



# InFormation

News for Pastoral Planners and Those Making the Plan a Reality

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## **INNOVATE OR PERISH**



The traditional parochial school structure cannot meet the diverse, complex demands of the twenty-first century, at least in urban centers, according to Rev. Joseph O'Keefe, Dean of the Lynch School of Education, at Boston College.

So what can be done to ensure the future of inner-city Catholic schools? In his recently published book, *Sustaining the Legacy. Inner-city Catholic Elementary Schools in the United States* (NCEA, 2004), O'Keefe and his fellow researchers recommend the following:

**After-school care:** schools should adopt early-childhood and extended-day programs. Doing so would both offer a service to the community and provide a new source of income for the school. Preschool programs can provide a steady source of income from fees and government vouchers that are available only for these programs. More significant, perhaps, is that preschool programs provide an important pool of applicants for the school's kindergarten and first grade classes.

**Clusters:** By pooling their resources and grouping into "clusters," Catholic schools can cut back on bureaucratic costs. The cluster can hire a staff of experts to assist the schools with development, fundraising, and purchasing (a staff member skilled in

grant writing is essential to the team). This model allows schools (especially urban schools) to maintain their small size and neighborhood roots while giving them access to the professional management expertise necessary for them to thrive in the twenty-first century.

**School boards:** Revitalized school boards are essential for the future of inner-city schools. There are long-standing models of effective boards in Catholic universities, secondary schools, and hospitals. By contributing expertise and funds, board members bring a level of professionalism to Catholic institutions.

**Form partnerships:** Schools cannot accomplish their goals in isolation. That is why innovative schools form partnerships with other service providers. The majority of these partnerships are with other Catholic institutions such as hospitals, social-service agencies, or a university or college. For example, universities can provide degrees and professional development programs for teachers and administrators; they can offer expertise and volunteers in financial management, technology, athletics, physical plant development, and fundraising; and they can assign student teachers and mentors to work in the schools. Social service agencies can place social workers in schools to provide services. Hospitals can provide nurses and doctors. Partnerships with other neighborhood organizations can provide various necessary services.

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The InFormation Newsletter is published by:

The Office of Research & Planning for the use of Parish Pastoral Planners and those who implement those plans.

Suggestions for future articles should be directed to Ron Lill *editor* e-mail to: [orp@adphila.org](mailto:orp@adphila.org) or Phone: 1-215-587-3545 These suggestions are encouraged and most welcome

## **What if our dreams Came true?**

**...And all the Catholics come to Mass pretty regularly and all the Catholic children attend the parish school or religious education program because the parents found it to be the most effective way to honor their baptismal promises to pass on the faith to their children.....**

This is a story about Saint Average. Saint Average is a parish in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia with the average registered membership of 4,549 parishioners, 1,784 families and a parish school of 341 students.(K-8)

Back in 2005, only 30 percent of the people came to Mass on Sunday. At St. Av's, that meant 1,365 people attended the 4 masses the parish offered back in 2005. Seating was never a problem because the Church held the Archdiocesan average of 676 seats. Sunday collection averaged \$5,311 (*based on average annual contributions per household of \$516, from an average household of 2.55 people*)

*-Continued on Page 4-*

# THE 6 ASSUMPTIONS OF PLANNING

*A reprint from the Alban Weekly*



## Planning: Six Assumptions, Six Realities

As a congregational leader, a pastor, rabbi, or a congregational member who holds a formal or informal position of leadership, you have to think about planning. Planning is de rigueur, a nearly obligatory responsibility of leaders across all faith and denominational boundaries. You must help the congregation to understand where it is going, why such a direction is important, and how to get there. You need to have a plan to structure work and maximize the resources of the congregation, and to build agreement so that people are willing to move together toward a shared goal.

You know the basics of planning like how important it is to map out your route, to create a representative process, or to include time for biblical study and discernment.

What are some of the pitfalls and snares to avoid? What are the assumptions and presumptions that can bog down your process?

**1. Assumption: A good planning process will be structured around current research, best practices, and leading edge thinking. Students and scholars of management and leadership are continually examining the field of planning to improve its theories, programs, and practices. The top business articles and management journals can inform you on the latest thinking and data analysis to apply in your congregation.**

Reality: While the newest thinking on planning is energizing to consider, your process must be appropriate to the needs, abilities, and situation of your congregation. If the goal of the church is membership growth, the process must look at membership and attendance data. If the purpose is outreach and evangelism, the process must look at community demographics.

**2. Assumption: A good planning process will find a solution**

that satisfies the various interests in the congregation and, at the same time, meets the congregation's spiritual and organizational needs. The process will result in consensus that represents the greatest portion of the congregation, resolves competing differences, and allows the congregation to move ahead.

Reality: A good planning process will result in clarity of purpose that compels the congregation to move ahead, but might not give everyone what he or she wants. And that's a good thing. An easy consensus may mean that the congregation has limited itself to the lowest common denominator, an idea or plan that almost everyone can agree on. A meaningful plan will address issues that are central to the identity and purpose of the congregation, and allows it to consider a call that surpasses different preferences and opinions.

