



January 2009

Development Directions

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

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A Holiday Conversation with Father Dan

By Frank Donaldson, President

With the downturn in the economy over the past year, many parishes and schools have expressed concern over some of the following challenges:

- Sunday collections are down by 10-20%.
- Major financial leaders are holding off in making any commitments until they see what will happen to the economy.
- Capital campaigns and annual funds are "dragging their feet" as donors ponder what they should support and what they should not.
- Tuition collections are a problem in some Catholic schools where job layoffs have been rampant.
- Endowment funds and the corpus of other investment vehicles have suffered 20-30% losses.
- Future student enrollment in Catholic schools is a challenge, based upon the economy we are in.
- Trying to be a "Total Stewardship" parish is tough in good times, much less in bad.

Obviously, not every parish and school is facing the above situations, but over the past 6-8 months I have heard from many who are. Between Christmas and New Year's, I had a long conversation with a pastor whom I have known for a long time. We've never worked together, but he has attended one or two of our workshops, and he - in principle - understands the true meaning of Catholic Development. It was an interesting conversation, because he is facing a crisis in his parish unlike anything he has ever had to deal with. Many of the above bullet points are alive and well, and there aren't any textbook answers to solve them. As he said, "They sure didn't teach us too much about all of this when I was in the seminary."

Let's listen in.

"Father Dan, so good to hear from you," I said. "How is life in the cold northeast?"

"Well, we're at 12 degrees and falling - both literally and figuratively. But, I'm sure we're no worse

off than anybody else, Frank. How are the good folks at ISPD? Still battling those 70 degree temperatures in December?" he inquired.

"We're doing fine, Father. Everybody you met when you were down here in New Orleans for the ISPD Development School is still on board, and we're working with some challenging parishes and schools," I answered.

"Well, I figured you guys would still be strapping on the gear and going to work. Too much Cajun blood with some of you to ever lay down on the job. How's Bernard?" (our senior associate)

"Father, he's still criss-crossing the globe - probably has 5 million domestic miles on Delta by now. Driving flight attendants crazy as usual."

"Frank?" Father Dan asked. "Let me see if I could pick your brain a little bit, if you have the time."

"Fire away, Father. This time of the year, I've got nothing but time, although my ten year old daughter and I are heading for the Hornets game in a couple of hours."

"Well, Frank, I've been at this parish now for three years. Nice place. People are friendly. About 1400 families. Your rule of 30-30-40 is alive and well. About 30% of our families are involved; 30% are not involved, and 40% are just out there - names are on the roles. Child needed to be baptized; daughter needed to be married; spouse needed to be buried. You know how it is. Good people, but it's hard to get them engaged. Same ones doing the same thing."

"Well, Father, knowing you, you probably have tried a bunch of new ideas - new programs, new ministries. You were always good at creating," I responded.

"Yes. I did and still do, but nothing dramatically has changed, and now with the economy the way it is, things have only gotten worse. Job layoffs, collections way off, school tuition payments late. I spend a lot of my time trying to make judgment calls without being too harsh with people. It does take money to run this place, you know."

"Father, obviously, you've got some real challenges. Tell me, over the past year what kinds of things have you been doing?"

"Well, we've tried a bunch of things," he said. "I've written letters to all of the parish families and let them know where we stand. I've spoken from the pulpit several times about our financial situation. Back 6-8 months ago, we hired a company to come in to write a series of letters to our parishioners asking them to increase their giving, or if they weren't doing anything, to please consider it. One letter right after the other, and although we saw a positive blip on the books, after 4-5 months, we were back to where we started. No real foundation of people."

"Father, as you know," I said, "that's the key. We seem to get so good at mailing and e-mailing and talking from the pulpit and over the PA and holding parent meetings and posting flyers and putting great stuff on our web site and asking people to sign up for this and that, and yet we don't seem to take the time to talk to folks - eyeball to eyeball."

