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Development Directions

A free resource for pastors, principals, development directors, volunteers and anyone engaged in the ministry of Catholic development.

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"THE FISH! PHILOSOPHY & CATHOLIC INSTITUTIONS"

By Frank Donaldson, President

Imagine a Catholic parish and/or school where everyone chooses to bring energy, passion and a positive attitude with them each day. Imagine an environment in which people are truly connected to their work, to their colleagues and to their "customers." Impossible? Not at all. FISH! is a process and a way of thinking that helps lead people toward creating that environment.

Several weeks ago, I had the wonderful opportunity to present ISPD's first full day workshop on "Customer Service in Your Catholic School" to over 60 Catholic leaders in the South Bend, Indiana area - some attendees even coming in from Chicago. We had a great time, sharing stories and talking about what it means to be a "customer" in a Catholic environment. We also talked about steps to take to create a "customer service" environment.

One of the major components of our workshop was to present the FISH! Philosophy. This emerged in 1998 from the film, ***FISH! Catch the Energy, Release the Potential***, produced by John Christensen from Chart House Learning. The film is about Seattle's world-famous Pike Place Fish Market and how they developed strong relationships with their customers. I was surprised to see the number of people at the workshop who were familiar with the philosophy. On the evaluation sheets there were a number of people who said that it would have been helpful if we would have applied this FISH! Philosophy to a Catholic parish or school. In other words, make it come alive!

Principle #1 - Have fun! Play!

This first principle may seem a bit strange in a Catholic school or in a Catholic Parish Council meeting, but how many times have we heard how boring and long that meeting was or Mr. or Mrs. So and So's classroom was sooooooooooooo boring. "All he ever did was read to us or have us do 'busy work'." Granted, the business of Catholic education is a serious matter, just as the business of balancing the parish budget needs to be handled in a business-like fashion. But, why can't there be laughter? Why can't there be some relaxed moments in the meeting where someone brings his/her favorite dish and serves it to everyone? Or every meeting someone has to bring 2-3 jokes that can be told at strategic times. Or, as a classroom teacher in the CCD program, having fun by acting or costuming or playing made-up board games. There are so many ways to have fun and learn or conduct business.

A number of months ago, I was working with a client and a parish staff trying to get ready for a Campaign. This was the first meeting of the Operational Chairs - five couples who had agreed to give up their time away from their family and work for over 12 months making sure this Campaign would be successful. As we worked our way through the agenda, the meeting became more and more tense, with the pastor and another Parish Council leader barking out orders and asking when this was going to be done by and who would be responsible for this and on and on. At one point, I paused and looked around the table at the chair couples and realized we had lost them. The look on their faces said it all: That if they were going to be part of something that was total drudgery, then they were going to have to think twice about serving in the future.

After the meeting, I sat down with the pastor and basically said, "Father, if future meetings are going to carry the same pace and tone that the one tonight did, then I predict that we will lose all of our operational chairs within the next 2 months." I could tell he was stunned.

"Why, Frank, do you feel that way?"

"Father, these ten people are volunteers. They have raised their hand and said YES to you because they believe in the mission and vision, and they believe in you. However, they did not sign up to have orders barked at them and come to a meeting and never smile and have some laughter. They are taking time away from the families, and four of those couple have children at home that, undoubtedly, they had to get sitters for. They need to be able to leave these meetings energized, excited about what we are doing and wanting to come back for more."

"I hear what you are saying," was all that the pastor said.

Not knowing what to expect at the next meeting, I came prepared for anything to happen. What did take place was a joy. The entire tone of the meeting was light, yet effective; the pastor baked some homemade bread and brought it; he cracked a few jokes, and at the end, he looked at each and every one of us around the table and said, "I just want you all to know how very much I appreciate the sacrifices you are making. Your dedication to this vision really inspires me as the pastor." Wow! Have fun!

Principle #2 - Make Their Day!

