



Institute of School and Parish Development (ISPD)
SPECIAL EDITION NEWSLETTER

**NAVIGATING CHALLENGING WATERS:
THE CORONAVIRUS AND CATHOLIC SCHOOL AND PARISH DEVELOPMENT**

by
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Not since September 2005, several days after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast, have we created and published a SPECIAL EDITION newsletter like this one with specific suggestions for Catholic school and parish leaders.

As we all know, these are challenging times. Whereas last week many were saying, “Let’s take it day by day,” now it is more of, “Let’s monitor this hour to hour.” The impact and spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) has turned our world upside down. Today, nothing is more important than all of us taking the necessary steps to protect and assure the health and well-being of our families, friends, neighbors, and colleagues; our school and parish communities, the communities in which we reside, and people all across the globe who are faced with this virus. In addition, at the heart of our faith is our ability and opportunity to pray for swift response and remedy.

Over the past few days, we have heard of more and more schools closing and moving into on-line teaching or simply closing for a few weeks. It began on the university level and now we hear of dioceses who are making that same decision – both for high schools and Catholic elementary schools. So, what do those who work as development – advancement - - stewardship directors do? How do we handle our enrollment management action items? What about staying in touch with donors? How do we know what next steps to take to invite people to participate in our Annual Fund? What happens to the capital campaigns we are in the middle of? Not knowing what the upcoming weeks are going to bring and realizing that many of us may be homebound or “office-bound” much more than ever before, ISPD would like to share fifteen suggestions for you to consider. Most all of these are based upon the fact that – in the short term -- we will not be conducting business like we used to, and the ability to bring people together and meet one-on-one or host gift receptions or open houses or school visits at this time would not be the prudent thing to do.

**FOR THOSE CATHOLIC LEADERS WORKING IN THE AREA OF OPERATIONAL VITALITY
(COMMUNICATIONS, ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT, CONSTITUENT RECORDS, ALUMNI
INVOLVEMENT, FUND -- ANNUAL, CAPITAL, ENDOWED, PLANNED, MEMORIAL --
DEVELOPMENT, AND SPECIAL EVENTS (FUND-RAISING AND FRIEND-RAISING))**



- **Suggestion # 1: Communicate, Communicate, Communicate.**

This is at the heart of everything we need to be doing at this time, and I have no doubt you are right on top of this. Like some have already done, establish a special place on the home page of your website and give that spot a title so people can recognize it. One school has it labeled, (COVID-19 UPDATE NEWS FOR ST. JOHN SCHOOL). Post something every day, all the way from the latest news impacting your school to a human-interest story of one of your families and how they are coping.
- **Suggestion # 2: Set up Prayer Groups/Chains.**

This is a wonderful time – with both our Catholic schools and parishes – to create Prayer Chains and Prayer Groups and invite people to sign up and pray the rosary or pray a novena or pray a special prayer that one of your students created for these times.
- **Suggestion # 3: Solidify Your Database.**

Possibly, with some time on your hands, this can be a wonderful opportunity to update and better segment your database. Many of the schools and parishes we work with always say that one day they will get to it – meaning they will create more fields to segment alumni by giving history and geography, segment parents by occupation and profession, update the addresses of recent graduates, segment donors by giving levels, segment volunteers by areas where they are serving, etc.
- **Suggestion # 4: Assemble Your 90-Day Leadership Team.**

More than likely, there are a few people in your Catholic school and/or parish who are monitoring, gathering information, making decisions, and communicating. What I am suggesting here is what we found so effective after Hurricane Katrina. Assemble a 90-Day Leadership Team of 12-15 people who represent all main areas of your school and/or parish. Many of them could be leaders (administration, board, faculty, parents, donors, alums, etc.) who are already in place in leadership positions, but now you are focusing them on immediate challenges. Much of what they would do could be done on-line via electronic communication vehicles. Please see suggestions below and plug them in where needed.
- **Suggestion # 5: Research GoToMeeting, Video Conferencing, Zoom, etc.**

You may have this one covered, but many of the schools and parishes we work with mainly use conference calling when they want to communicate with more than two people. There are many things to explore – GoToMeeting, GoToWebinar, Zoom, video conferencing, etc. Now is the time to research – great job for a member or two from the 90-Day Leadership Team.
- **Suggestion # 6: Communicate Importance of Your Mission.**

Woven throughout all your communication pieces should be the constant reinforcement of your school's mission and/or your parish's mission. Everything you are doing now in these turbulent times should all go back to your mission. Remind people of that; tie in all these activities and processes to the fact that they all are seeking to expand the mission of your school and/or parish. For example, if part of your mission



statement is to help build God's Kingdom, then mention how that is being done in establishing the Prayer Group or the Prayer Chain.

▪ **Suggestion # 7: Conduct a Survey with Survey Monkey.**

Pipeline to your people. Now is the time to learn how to use Survey Monkey if you don't know how – and most of you do! Send out a survey to parents, to alums, to parishioners, to donors, along with an introductory letter letting them know you are seeking their input. Ask open-ended as well as specific questions:

- Are there any questions they would like to have answers on regarding your Catholic school or parish?
- Is there anything they believe you could be of service to them about?
- Would they like to be part of a Prayer Chain?
- Would they like to know what opportunities are available for them – during these times – in the parish?
- Would they like to work on a short-term plan with the school and/or parish and give their input on how to solve 4-5 challenges the school and/or parish may be facing? (See Suggestion # 8).
- Etc.