"Frank, I agree," he stated. "It seems the only chances I have to interact with people are after Mass, at staff meetings, when I visit folks in the hospital and when I meet with families for baptisms and funerals and weddings. Any suggestions?"

"Well, the first thing is to realize - as you know -- that the heart of Catholic Development is building relationships. But it is so hard to do because it does take time. Yet the first step is to build a culture that is inviting, hospitable, welcoming, and engaging. Father, sometimes I am reluctant to say this, but it all starts and is continuously supported by you. You don't have to cook the meal, but you certainly do have to serve it."

"What do you mean by that, Frank?" Father asked.

"Father, you set the tone for whether or not the parish is warm. You establish that atmosphere where people feel like they belong and want to keep coming back. You do it from the pulpit; you do it by picking up the phone 10-12 times per month and calling families that you don't know but who are registered as parishioners in your parish. You get your Pastoral Council members to do

the same - by calling 8-10 families each month and saying hi. You do it by proclaiming at your key ministry meetings that "warmth" is the theme of the parish, and everyone needs to get on board. You do it by launching a vibrant Greeters' Ministry or by holding 3-4 Town Hall meetings every year and just opening up the floor to talk and invite input. You do it by hosting a pastor breakfast once a month and invite 8-10 families whom you don't know too well but they are parishioners. You do it by creating an action plan for People Engagement and inviting 50+ to help you come up with action strategies to make it all come alive. You do it by personally visiting 5 families in their home each month and having a cup of coffee. You do it by getting others to "buy into" this way of thinking on how to build church. You do it by hosting "Bring a Friend" Sundays 3-4 times per year where you invite your parishioners to bring a friend to celebrate Liturgy. You do it by surveying your people at least once a year and asking their opinion - at Mass, online, through the mail, or any other way you can get their best wisdom. You do it by having the parish host Family Night once or twice a month and having movies and games and sports and hamburgers and hot dogs. You do it by always remembering that "belonging does lead to believing."

"Frank, that sure sounds like a lot of work. I am soooo busy. How can I do all of this?" Father Dan inquired.

"Father? Two things," I replied. "First of all, you cannot do all of this by yourself, but you've got to set the tone, and you've got to take the first steps. These are first steps that have never been done before like make 5-10 phone calls every month to say hi. Can you imagine the impact this will have? In those parishes where the pastors took the time to do this most people respond by saying, 'I can't believe Father took the time to call me.' Secondly, you've got to answer the question: How important is all of this to your parish? If you truly believe that people are the answer - and here at ISPD we do - then you will take the time to make this happen. I know it seems like a lot but look at the possibilities. People are craving for relationships and to feel a strong sense of belonging. Look at the hundreds of thousands of people who were at our new president's inauguration on January 20th. What were they looking for? Many were there looking for hope, looking to belong to something meaningful, looking to be part of something that will make a difference. That is what we can do in the Catholic Church - we can give people hope; we can show people the way to come in and make a difference; we can invite people to belong. But you know what, Father? In our experience that just 'ain't gonna happen' by sending them another letter asking for more money, or standing up in the pulpit and saying how bad things are, or inviting people to come to the Lord's table and not making them feel welcome, warm and needed."

"That's a tall order, Frank."

"Yes, Father, it certainly is, but what is exciting is what can happen when a parish and/or a Catholic school places the emphasis on building a stronger faith community," I said.

"Frank, by the way, how is your parish - Our Lady of Lourdes down there in Slidell? Did that hurricane totally destroy you guys?"

"Father, I've got to brag, if you will excuse me. We are wrapping up our capital campaign with our parish families and are getting ready to reach out across the country. But, here is the most amazing news I have ever had to report in 20 years in this business. Lourdes has 1100 families who are back after Hurricane Katrina. 910 of them have participated in this Campaign with their Gift of Prayer and/or their Gift of Involvement and/or their Gift of Financial Participation. We actually expect to hit close to 90%! And you know what, Father? It all goes back to two things: 1. Before Katrina, we began this People Engagement effort, and 2. After Hurricane Katrina, our pastor and our associate pastor continue to "warm up" the parish on a daily basis. People simply love to belong, and that tone is set by our leaders."

