

International Catholic Stewardship Council – 61st Annual Conference: Orlando, Florida – October 1-4, 2023

(NOTES)

It was really an honor and privilege to represent our Parish at the just concluded ICSC Conference in Orlando, Florida. The conference was both a learning experience and a networking opportunity. It was beautiful and extremely rewarding. We were excited and also humbled to note that as a Parish, we were already taking some of the actions that were discussed. However, there is always room for improvement and new opportunities for growth.

Below please find a synopsis of the different sessions we were able to attend. We have organized this report according to sessions in order to be as precise as possible and also to acknowledge and recognize each speaker's contribution.

1. Introducing Welcoming Pathway: (Our Sunday Visitor – various speakers)

Filling the Pews:

Parishes are always presented with lots of obstacles in trying to retain mass attendance levels. These obstacles may include but not limited to 'Parish not being engaging enough or not welcoming, peoples' fear of not fitting in, attitude of parishioners and clergy.

- **So how do you fill and retain the pews?** Parishes are presented with opportunities to reset their parishes and encourage attendance not only for active parishioners but also for visitors, as well as lukewarm parishioners during high Mass attendance times, especially at these times:
 - Ash Wednesday
 - Holy Week

- September when CCE starts
- The Advent seasons.
- These are times to show compassion and compelling reasons to belong to your parish.

What to Do

- As much as possible, disprove such obstacles such as ‘not engaging enough, not welcoming, fear of not fitting in, attitude of parishioners and clergy. Maximize all opportunities when new people or visitors.
- Capitalize on your strong points when mass attendance is high and get people to come back
- Be genuinely hospitable to both old and young. The way you treat and welcome people could be that difference - Tone and perception can make a huge difference. People encounter God through us so our attitude makes a great difference. Every Parish should embrace **Radical hospitality**: It is something we live and breathe every day! In the right situation, radical hospitality can be contagious. It is great for evangelization. Train volunteers for outstanding and welcoming atmosphere.
- Form personal relationships with people. Some people need that physical touch i.e., hugs and handshakes, to feel welcome. Faith is also founded on relationships.
- It is also important to have a **Parish Mission Statement** that everyone knows and believes in. We need a parish where we can proudly say that there is no better place to be a Catholic than this Church.
- It is everybody’s mission (not just the clergy), to bring people back to the church. We should see people as God sees us and as opportunities to save souls.
- To be a more engaging Parish, we should be more accommodating especially with younger couples with children. We should always encourage that feeling of belonging, acknowledge people and get them involved and engaged. Everyone has a unique gift and there should always be a ministry for everyone. Ministry leaders come in very useful here. **Find something to**

do for everyone who volunteers! Don't be selfish. Everyone is there to serve for the collective good.

- Everyone in the parish has to be on the same page, pastors, staff members as well as parishioners. This is a continuous process and not just a transactional process.

Simple Acts that Maybe Helpful

- Establish zip code family groups who can check up on families in the community from time to time
- Grief ministries who can check up on bereaved parishioners just to see how they are coping
- Provide parish life brochures that share information about the parish
- From time to time, send out welcome home letters to reassure active parishioners and invite lukewarm people to come back
- Small changes can have tremendous impacts; so, commit to making small changes, if needed, and sticking with it.
- Finally, let response to God's goodness motivate us in all we do. (Bishop of Detroit???)

The following quote is rather fitting:

Consult not your fears but your hopes and your dreams. Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what is still possible for you to do. (Saint Pope John XXIII).

2. Is Your Donor Engagement Relational or Transactional? (Speaker: Micheal MacKinnon of Parish Soft).

The covid pandemic, resulted in fewer regular in person mass attendance for most parishes, and therefore lower regular collections. The results include difficulty in engaging families and missed opportunities to connect with donors.

Parishes can strive to overcome this by trying the following:

- Building deeper bonds and personal relationships with parishioners by providing volunteer opportunities for all who wish to serve
- Checking up on parishioners regularly especially when they have been absent from Mass. Calling to check up on them and not always to solicit funds.
- Creating groups like book clubs and work groups for people to connect
- Organizing intergenerational engagements
- Getting out of our comfort zones and doing something different if it makes sense. Reevaluate the notion that things have always been done in a certain way. Be open to change.
- New evangelization requires an active social media presence to connect with more people, especially those who have drifted away from the church. Almost everyone, especially the younger generations and even baby boomers are very active on social media. Let our website reflect our most prized values and mission.
- Leverage technology and use instruments such as social media, text messages and email actively to engage parishioners. Many millennials are prompted to donate by images on social media or as a result of direct appeals. We need to meet them where they are!
- To engage younger adults, establish dynamic programmes for networking and social gatherings. Parishes can partner with nearby parishes to do this maybe once every month.
- Every Christian is called to evangelize through having a personal relationship with Jesus, loving one another, and engaging in charitable works
- Set up QR codes for online giving and include in bulletins or place at strategic places around the church. Young adults operate a lot with

technology and this makes it easier and convenient for them to just scan and donate

- Be strategic and intentional about making these donor engagements relational instead of transactional!

