InFormation

News for Pastoral Planners and Those Making the Plan a Reality!

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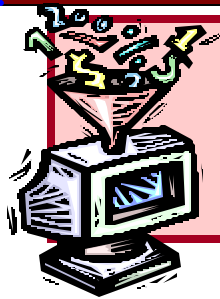## Youth are Leading the Transition to a Fully Wired and Mobile Nation

"Today's American teens live in a world enveloped by communications technologies; the internet and cell phones have become a central force that fuels the rhythm of daily life." according to the authors of a report conducted as part of the Pew Foundation's Internet and American Life Project entitled *Teens and Technology: Youth are Leading the Transition to a Fully Wired and Mobile Nation*
Amanda Lenhart, Mary Madden and Paul Hitlin found that 87% of those between the ages of 12 and 17 are online. Compared to four years ago, teens' use of the internet has intensified and broadened as they log on more often and do more things when they are online.

Not only has the number of users increased, but also the variety of technologies that teens use to support their communication, research, and entertainment desires has grown. These technologies enable a variety of methods and channels by which youth can communicate with one another as well as with their parents and other authorities. Email, once the cutting edge "killer app," is losing its privileged place among many teens as they express preferences for instant messaging (IM) and text messaging as ways to connect with their friends.

In focus groups, teens described their new environment. To them, email is increasingly seen as a tool for communicating with "adults" such as teachers, institutions like schools, and as a way to convey lengthy and detailed information to large groups. Meanwhile, IM is used for everyday conversations with multiple friends that range from casual to more serious and private exchanges. It is also used as a place of personal expression.
The study did not specifically address the Church or religious expression in these forms of communication but the implication is clear. If a parish wants to be in contact with the young people, it will have to communicate with them where they are. This means on the web, through e mail and in IM and text messaging. How has your parish been planning to do these things for this new generation of Catholics?

Annual Pastoral report! What Happens to the data?

In December or November the Chancery Office sends every Pastor the Annual Pastoral Report survey form (also available in Excel format). The parish is requested to fill out the information pertaining to the period January 1st to December 31st of that year and return it to the Chancery by January 31st. Once the Chancery Office receives them back, their staff and the Office for Catholic Education enter all of the Pastor's responses into a shared database.

When all the parishes are entered into the database, the Office for Research and Planning performs a data cleaning process. This cleaning process uses a sophisticated program to identify errors and discrepancies and "flag them" based on criteria, and on answers from previous years or related answers in the same year. For example, it is not common for a parish to have a

What Can the Parish Do to Protect Marriage?

What Parishes need to do to Protect Marriage….

The family, "founded on indissoluble marriage between a man and a woman," is where men and women "are enabled to be born in dignity, and to grow and to develop in an integral manner," explained the Pope in his homily concluding the world meeting of Families in Valencia, Spain, on July 9th.

"The joyful love with which our parents welcomed us and accompanied our first steps in this world is like a sacramental sign and prolongation of the benevolent love of God from which we have come," he noted.

This experience of being welcomed and loved by God and by our parents, explained Benedict XVI, "is always the firm foundation for authentic human growth and authentic development, helping us to mature on the way towards the truth and love, and to move beyond ourselves in order to enter into communion with others and God." The **parish** has an important role to play in supporting marriage especially in the face of less support by society in general. Between June and

December 2005 more than 80 U.S. dioceses conducted focus groups with newly married, middle years, and older couples; Spanish-speaking couples; remarried couples; interfaith and interchurch couples; separated and divorced person; and single young adults. Participants identified their major issues and concerns around marriage; discussed their experience of marriage ministry in their diocese and parishes; and offered suggestions to improve church outreach to engaged and married couples. A summary of the focus group reports are available on the USCCB web site http://www.usccb.org/ Let us share it with you….

(1) Reflecting on their marriage

Married couples were asked to reflect on the positives and negatives of their marriage at this stage. The positives tended to be similar: companionship, trust, good communication, and shared faith. Many mention children. The negatives were more diverse. Time is a major issue for people at all stages. Children, including adult children, are a major concern, with issues around discipline and handing on faith and values. Some Spanish-speaking couples worry about the effect of secular values and the culture on their children.

Parish Communication in Today's Climate of Mistrust
By Dr. R. J. Miller

"Over the past few years a subtle but important shift has taken place in the general climate of opinion in our society. Mistrust has replaced trust, and people in positions of leadership can no longer assume that their words or actions will be given the benefit of the doubt." *Yankelovich, Daniel and Furth, Isabella "The Role of Colleges in an Era of Mistrust" Chronicle of Higher Education, September16,2005,B8*

The American public is increasingly guarded about placing their trust in government or corporations. But lately, this mistrust has extended to the news media, the courts, non governmental organizations, schools and colleges, and even churches. The ability to communicate under these difficult conditions has become an essential skill.

Many Church leaders are used to assuming that they will be seen as acting in good faith and, until fairly recently, this has been a safe assumption. But under today's conditions, the public is just as likely to assume that the Church leader has ulterior motives. In an atmosphere of mistrust, extra care must be taken when communicating. Here are 10 principles for communicating under conditions of mistrust.

