

Catholic School Management - Certificate Programs
Opening Talk
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University of Notre Dame

Parables from the Past – Possibilities for the Future

Good morning and welcome to the University of Notre Dame and the 2009 Certificate Programs. I thank you for being here, for your commitment to Catholic schools, and, most especially, for the questions you bring with you; questions which need good answers if your schools are going to survive and flourish. The questions are difficult ones and the answers must not only be tailored to the specific circumstances surrounding each of your schools, but they must also have been grounded solidly in research and have been tested in similar situations to yours and proven to be effective. It is this approach that Catholic School Management has used for more than 35 years, and this approach which has kept thousands of Catholic schools open, viable, and providing the opportunity for students to experience elements of faith integrated in an effective learning process.

In an effort to put both the questions and answers in perspective, I'd like to take you on a journey back in time. As we travel through various time periods and visit Catholic schools in various states, you will, I promise, begin to see answers to your questions; answers which can be explored more deeply in each of the programs this week. You will make a difference in and for your school!

Forty years ago this May in New Haven, Connecticut, 69-year old pastor, Father Andrew Cooney had received a letter from the Diocesan Fiscal Officer recommending that his school be closed immediately because of recurring deficits, declining enrollment, fewer Sisters available to staff the school, and a depletion of parish reserves. Deeply disturbed at the prospect of closing his school and feeling alone and helpless, Father Cooney shared the letter with a parishioner, attorney, and friend, Harold Donegan. Several days later Harold shared the letter with one of his tennis partners, a 24-year old Navy veteran and business planner with a multi-national conglomerate, the Olin Corporation. Neither had any experience with Catholic schools other than their own education in a Catholic high school. Both, however, recognized two fundamental premises which would be key to St. Bernadette School and to thousands of schools in the future. First, people respond to people, not to institutions. Secondly, that perceived value must exceed perceived cost if people are to purchase a product or service. The corollaries are equally important. First, no one person (pastor or principal), no matter how talented or dedicated, can "do it alone." Second, raising tuition to cover costs, without product/program enhancement and promotion, will force enrollment decline.

I was that 24-year old, with a background in finance and marketing and no formal training as an educator. Harold Donegan, Father Cooney, and I spent many days, nights, and weekends working together, first, to form a board. The board was essential to broaden the base of support. The board was to consist of nine to twenty-one committed individuals, with complementary skills, willing to work in committees, as well as on the board, and having received extensive training. Then, with the assistance of the board and faculty, the school's mission was redefined and clarified in light of the school's philosophy. A new vision and profile of the graduate at graduation was prepared. Finally, a strategic long-range plan was prepared by board members, administrators, and in cooperation with the pastor. Board members told their friends about the work being done and the plans for the future, and enrollment increased. St. Bernadette School remains open today and has educated thousands of students and produced more than one thousand alums, including the current Mayor of the City of New Haven.

Perhaps the formation and training of the board are obvious first steps in ensuring the viability and vitality of Catholic schools. However, what about mission clarification? Is this relevant? Time for a quiz: Who can tell me what was the original mission statement the Mothers March of Dimes?

(To eradicate polio)

- Salk vaccine developed – polio eradicated
- Mothers March of Dimes continued – What was the second mission statement?

(To overcome birth defects)

- Contemporary mission

(To help ensure healthy babies)

Mission statements need to be relevant and compelling, and they must be related directly to the philosophy, which is foundational, and the vision, which is future-oriented. All three documents are critical!

