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Catholic School Enrollment Talk

ISPD is your Catholic School Enrollment Solution for maintaining and/or increasing the quantity, quality, or diversity of your elementary or secondary Catholic school enrollment.

"Telecounseling & Lent Both Involve Vulnerability"

By John Cooper, ISPD Enrollment Specialist

You are in the "heat of the recruitment battle" as you head into the month of March. The single most critical tactic you can employ at this moment is "telecounseling". Not telemarketing! Telecounseling!!!

If telecounseling is so critical, why don't all Catholic schools embrace it as part of their recruitment effort?

The answer is found in our faith. The sign of the cross is one of our greatest identifying symbols as Catholics and we focus particular attention on the cross during the season of Lent. The cross is a sign of triumph over death. However, the cross is also a sign of vulnerability. In telecounseling one-on-one with prospective families we place ourselves in that vulnerable position. However, just as the cross leads Jesus to the resurrection so too can telecounseling lead your school's enrollment to new life.

What exactly is involved in telecounseling?

At its most basic level, telecounseling strives to communicate three things to families who are considering your school:

1. These families need to hear that you welcome them and that you want them in your school community. Never assume that a family has heard this welcoming embrace until you see their child seated as a student in your school in August.
2. They need to hear the benefits from someone who officially represents the school (e.g. principal, staff, or faculty). They expect that someone who knows the school intimately can tell them why they should "buy into" a faith based education. Not everyone enjoys talking on the telephone so pick faculty or staff who are the best salespersons for your school.
3. They need to hear the benefits from someone who is benefiting from the school right now (e.g. a parent or an alum). Choose a parent(s) or alum who can best articulate the experience of your school in an empathetic and

convincing manner. Make sure that they care enough to listen and appreciate the importance of the decision that the prospective family is making. Give them relevant information to share about the school. NEVER give them a script. Keep the conversation natural.

If this sounds like two telephone calls need to be made, that's exactly right.

The enrollment system that ISPD offers in its seminars shows you how to operationalize telecounseling year round. However, even if telecounseling has been absent all year, it can still be effective, particularly in the next two months. Here are a few pointers to share with those who are telecounseling for your school.

Tips for Making Effective Calls:

- Introduce yourself and tell why you are calling
- Establish rapport and visit with them
- Personalize the conversation. People love to talk about themselves, especially their children. Ask questions that allow the prospect to open-up about themselves.
- Ask open-ended questions that create dialogue. Stay away from "Yes" or "No" answers.
- Embrace questions such as "What are you looking for in a school?"
- Let the prospect do the talking (80/20 rule)
- Answer questions thoroughly
- When answering questions emphasize features, stress benefits, and give lots of examples
- Close by asking for action such as come to our open house, would you like to apply and/or register, etc.
- If you are going to make two phone calls (as suggested), separate them by about a month apart. Use your judgment based on notes taken from the first call as an email might be better than a second call.
- Always take notes from the conversation (even if the note is that you left a voice mail message) and forward them to the person responsible for the prospective student information in your school.

Signs of Enrollment Success

Joelyn Aukerman, the development and admissions person at Christ The Divine Teacher School in Latrobe, Pennsylvania (Greensburg Diocese), recently shared this quote about how Catholic School Enrollment Solutions helped her school's enrollment:

"Our enrollment has increased this year as a result of our improved communication processes learned at your seminar! The day we left your seminar I proclaimed to Brian Casey and Mike Ziemski that I would try to increase our enrollment by 10. It has increased by at least 30. Please use me as your reference - I would love to repay you for your help!"

If you would like to share your enrollment successes, please email me at jcooperispd@aol.com

A Catholic School Web Site to Watch

St. Joseph School in Tiffin, Ohio

www.tiffinstjoe.org/

In January, I presented ISPD's Catholic School Enrollment Solutions workshop to schools in the Diocese of Toledo. During the presentation I visited with Dave Kraft, the technology coordinator for St. Joseph School in Tiffin, Ohio. Dave shared how his school is using pod casting on their web site. Visit the site and check out Amy Recker as she speaks on the importance of Catholic Education for her family. Your school could do something very similar. People appreciate web site interactivity. Most importantly, they like to see unique ways of communicating the benefits of a Catholic education. St. Joseph's pod cast is worth your time to investigate.

- [Click here to visit St Joseph School](#)

Spiritual Thought

Several years ago as director of enrollment services at a small, Catholic college, I would go to the chapel to pray during lunch. I found this quiet time in a beautiful chapel extremely rewarding. However, some days a bird would get into the chapel. Aside from flying low over my head as I sat and prayed, what distracted me most was how the bird would crash into the clear glass window in the choir loft. Unless I would go and get the maintenance person to let it out, the bird would crash against the window until it died. I asked the maintenance person to show me how to open the window and as I started opening the window I noticed something - there were birds who had hit the window so hard in the past that they did not automatically want to fly through the window even when it was open for fear that they would again crash. Whether closed or open, the freedom that awaited them on the outside all looked the same.

We are often like those birds. We see what looks like freedom or the solution to a problem. However, we have difficulty deciding when life's window is open or closed. Maybe you are feeling that way today whether with your school's enrollment or with life in general. We can't control the responses of those who choose not to enroll, but we can control our perception of their decision and what that means for us in the present. In faith I know that there is an open window for your school's enrollment. The season of Lent provides us with a perfect opportunity to exercise greater patience in discerning those open or closed windows. I pray for God's blessings to you on a wonderful Lenten journey.

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