1. Recognize that silence, denial and closed doors are almost always interpreted as evidence of bad faith. Church leaders have long been careful about how they approach difficult issues. Confidential, closed-door discussions are extremely valuable in that they give all parties the chance to speak honestly,

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Tivia Box
How many Weddings Take place in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia?

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2001-2005
6,123	5,369	5,049	4,941	4,631	Change -1,492 %Change –24%

Note *Weddings include all those witnessed by a priest and convalidation by renewal of consent.*
These statistics are a product of the *Annual Pastoral Report* as outlined in the article *What Happens to the Data?* (see the article for the web link to the reports generated)

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.
Contact us at: *The Archdiocese of Philadelphia*
222 n. 17th Street Rm.216
Phila, Pa 19103

tn#215-587-3545   **E-mail** *orp@adphila.org*

Parish Communication in Today's Climate of Mistrust

By Dr. R. J. Miller

and they have become accepted as standard procedure. In an ordinary climate, few eyebrows would be raised, but a mistrustful public will attribute the worst possible motives to such activities.

2. Do not assume you will be given the benefit of the doubt. In recent years scandals have damaged the Church. Consequently, Church leaders must tread carefully. A misstep will not be quickly or easily forgiven.

3. Work out your positions on emotion-laden issues in advance- and communicate them effectively within the parish or archdiocesan community. Church leaders must pay careful attention to how their positions on highly polarized issues influence their staff, parishioners, neighbors, and the larger society. And they must take the initiative to communicate, rather than just hastily respond to scandals or controversy.

Communicating such positions internally is a vital part of the process, and one that is often neglected or ineffective. A committee that is responsible for hashing out a policy might engage in a heated discussion, work through a difficult issue, and arrive at a resolution. If that resolution is not effectively understood and supported by the clergy, diocesan administrators, and other parish leaders, it will not be implemented. Simply making sure that everyone gets a memo is not enough. All parties must participate, as appropriate, in shaping policy and ensuring that everyone who speaks for the Church understands it.

4. Be mindful that anything but plain talk is suspect. As a rule, the Church does not go in for plain talk. Subtlety, qualifications, and nuance are the order of the day, and many people in Church life have grown accustomed to that complexity. When communicating with the larger society however, Church leaders must anticipate that the audience may interpret nuance and qualification in the most unfavorable way.

5. Recognize that being "good people" and having "good motives" are not acceptable rationalizations. Pastors and other Church workers are used to seeing themselves as the good guys. Their actions, after all, are aimed not at self-enrichment, but at the long-term health of the Church. Unfortunately, being honorable people acting for the good of a noble institution does not suffice in the public's eyes. Church leaders don't always realize that moving aggressively to promote the Church's interest is often seen as "playing hardball" and has a negative impact on the Church's standing in the eyes of the public.

6. Respond to the public's genuine hunger for honesty and integrity. Polls show the public places an ever higher premium on the traditional benchmarks of integrity; honesty, respect for all constituencies, and high-quality services. In addition, people want organizations to operate transparently, to show a human face to the outside world, to live up to their own professed standards of behavior and to demonstrate a commitment to the larger society. Mistrust is widespread, but beneath it lies a hunger for engagement and deeper connections. Institutions, especially Churches, that break through the layer of mistrust can satisfy that hunger.

7. Build trust. The best way to build trust is to make sure that your performance exceeds expectations whenever possible. This is easy to say but often neglected in practice. There is no more effective way to destroy trust in the Church than to pay lip service to noble ideas while failing to follow through on the things that matter most to people. The archdiocese or parish must make an honest effort to determine what they are really prepared to do and, when in doubt, err on the side of under-promising rather than under-performing.

8. Make a conscious effort to move toward a "stewardship" ethic. Stewardship involves making a commitment to leaving God's gifts, the world and your parish, better off than you found them. It also extends the perimeter of whom the Parish cares for, and how it cares for them, to include a much wider community.

9. Recognize that more is expected of privileged institutions. Parish leaders cannot assume that people know exactly what or how much the archdiocese or the parish are doing to carry out their mission and to fulfill their ethical obligations beyond the bare minimum.

10. Make Prayer a part of every Communication When doing God's work it requires that God should be central and completely involved

The Church has a unique position of privilege. More than any other institution in our society, it is seen as a trusted guardian of truth. That position, which Churches still hold in spite of the current climate, gives them an unusual opportunity for leadership. If they embrace that leadership role, our Churches can help our society regain its ethical bearings and rebuild the public trust.

Prayer for a Meeting

Leader
Lord Jesus, where two or more gather in your name You are present and whatever we agree on and ask in your name, you will take it before the Father and it will be granted **(paraphrased from Luke's gospel)** and so we pray-
All
Please release us from our burdens and daily pressures. Renew us with your Holy Spirit! Open our hearts, our ears and our minds that we may be guided by you. Make us sensitive to the needs of your people as we meet and plan for the parish of …… Keep us mindful of your presence Lord, and respectful of one an other. As we agree and pray in the name of your son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ….. Amen.