In 1973, not long after the publication of the Pastoral of Education *To Teach as Jesus Did*, the Archdiocese of Hartford faced the prospect of closing up to six of its inner city Catholic elementary schools in New Haven and Hartford. Again, declining enrollments, financial problems, and the decreasing numbers of Sisters combined to force the question of closure. Now, however, the issues of changing demographics loomed large as immigrant Catholics moved out of the cities to the suburbs, and increasing numbers of non-Catholics moved in. Racial tensions caused additional concerns for pastors. In interviews with parents, it became increasingly clear that both Catholic and non-Catholic parents alike sought Catholic schools not just for a better education or religious values, but the safety, structure, and discipline which these schools provided for their children. We worked with St. Martin de Porres, Sacred Heart, St. Peter, St. Francis, and St. Rose in New Haven, as well as St. Peter and St. Augustine in Hartford. Boards were formed, missions redefined and clarified, strategic long-range plans developed, and twinning programs were initiated with suburban parishes, most of which did not have Catholic schools of their own. Many of those twinning programs remain to this day, and all of the aforementioned schools remained open for at least the next 15 years.

During 1976 and 1977, the Provincial Chapter of the Brothers of Holy Cross began working toward the formation of Boards of Directors to assist in the conduct and operation of their high schools. A young Brother John Paige, CSC, then Principal of Notre Dame High School in West Haven, had watched closely the work of boards in parish elementary schools in the City of New Haven. With the assistance of his confreres, he improved upon the model, drawing from work already underway by the Jesuits, the Marianists, and the Xaverian Brothers. Recognizing the continual decline in numbers of religious, new corporations were formed with the “Members” holding selected reserved powers, and the new Boards of Directors governing the schools as boards of limited jurisdiction. These boards were far more than advisory or consultative, and proved to be the key to long-term viability for these schools and hundreds like them throughout the United States. Today the vast majority of the 1,220 Catholic high schools operate with Boards of Directors or Boards of Trustees, which function as boards of limited jurisdiction. There is a growing movement toward these boards of limited jurisdiction in Catholic elementary schools today as well. John Paige is today the Vicar General for the Congregation of Holy Cross in Rome.

These success stories underpin the premise that people respond to people, not to institutions, and begin to set the stage for the value proposition. This value proposition will be critical to each of your schools.

Can this be done across an entire Diocese? To answer that we look to the Diocese of Duluth, Minnesota, in 1981, the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana, in 1996, and the Diocese of Monterey, California, today. In each case, the Diocesan Bishops and Superintendents committed to a four-year proactive program to strengthen parish elementary schools. Key elements included:

- The formation of boards;
- Mission clarification;

- Long-range strategic plans;
- Enhanced communication and marketing efforts;
- Formal enrollment management programs;
- Comprehensive development programs;
- Long-range financial plans and monthly budget monitoring.

More than 93% of the schools involved have remained open and viable. (Indeed, only two have closed.)

Will all Catholic schools currently in existence be able to survive? The answer to this question is both a simple and direct “NO.” Some schools are in the wrong location, some parishes themselves are not viable, some schools are in much too close proximity to others, and, finally, some pastors, superintendents, and bishops still cling to the belief that just because the school is Catholic it will survive, and parents should enroll their children in the school.

That brings us to our next premise that Catholic schools must be marketed, and marketed effectively, if they are going to remain viable and, indeed, flourish. Marketing by definition involves the research, analysis, planning, implementation, and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchange relationships with specifically targeted markets. Note the operative phrases:

- Research;
- Planning;
- Voluntary exchange relationships;
- Target markets.

Experience has shown clearly that Catholic schools can be marketed for image, enrollment, and resources. Research is the key, along with carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchange relationships with specifically targeted markets.

As consultants, we are often faced with these specific questions:

1. Is cost-based/needs-based tuition an effective model?
2. Will tuition increases force enrollment declines?
3. If we lower tuition, will enrollment increase?
4. Can we raise tuition to balance the budget and then offer financial assistance to those families that need it with money generated from development programs?

None of these questions is answerable in the affirmative without extensive research. Indeed, most of the time, the answer to each of these questions is a definitive “NO.” Let me explain.

In 1989, a talented biology and chemistry teacher, Brother Phillip, had been asked by his Community to serve as Principal/Headmaster of their Community-owned school in California. Upon assuming the office, he found myriad problems, including declining enrollment, mounting deficits, a spirit of being defeated among the faculty, and a sense of isolation. The high school offered approximately the same programs as other public and Catholic high schools in the area, and yet needed to charge higher tuition just to survive. Enrollment dropped!