**3. Assumption: Disagreements and competing preferences mean that the planning process is failing, and leaders should intervene to keep the process on track. A planning process is the way to negotiate different opinions and get a consensus on goals. A skilled leader will steer the group away from landmines and heated arguments to achieve consensus.**

Reality: Planning gives people a safe and structured place to explore what is important to them and their vision for their congregation. Congregations come to agreements on the future through disagreements, like how they will pass on their faith traditions to the next generations. People argue about what they believe is most important, then they accommodate by finally making decisions about their shared future. A leader's role is to provide the structure and safety necessary for people to have the conversations and disagreements they need to discern their future with God.

**4. Assumption: Congregations that are committed to good planning will make the time to do it right.**

Reality: There is a limit to the people and energy available to devote to planning in any organization, not just congregations. Leaders must honor this limit on **Cont. on Page 3**



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## Trivia Box

What percentage of all the world's Catholics live in the United States of America?

The answer can be found on page 3  
Look by the picture of our Holy Father

**Has your parish or Cluster entered into a Planning Process?**

**Do you need a professional Facilitator?  
The office of Research and Planning maintains a list of trained and experienced Resource people.**

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#### assumptions Cont. from page2

resources and ask what part of planning is needed most right now. Is it learning about new ideas, dreaming and shaping a vision, reviewing data to be realistic about a current situation, or shaping specific programs and goals? When the planning task is too large, beyond the realities of ability or available resources, leaders must work on the steps the congregation is ready to take, steps that will lead it toward the goal. Like the headlights on a car at night, they won't light the whole journey but they show you the next part of the road.

Few congregations need and are capable of an extended and exhaustive planning process. Congregations do, however, need to structure ways to talk about their identity, purpose, and future, and they need a path to develop their commitments to act together.

#### **5. Assumption: A planning process must result in a written plan that will serve as a reference and a guide for actions in the future. The written plan is what effects change, creates an accountability structure, and moves a congregation into the future.**

Reality: A planning process provides direction and structure for conversation. The product of a planning process is not necessarily a written plan. The important product of a planning process is a conversation that changes a congregation, whether it results in a written document or a less formal set of agreements. The planning process is a way to provide the direction and the structure necessary for the conversation. A plan is much more than an answer to a question. It is a tool for people to have a necessary conversation about what is important.

It's not the plan, it's the conversation with one another and with God. It's not the graph of attendance figures for the past 15 years that will tell you what to do. It's the conversation about that graph and those numbers, when people wrestle with the tension between their intent and their reality (the graph), that will provide direction and meaning.

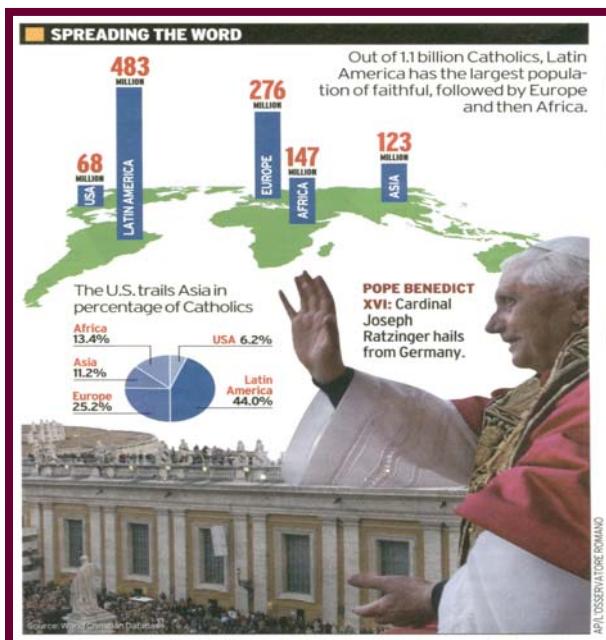
#### **6.Assumption: You need to set a timetable and stick with it. A planning timetable lets you integrate a predetermined planning program into your congregational year, and mesh planning with other important themes on the calendar, such as stewardship.**

Reality: Focusing on a preset program can limit the congregation's opportunity to use space and time for the intrusion of the hand of God or the movement of the Spirit that might operate on a different timetable.

One of the intriguing stories in Hebrew Scripture refers to "pitching tent" in the book of Exodus. When the Israelites wandered in the desert, they moved when the pillars of cloud and fire moved that is, when they had a clear sense of direction. When they were not sure about their next step, they "pitched tent" and waited to discern the next steps of their journey. This suggests that discernment does not operate on a knowable timetable. Instead, the plan and the path were developed within a discerning relationship with God. They were not able to rush ahead directly to the Promised Land. Had Moses been a better planner, and discovered a direct route to make the trip to the Promised Land in a matter of months instead of wandering for years in the desert, the people may not have changed when they arrived. They may have arrived much the same as they left Egypt. It was the journey that was important, when they had to ask questions of how they would form community and what was important about their relationship to God that shaped them as a nation.