"Frank, that is great news!"

"Yes, Father, it is, and the greater news is that this all works, and you will be great at moving this forward at your parish. It can be done, and I have no doubt that you can set the tone and establish the pace. It is all about bringing people to Christ and Christ to people. And, you are so good at that. But it starts with a handshake, or a hug and hello."

ISPD to Host Four Webinars This Spring

With the success of our webinar back on November 24th on "Getting Ready for a Capital Campaign", ISPD will host four additional one-hour webinars this spring. Here is the schedule:

- **February 2009:** "Building a Strong Catholic Development Effort in Tough Economic Times"
- **March 2009:** "Getting Your Parish and/or School Ready for a Capital Campaign"
- **April 2009:** "Understanding the Successful Traits of a Successful Catholic Parish and/or School Development/Advancement Director"
- **May 2009:** "Evaluating and Assessing Your Catholic Development/Advancement Efforts"

Please look out for special announcements coming from ISPD about the date, time and cost of these webinars.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

All of us here at ISPD would like to wish all of you a very Happy, Prosperous, and Meaningful New Year. May 2009 be one of hope, promise, and accomplishment as we share the Good News by engaging people into our faith communities.

ISPD 15 MIN Educational DVDs on Catholic Development Free upon Request

- *An Introduction to Long-Range Planning for Catholic Parishes*
- *An Introduction to Long-Range, Strategic Planning for Catholic Schools*
- *An Introduction to ISPD's Total Stewardship Process*
- *Creating the Strategic Plan for Development for Parishes and Schools*
- *Inviting, Involving, and Engaging More People into the Life of Your Catholic Parish*
- *Getting Ready for a Capital Campaign, Part I*
- *Implementing a Capital Campaign, Part II*

To receive your free 15 minute DVD, please visit the [Resource Center](#) on our website.

ISPD OFFERS FREE SERVICE: A Place for You to Announce Job Openings in Catholic Development, Advancement and Total Stewardship

ISPD is pleased to offer a free service to any Catholic parish, school or diocese. We have a new button on our website entitled [Development Job Postings](#). By clicking on this button, visitors can go directly to this page and view job announcements and opportunities from area Catholic institutions. Twice per month in our two newsletters, ISPD will highlight this opportunity and invite readers to view these announcements. These newsletters reach over 11,000 Catholic leaders by e-mail each month.

Each announcement should be no more than 200 words and should invite people to submit a resume to your specific address (e-mail or physical). We ask that you mail new requests (with the

announcement attached in a Microsoft Word document) to ISPD@aol.com , including the name of your contact person and a telephone number where we can reach you, just in case we need clarification on the announcement. Announcements will be put in alphabetical order by institution.

- [Click here to read more about these job opportunities in Catholic development](#)

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. *Catholic School Enrollment Talk* is our free monthly online newsletter for anyone interested in Catholic school enrollment solutions.

- [Subscribe today!](#)

SPRING 2009 WORKSHOPS

Dynamic presenters share proven strategies and discuss development issues during one day seminars for Catholic parishes and schools. These workshops are conveniently held across the country at an affordable price of \$75-\$99.

We hope you'll join us!

Topics Include:

- ** Annual Fund **
- ** 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 **
- ** Long Range Planning **
- ** Strategic Plan for Development **

Locations Include:

Austin, Chicago, Cincinnati, Ft. Lauderdale
Kansas City, Lexington, Little Rock, Omaha
Philadelphia, Providence, Raleigh, Seattle

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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The Institute of School and Parish Development (ISPD) is a national, Catholic development consulting firm created to serve Catholic schools, parishes and dioceses in the areas of planning, marketing, fund-raising, and resource development.

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to anyone you think could benefit from this information. If there are any topics you would like to see covered in a future newsletter, please contact us.

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