Almost immediately following Brother Phillip’s call for help, we were able to complete a detailed assessment of the school, which provided a roadmap for their future. Among the key directions were the following:

1. Restructure the ownership/governance model.
2. Create a Board of Directors.
3. Clarify mission and vision.
4. Collaboratively create a strategic long-range plan. (with participation by Board, administration, faculty)

5. Enhance the academic program.
6. Enhance athletic offerings and other extracurricular activities with a full participation/no-cut policy.
7. Establish a dedicated office of enrollment management.
8. Establish a dedicated development office with components for annual giving, fundraising coordination, and planned giving for endowment growth.
9. Mount an aggressive communication/marketing program.

Today, Woodside Priory School is one of the premier Catholic secondary schools in California, with capacity enrollment, multiple new buildings, an extensive endowment, and new on-campus faculty housing. By the way, their tuition is among the highest for Catholic schools in the Country.

Additional stories:

- St. Andrew School, Pasadena - 1992:
 - Location; One of three schools in Pasadena
 - Demographics; Poorest and most diverse
 - Academic Program – Board and Admin -Writing-to-Read;
- Notre Dame High School, San Jose - 1999:
 - Location; Inner city, one city block, no fields, no parking, old mansion
 - Board initiative; Dissolved in 1990, reformed 1999, community research, S.P.
 - Programs; \$12 million Gamble
- École Notre Dame des Victories, San Francisco - 2000:
 - Location; Downtown, Union Square, Chinatown, Financial District, no housing, RC
 - Marketing; Technology, French, K-8, Le Petite Dejourner
 - Planning. Parental involvement, alum involvement, curriculum mapping, and technology

And, what of the possibilities for the future?

We live in a changing and unsettled time. As Catholic schools continue to close year after year, research shows clearly that parents increasingly desire exactly the type of education which Catholic schools offer. I quote ...

“Underlying virtually all of the changes occurring in the world today, both as an instrument and cause, are technology and the technological worldview. Technology is one of the most marvelous expressions of the human spirit in history; but it is not an unmixed blessing. It can enrich life immeasurably or make a tragedy of life. The choice is man’s, and education has a powerful role in shaping that choice.” (No. 33 TTJD)

“More than any other program of education sponsored by the Church, the Catholic school has the opportunity and obligation to be unique, contemporary, and oriented to Christian service ...” (No. 106 TTJD)

Those two statements were not written for today’s talk. Indeed, they are part of the Pastoral on Education to Teach as Jesus Did, paragraphs 33 and 106, respectively, written in 1972.

It is often said that those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it. As we outline possibilities for the future, allow me the opportunity to provide some additional perspective. It is abundantly clear today - although it should have been clear as early as 1972 – that boards and lay involvement are essential to the long-term viability of Catholic schools. Carefully structured boards with committed and trained individuals will breathe new life into Catholic schools at every level. That lesson was taught most effectively here at the University of Notre Dame in 1965 when Father Theodore Hesburgh led preliminary discussions on the front porch of the Summer House at Land O’Lakes in Wisconsin. Movement to a lay Board of Trustees was approved in January of 1967 by

the Provincial Council of the Congregation of Holy Cross of the Indiana Province. The model was created in a dissertation he had prepared at Catholic University of America in 1945. The original dissertation topic, "The Importance of the Laity in the Governance of Catholic Education in the Church" had been rejected as irrelevant and unimportant. Eventually published under the title "The Effects of the Imprints of the Characters of the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation to the Lay Apostolate," the dissertation formed the basis for the reorganization of ownership and governance at this University. It has proven to be a huge success, with most other Catholic colleges now using this ownership/governance model.

Others have similarly called for the establishment of boards with genuine governance authority. Nathan Hatch, former Provost of the University of Notre Dame (now President of Wake Forest University), in his seminal work of 1989 entitled The Democratization of American Christianity recognized the increasing importance of laity, Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist, and Catholic in governance structures of viable Churches.