So, allow planning to take the needed amount of time, despite the reality that there will be those in the congregation, including yourself, who will be anxious to get to the "answer" and know what to "do."

Based on excerpts from the book, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations*, by Gilbert R. Rendle and Alice Mann. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2003.



from the Advertising Age magazine

#### **An opening prayer for a meeting**

We don't really listen to each other, God. At least not all the time. Instead of true dialogue, we carry on two parallel monologues. I talk. My companion talks. But what we're really concentrating on is how to sound good, how to make our points strongly, how to out shine the other person we're talking with. Teach us to listen as your son listened to everyone who spoke with him. Remind us that somehow, you are trying to reach us through our partner in conversation. Your truth, love, and goodness are seeking us out in the truth, love, and goodness being communicated. When our words are harsh, hostile, angry, we convey the very opposite qualities. Teach us to be still, Lord that we may truly hear our brothers and sisters and, in them, you. **Amen!**

Reprinted from *Christopher Prayers for Today* ©, 1972 The Christophers, and used with permission, The Christophers, 12 E. 48th St N.Y. N.Y. 10017



**-Dreams Continued from Page 1-**

As a member of St. Av's Parish Pastoral Council I was very excited when the council recommended some very specific programs to enrich the Liturgical experience and to work hard to identify the registered Catholics in our Parish who for one reason or another were out of the pew. Active parishioners contacted the less active and assured them that they were not only welcome but needed. Because God loves them, we love them and we needed them to help us celebrate Jesus at our Masses.

Since then our prayers, planning, evangelization, and renewal efforts doubled the number who regularly show up for Mass (that's 2,730 parishioners where once there were only 1,365). With only the 4 Masses we were offering back then it meant standing room only at the more popular Masses. We moved the music ministry to the alter and opened the balcony to worshipers. We also had to employ ushers so that all pews were fully utilized.

We enjoyed an increased offering from an average Sunday collection of \$5,311 to \$10,622(*based on annual contributions per household of \$516*). But that was before we implemented a stewardship program. By just getting people to increase their giving by 1.5% per year , we were able to increase our weekly collection by \$160 (*\$8,340 more per year*). Then we had to come up with the best way to use this money.

Also back in '05, council looked at our school and our parish religious education program and we started a committee that would ensure a quality educational experience in a Catholic environment for the long term future. We studied our demographics and searched for the 28% of Catholic children who were not receiving any formal instruction in the faith. Once we identified them, we contacted the households and presented our educational alternatives to the parents and children. It was a very extraordinary time here at St. Average!

Most of the 28% of elementary aged students that were not accounted for in our formal religious training started to show up because of our diligence in finding them and offering a competitive education in a Catholic environment. Our enrollment increased to 473. Average class size grew from 19 to 26 students. This meant a 35% increase to revenue through tuition. Unfortunately, not quite enough to cover our projected expansion needs because of new technology, sports facilities, and academic subject "houses" for the upper grades. Then, at a planning meeting, we explored needs and opportunities in our parish. While pouring over numbers and statistics we realized that by combining our financially independent school with those of our

neighboring parishes, we could expand a regional school to serve the needs of all the Catholic children in the area with the best of everything, remove our old school, and expand the parking lot to accommodate the increased traffic to Church.

In our old school, 67% of our children (267) were spending 1 to 3 hours not supervised while their parents worked. So in our new regional facility an after school program was added with games, supervised home work, physical play time, and continued faith development activities. The additional revenue from this program offset the expense and the parents were relieved to have a trusted partner supervising their children.

When the Catholic children who were not attending any religious education started coming, our parish religious education program also increased in size. We spent some of the additional revenue on insuring that our religious education program was excellent. All the teachers were educated in theology as well as educational methods. Our teachers and students formed learning teams on the Internet. This increased our capabilities in extending our religious education program into the home. Besides involving the children for more than one short period, parents were able to see what was being taught and could monitor the internet activities of the children.

Fortunately, back in 2005 we didn't fret like so many parishes trying to do less with less. We developed a plan to grow. We also used a booklet called the *Characteristics Found in a Vital Parish*. It helped us to see if our parish measured up. It helped us to check if potential parishioners knew that Jesus is present in our Church and is calling all to come and be with him.

There are a few new vocations from our parish now that there are more people involved and more supportive families but no chance of getting an additional priest right away. We are really blessed to have Fr. John as our pastor. He has a gift for identifying the talents and gifts of each parishioner. This starts when people register and identify the areas in the parish where they would like to serve. Fortunately, today we have many well trained capable people who expect to be asked to support Fr. John and the work of their parish. It's hard to believe it all started back in 2005.

*This fictional article was written by Ron Lill,  
using available statistics and a little imagination.*