Closing

Leader
Father please bless our efforts and bring our vision to fruition if it is your will. In Jesus name we pray ….Amen
Let us conclude with the words our Savior gave us.
All
Pray the Our Father

Other negatives included differences over religious beliefs and practices, health and finances, addictions, and abuse.

(2) Church teaching and marriage

Couples were asked how church teaching on marriage has supported and challenged them.

Many said that the church's teaching on permanence and commitment is very helpful. Others cited the teaching on marriage as a sacrament and a vocation. The teaching on sexuality in general and contraception and Natural Family Planning in particular drew a mixed response. Some cited it as helpful in their marriage, but most who mentioned it saw it as a challenge.

Those who had gone through the annulment process had mixed experiences. For many who attempted it, the process brought healing and closure, even though it was often painful. Others did not even begin the process. They did not see the point, especially if they had no plans to re-marry, or they had heard that it was lengthy or costly (neither is necessarily true). Many people do not know, or are misinformed, about church teaching on divorce and annulments.

(3) Diocesan and parish support for marriage

Focus group participants were asked how their parish and diocese support married couples and what more could be done.

In general, participants did not see the parish as a source of direct support for marriage; that is, their parishes do not sponsor marriage enrichment activities on a regular and ongoing basis (e.g., retreats for married couples, support groups, workshops). Some had participated in, or knew about, diocesan-sponsored activities to celebrate milestone anniversaries. Many people believed that more was available but they simply did not know about it. They wanted more publicity for marriage enrichment activities.

Participants asked for more opportunities for adult faith formation, small groups/ support groups, retreats, mentoring, more

preaching about marriage, and helpful resources and referrals for troubled couples. Some suggested that parishes collaborate with each other around marriage enrichment; this could improve the quality and quantity of what is offered.

Many participants discussed the key role played by pastors. They identified the influence of the priest in three areas. First, people who are experiencing marital difficulties may approach their pastor. They do not expect priests to be counselors, but they want someone to listen and to support them. .

Second, participants said that priests can raise awareness about marriage. A major example is preaching on Sunday. Many said that they rarely heard a homily about marriage.

Third, much of marriage ministry is peer ministry. Some married couples mentor engaged and newly married couples, while others facilitate support groups and faith sharing groups. The priest's role is not to do the ministry himself but to support and encourage those people who are willing to become involved. *See* http://www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/ for more information on the focus groups and study

Annual Pastoral report! What Happens to the data?

100% increase in marriages or baptisms in a year. The number of non Hispanic registered parishioners and Hispanic parishioners have to add up to the total number of registered parishioner reported in a given year.
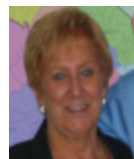
Flags are checked to see if they are *data entry errors* (if the answer in the database does not match the answer on the paper copy), or *internal errors* (e.g. numbers may have been entered correctly but they don't add up. The error can be identified and corrected.) and then *visually reviewed* to see if the error flag can be explained by something else that is known about the parish (e.g a new Pastor imposed more careful counting procedures). When an error is detected that cannot be explained, it is treated as an *external error* (parish entering error), and it is necessary to con-

tact the parish. A fax is sent to the Pastor requesting that he verify the information reported. If the report that is faxed back is ambiguous or is still incorrect, a phone call is made to the parish to resolve the error. Corrections are made and the database is updated.

The Office for Research and Planning then generates reports. One of the most important is sent to the Pastors in early July, this is their Report to Pastor, which includes demographic and sacramental information obtained from the Annual Pastoral Report over a five year period. Another report sent to the Pastors, is the Report on Parish Schools. Cluster Reports and School Cluster Reports are posted on the Archdiocesan web site for each cluster and can be accessed through this page http://archphila.org/pastplan/INDEX/ MandR_index.html

Every response of the Pastors on the Annual Pastoral Report is developed into a report and distributed, via email, to all the Bishops, Regional Vicars and Archdiocesan Departments who may be linked to or work on that particular topic. Each year, 86 different reports are developed. Staff in 42 different offices receive this information to assist them to serve the parishes. Information, summarized in these reports is also used to develop responses to question from the media, the U.S. Conference of Bishops, the Vatican, and other Church organizations and researchers.

Accurate and timely information, provided by conscientious Pastors and their parish staffs, is an integral part of making good decisions for the future of the Church. This is a great opportunity to thank everyone at the parishes for the wonderful effort put forth in building these reports. **Thank You!**

Fran Stratton **Dr. Miller** **Tom Denton**

A special Thanks to Fran, Bob, and Tom of Research and Planning for digesting all the information provided, posting it in usable form for planning. Also for contributing to this article.
Note:
To view reports developed from this information go to;
http://archphila.org/pastplan/INDEX/ MandR_index.html and click on the area of interest upon arriving select the location you wish to view then click on the report