▪ **Suggestion # 8: Launch Short-Term Planning Process with Five Challenges.**

- With your 90-Day Leadership Team, come up with five challenges you believe your school and/or parish faces during these times. Have the challenges worded to say, "How can we . . ."? For example:
 - How can we best communicate with our school families during these times when we do not see our students on a daily basis?
 - How can we best continue to reach out and invite people to be part of our incoming class in 2020 – 2021?
 - How can we best continue the capital campaign we launched three months when it is difficult to meet one-on-one and invite folks to receptions?
 - How can we make sure we best communicate with all our ministries during these times when activities and meetings have been postponed?
 - How can we continue to let people know the importance of their gifts to the parish when many are not coming to Mass on the weekends?
- Have your Leadership Team identify 10-15 people each they know from the parish and/or school and then invite them via e-mail to SOLVE THE CHALLENGES.
- Have your 90-Day Leadership Team (via e-mails and conference calls and GoToMeeting) go through these solutions and then create a specific plan of action. Everything we are talking about involves people – even if it is not eyeball to eyeball.

▪ **Suggestion # 9: Host a Weekly 5-Minute State of the School/Parish Address.**

Using a platform like GoToMeeting, invite your parents and/or parishioners, alums, etc. to join you (principal, pastor, president) every week for a 5 minute State of the



School/Parish address where – via PowerPoint – you can share the latest updates on school and/or parish news and also refer to results or invite people to be part of some of these suggestions that you are moving forward on.

▪ **Suggestion # 10: Inquire as to What Others Are Doing.**

There are so many wonderful minds at work right now in other schools and parishes, creating new ideas and solutions for what we face. Let 1-2-3 members of your 90-Day Leadership Team make 10 calls each to other Catholic schools and/or parishes and simply identify themselves and say they are gathering the best practices of what other Catholic schools and parishes are doing.

▪ **Suggestion # 11: Build Relationships with Phone Calls.**

Now is the time to reach out to those people (key donors, parents, alums, parishioners) you have wanted to touch base with but have not had the time to do so. Just pick up the phone and see how they are doing and let them know what is happening in your school and/or parish. This is also a good time to circle back to those who have gotten involved in your annual giving or your capital campaign this fiscal year and say thank you again.

▪ **Suggestion # 12: Establish a National Advisory Group.**

In the upcoming NCEA book we wrote titled *Fifteen More Lessons Learned in 30+ Years in Catholic School Development*, we devote one of the chapters to creating National Advisory Boards – alums, past parents, friends, former parishioners, etc. who live out of town/state. The purpose is to seek their best wisdom 4-6 times per year and invite their input and perspective on challenges you face. Especially valuable for Catholic schools, now is the time to put this into motion. The idea here is move outside of that ripple of people you interact with all the time. The 90-Day Leadership Team can help with this, and it all can be done via some of the platforms we have mentioned thus far.

▪ **Suggestion # 13: Make sure on-line giving on your website is clear for all.**

Because you may not have many personal ways for this to happen over the upcoming weeks and maybe months, please make sure this is clear and always mention this in your communication pieces – when and where appropriate.

▪ **Suggestion # 14: Take an On-Line Class in Development/Advancement/Stewardship.**

ISPD offers a number of on-line classes in Catholic school and parish development. We are thinking about offering 3-4 of them over the next three months. Possible topics would be:

- Understanding Catholic School Development
- Total Parish Development: Building Your People Base.
- Communicating and Building Your Development/Stewardship Efforts in These Turbulent Times.
- Successful Enrollment Management
- Total Stewardship Process in Your Parish: A 12 Month Effort



Please let us know (frank@ispdconsulting.com) if you may be interested in any of these courses, especially during this time where you may have a few more hours to take an on-line course.

▪ **Suggestion # 15: ISPD Example in Action – Please read.**

As a Catholic consulting company, we work with 15 Catholic schools and/or parishes at a time – throughout the country. With the wonderful people we are working with right now, we are in the process of changing how we communicate and how we deliver all of the information and materials when people are unable to meet in person and when we are challenged to get on an airplane and travel. I thought I would share with you something that went out from one of our clients this morning. This is a Catholic elementary school that is in the middle of a strategic planning process that involves over 80 people. Thought it might be helpful.

We wanted to let you know that we are closely monitoring the Coronavirus situation. Working with our consultant from ISPD, we are developing a plan to continue the momentum and good work of the planning process – even if the March meetings are affected. Likely, we would meet virtually, and we ask that you please keep those dates already reserved on your calendar to participate.

As we get closer to the meeting date, we will communicate notes from the last meeting as well as agendas/details/instructions for the March meeting.

Many thanks for your participation and your patience. We pray for God's guidance and offer prayers for the health and safety of all those who are affected.

Yes. We will continue! It may not be “eyeball to eyeball” for now, but we can build this plan; we can communicate with our people; we can reach out and invite people to belong; we can have people feel part of something bigger than them; we can do meaningful work in this ministry. Belonging leads to believing NOW IS THE TIME TO INVITE PEOPLE TO BELONG. We pray the above suggestions will help.

By the way, if you need any guidance on the above suggestions, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me – frank@ispdconsulting.com.