Peter Steinfels in his monumental 2003 publication A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America noted, "Priests will need a capacity to animate and guide others in leadership roles. They may well deputize others to take care of the strictly administrative worries about boilers and bookkeeping that priests so often complain about, but they will have to be able to organize and inspire people, to identify and reinforce the gifts of staff and parishioners, and to sustain them spiritually. Priests will have to become more accountable."

Paul Lakeland put it even more bluntly in 2003 in his book The Liberation of the Laity: In Search of an Accountable Church. "It is easy for all but the most conservative Catholics to see that there is something sadly wrong with the present structure of leadership in the Church ..." Lakeland's final proposal (Pg. 284) "that the Bishop is one who confirms the calling of the new servant leader rather than is the appointer of the new servant leader" is not likely to occur in my lifetime or, perhaps, even yours. However, an increasing number of serious students of Catholicism are moving in that direction. The Roman Curia, however, is moving in the opposite direction – defending the ultramontane position (the centralization of Church governance, at the expense of local involvement). (Weakland pg. 294-295)

In the ideal - teachers, parents, school administrators, board members, and pastors work together in this vision of the future for the revival of Catholic schools. These schools have clear statements of philosophy, mission, and vision; consistently updated strategic long-range plans; enhanced academic programs which utilize cutting-edge technology for the benefit of students; and adopt a consistent position of transparency and accountability.

Will they receive the human and financial support necessary? That is up to you and me. Here we turn to my friend and colleague, Kerry A. Robinson, in wonderful article published in *America* magazine in July of 2008. As a member of both the Catholic philanthropic community (Kerry is a member of the Raskob family) and as a Director of Development and advisor to Catholic institutions and charities, Kerry raises the following points:

1. **Be worthy of generosity.**
 - Catholic school teachers, administrators, and board members must have a passion for excellence; (No room for mediocrity)
 - This passion for excellence should be exhibited in a well-defined mission and vision and committed to exemplary standards and practices at all levels.
2. **Money follows mission.** The school's philosophy, mission, and vision must be clear, well articulated, understood, advanced, and accomplished. This is according to Kerry – financial support is at its best; a byproduct of the school's creativity, vitality, and vision.
3. **Donors are subjects, not objects.** Catholics have risen to levels of enormous affluence and influence in the United States, especially over the last five decades.

Increasingly, those who donate are sophisticated and strategic in the choices they make, as they seek to maximize the impact of their grant dollars. They look at philanthropy as an investment and expect a return on it. All people search for meaning and desire to be part of something life-giving and consequential, and most want to contribute in deeply meaningful ways. We have an obligation to help identify and communicate those opportunities.

4. **Imagine abundance.** There is always more to be given and received. If there is no confidence in the importance of the mission, one fails to meet the first maxim of successful development: be worthy of generosity. Kerry's favorite definition of a cynic is one who has given up, but not yet shut up. Resist negativity and cynicism in all its insidious forms. Learn to proclaim the good news of your school and how it is making a measurable difference in your area, in the Church, and in the world. Believe honestly that all people want to hear good news and to be part of something life-giving, successful, and, yes, holy.
5. **It's all about joy.** Care for the donor and take delight in the relationship. Evince a collaborative, communal, participatory and enthusiastic disposition. In one instance, a \$1 million donor said, "You make it a joy to give." Don't we wish we could all hear that?
6. **Successful development/ successful leadership.** "Donors do not take risks on leadership. They follow the vibrancy – that is, they seek leaders who are passionate and trustworthy, people of conviction and vision. If donors are confident in the school's leadership, they will be willing to take risks on new initiatives and creative programs."

As in the parable of the mustard seed with which we are all familiar, the possibilities are endless. Use this week to pick our brains, to learn from each other, to share with others your problems and possibilities, and leave here at the end of the week committed to ensure that your school can and will provide a high quality Catholic education for youngsters for generations to come. May God bless each of you in your ministry, in your work, and in the joy that you bring to that work and to others. Imagine abundance and be worthy of generosity!