This is all about becoming World Class, actually making someone's day by going above and beyond what people normally expect. How many times do people call the parish office or the Catholic school and get the same old response? Do they have to

go through a maze of voice mail instructions? Are they told that someone is not in and the person answering the phone has no earthly idea when to expect that person? Or, when people come to celebrate Liturgy at our parish on Sunday morning, what do we, as Catholic leaders, do to "make their day"? Are they greeted as they come into church? Do we make ministry leaders' day by recognizing every weekend the outstanding work that so and so is doing in this ministry or that ministry? Are we doing the best we can do to heighten the effectiveness of our music ministry for each Mass? Are homilies inspiring and meaningful? Are lesson plans well thought out and presented with freshness and creativity? Are our professional days in Catholic schools bringing in the very best trainers, educators, innovators? Are we creating new ways to thank our benefactors and engage them further into the life of our Catholic institution? What are we doing, as Catholic leaders, to "make their day"?

Principle #3 - Be There!

I have a little exercise that I would like to recommend. Over the next few days, as you talk with your co-workers, your faculty members, your parish leaders, be aware of how these conversations progress. There seem to be many people who would do well to listen more than they speak, myself included. How many times have we begun to share a story or an experience or a thought or a way of thinking and after 1-2 minutes, the person we are telling this to turns it around and launches off into a 3-5 minute monologue about their experience? What we had to say bears little significance any more. How well do we listen when we speak with that student who may be having trouble in Math? Are we really there for our fellow parishioner who seems to be reaching out to us in hopes of receiving a sympathetic ear? Do we really seem interested when that parent calls and wants to discuss a situation at home? Do we zero in on that parent at the Parent Teacher Conference and give them our utmost attention, even though we will be speaking to 30 other parents that evening? Be there. *Development is the **meaningful** involvement of people in your mission and vision for the future.* As we seek to develop our Catholic parishes and schools, let's do so through engaging people into meaningful relationships. Let's "be there" for them.

Principle #4 - Choose Your Attitude!

In last month's issue, we discussed this and ended with a quote from Teddy Roosevelt. Here's a quote by Charles Swindoll that I would like to share with you:

"The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failure, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company, a church, a school, a home. The remarkable thing is that we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past; we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you - we are in charge of our attitudes."

And so, the FISH! Philosophy is applicable to Catholic institutions. I have shown the video at many parish staff meetings and many Catholic school faculty and staff meetings. It always is a hit, simply because if we follow the principles -- Have Fun, Make Their Day, Be There, and Choose Your Attitude - our culture and environment will certainly be receptive to welcoming and engaging people into the life of our

Catholic school and/or parish.

MERRY CHRISTMAS & HAPPY NEW YEAR!

All of us here at The Institute of School & Parish Development wish you and your family a Happy, Blessed and Joyous Holiday Season.

The ISPD office in New Orleans will be closed from Noon on Friday, December 21, 2007 through Wednesday, December 26th so that all ISPD employees and associates can enjoy the holidays with their families. We will re-open on Wednesday, December 27, 2007. To celebrate New Year's our office will be closed December 31 and January 1, 2008.

SPRING 2008 WORKSHOPS will be posted soon

Dynamic presenters share proven strategies and discuss development issues during one and two day seminars for Catholic parishes and schools. These workshops are conveniently held across the country at an affordable price of \$69-\$250 .

We hope you'll join us!

Pending Topics Include:

- ** Become a More Welcoming, Engaging & Affirming Catholic Parish **
- ** Best First Steps to Take in Beginning Your Catholic Development Efforts **
 - ** Capital Campaigns That Produce Results **
- ** Catholic School Enrollment Solutions - One and Two Day Seminars **
 - ** Customer Service in Your Catholic School **
 - ** Long Range Planning **

ISPD Also Conducts On-Site Workshops

Offered to Catholic schools and parishes within a single diocese, these workshops are designed to meet your specific needs.

- [Check Here for More Information on ISPD Development Workshops](#)

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