are interested in having a very clear mission, vision, and plan for the future. They create that plan through the engagement of people, and these same folks are the ones who help implement that plan and take it to the next level. Excitement is in the air, and benchmarks and progress can be seen. Although challenging, pastors and principals take pride in their parish and school and talk about it at every turn of the road. Parish staff, school faculty and staff, and ministry leaders are on the same page. People are treated with courtesy and politeness when they register as a new parish family or a prospective family at the school. It is NOT the “same old, same old.” People who do not have a sense of forward movement and positive attitudes are worked with, and if they do not get it, then the leaders work an exit process to help them find something else. Mediocrity is not tolerated; quality is strived for and attained in many areas. The school and/or parish has made the conscious decision to devote the resources to putting the development/stewardship/advancement office in place with the proper personnel. There is not a “gimme your money” tone that permeates. People are invited to share their gifts of prayer, service and financial

participation. Total Stewardship education throughout the year, constituent input, vision-mission-plan of action, a welcoming atmosphere, are all part of the Level 3 culture. Development processes are in place to go beyond selling candy and holding a fair and festival or putting on an auction and dinner dance. Annual Funds, Capital Campaigns, and some one on one work is being done. The leaders are consciously aware that parents, alums, parishioners, past parents, grandparents, the community, and others need to be constantly invited to be “stewards for a lifetime.” In Level 3 we begin to see the WIN-WIN attitude slowly begin to permeate the culture. It is not an “us vs. them” with pastor and parishioners, or teachers and students, or boards and parents, or ministry leaders and new parishioners, or school leaders and parents. This is an exciting level to reach. Let’s sum it up this way:

- Level 3 Inviting: Moving more toward “eyeball to eyeball” invitation with creative processes for people to become engaged
- Level 3 Giving: People are giving THEIR gifts – what they enjoy sharing with that parish/school
- Level 3 Receiving: Excellent acknowledgement, appreciation and affirmation

Level 4 is the pinnacle, and yes, it is possible to stay there and keep getting better. The *Culture of Giving* at this level is outstanding. Unfortunately, there are not many Catholic schools and parishes that are at this level. And, there is one basic reason: They do NOT know their constituent base on a personal basis, and they have not put the processes in place to develop the life-long relationships with them. At this level, parents and parishioners and their families are met with each year – person to person – eyeball to eyeball. Either the pastor, the principal, the president, lead faculty members, board/council members, advancement/development officers, parent leaders, and others make it a point to meet with EVERY family that makes up the parent and/or parishioner base of that parish and/or Catholic school. The Culture of Giving is established at the beginning of the relationship as these leaders cover four things in that annual conversation:

1. How are you doing?
2. Here is what we expect from you and what do you expect from us?
3. What gifts would you enjoy sharing here in the parish/school?
4. Is there anything we (as your home parish/as your child’s school) can do for you and your family?

There is a quality, customer-service; there is a willingness to invite personally, give joyfully, and receive thankfully. This is established through building those relationships. Hundreds of people are invited and involved in

strategic planning, and in serving on boards and council. There is room for everyone. Whatever gifts people have, they are invited to pray, discern, and decide what they wish to share – in terms of prayer, service and finance. Annual Funds, Capital Campaigns, Planned Gifts, Memorial Gifts, Endowment Growth, Major Gifts – these are all processes that grow out of this Culture of Giving at Level 4. People drive these processes.

By way of example, recently I attended the Leadership Reception of one of the high schools we are working with in the Diocese of Arlington. The family who was hosting the reception have a beautiful home, and it was clear to see that the 80+ people in attendance were having a wonderful time. As the evening was drawing to a close, I had the opportunity chat with the host and hostess. Now here was a couple who had graciously allowed the school to use their home, had paid for the catering, and had made a major gift to kick off this year's Annual Fund. They both stated to me that after their third child graduated this year, they were very interested in setting up a Teacher Endowment Fund – to be used only for teacher professional advancement, and over the next xxx number of years they would be responsible for funding it on an annual basis. When I inquired further, they told me, "We came here not knowing anyone or anything, but very quickly we were personally invited and have served and used our resources to become partners with this school for a lifetime." As I was driving out of their driveway a little while later, I could only think: What a *Culture of Giving* they have established.

- Level 4 Inviting: Mostly personalized – one on one – parish/school does not use the reasons of not enough time, not enough personnel, not enough resources, to make this happen. They make it happen because it is the very reason they are at Level 4.
- Level 4 Giving: People are creative in giving THEIR gifts – what they enjoy sharing with that parish/school
- Level 4 Receiving: Excellent acknowledgement, appreciation and affirmation

So, what is your *Culture of Giving*? It is so important to recognize, understand and address. As Catholic institutions, our future depends upon it.