3. Cultivating Healthy Stewardship Habits for Young Adults. (Matt Kresich of Holy Name Church, Cedar Lake, Indiana)

In what ways can we actively engage young adults in parish life?

- Family based approach being that parents are the most significant influence on the religious and spiritual outcome for their kids. Parents can integrate stewardship into their intergenerational families. Once the parents are on board, the young people usually follow.
- Encourage young people to activate their God Given special gifts and use it for service to others and to the glory of God. What are you giving in return for your gifts?
- Teach them to allow themselves to be loved by God and return the love by engaging in stewardship activities
- Create activities in Church to get them involved. Put more focus on social responsibility and the Church. Care for God's creation.
- Young people love lent, so incorporate stewardship practices during lent.

Suggestions:

- Encourage young people to do some good in the community during lent and not just to abstain from something. They love social courses and love to participate in things that bring about some good to the community.
- Subsequent years, send at least one young adult or youth to the Conference. That should expose them on what their peers are doing for the Church.
- The monthly stewardship report is also very important for people to appreciate what their donation (time, talent and treasure) is doing to help the common good. Parish can designate one Sunday in a month to give this report at all masses. First Sunday of a new month is ideal to give report for the previous month.

4. Engagement Without Boundaries: Creating Cross-Cultural Campaigns (Various Speakers)

Major Points and Things To Consider

- Engaging different cultures and generations can present unique issues for a parish
- In places where you have different languages, it may be better to make bullet points of messages or materials for presentations and let each language capture same in their own language and nuances. Literal translation from English to various languages can result in messages being lost in translation.
- Make appeal materials reflective of your community, so people can see themselves in parish communications. Same goes for all electronic communications including websites.
- Use of QR codes for donations. Millennials who may not have written any checks in their lives may find it difficult filling out pledge cards. Moreover, people may be reluctant to put their information on pledge cards.
- Set aside particular Sundays to be appeal days and let people know in advance. Also simplify pledge cards.
- Desist from prejudging anyone, as you never know their abilities.
- Make personal connections/relationships and have a long-term view of getting people involved, instead of satisfying immediate needs.
- Ask people, especially young adults, how they want to receive communication. Find out what people need and as much as possible, try to provide that.
- **During announcement to turn off cell phones before Mass begins, we can instead ask the young people to bring out their cell phones, take a selfie, and post on social media that they are about to spend time with Jesus and inviting others to do so. This is a way to also evangelize other young people. SOCIAL MEDIA IS VERY POWERFUL!**

5. Seeking Out the Lost Sheep: Engaging Young Parishioners and Growing the Church (Lois Locey of Diocese of Petersburg, Florida)

People are on a quest to deepen their relationship with God and others. Let us be that place to offer them the opportunity to do so.

Suggestions

- Working with active Catholics to evangelize the fallen away and the under churchd via inspiring personal relationships.
- Zeroing in all **C.A.P.E Catholics**. These are people who only come to mass during Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Pentecost celebrations and Easter)
- Set up care teams to do well checks for those who have not attended mass for some time.
- Constantly update parishioners with special schedules and advertise events around parish. You can put out signs around the parish.
- Make the Church visible and attractive for people to come and stay. Signs with messages like: "ROUGH WEEK? WE'RE OPEN EVERYDAY. JOIN US." "MASS HAS NOT ENDED: IT MUST BE LIVED". "TREAT OTHERS AS YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE TREATED".
- On the website, you can include videos that explain the sacraments or any other thing of interest: how to make a good confession, divine mercy explained etc.
- Let Mass Times be the first thing you see on the website. Let it be very visible.
- Make worship available to new comers in the area. Ensure that nearby hotels and apartments have information on our parish as one of the area churches.
- Conduct inter-generational religious education from time to time.
- Offer service projects to engage millennials. They are more compelled to do community service.

6. Building a Culture of Stewardship that Engages all ages. (Leisa Anslinger, Nashville Tennessee)

How do you keep the fire burning?

- Stewardship requires ongoing lifelong conversion and consistent formation - share messages always and everywhere
- Stewardship means being committed to Christ, nurturing and sharing your gifts for the benefit of all. As a good steward, you give your time, talent, faith treasure and resources to build humanity.
- Define and articulate parish mission and culture clearly, so everyone is on board. Let it be a collection of shared beliefs and values
- Encourage young people to serve in gratitude. Each person has a certain duty to fulfil and living in gratitude is inspiring. Young adults and new volunteers can shadow the veterans
- Show empathy to young people and walk with them especially at stressful times
- Invite people to share their experiences through talks. For those who may not be very comfortable with public speaking, stewardship experiences could be shared on website or a paragraph in the bulletins. We can tag the section 'Stewardship Experiences'.

7. Clergy to Clergy Discussions on the Effectiveness of Stewardship in Their Parishes

Get the time and talent, the treasure will come

- The church needs disciples and stewards, not volunteers, because volunteers come and go.
- Stewardship makes you a disciple and not a by-stander. Don't just be a consumer coming to buy products – participate.
- Stewards serve not just because there is need but because they have a need to serve
- Stewards build relationships
- Organize Stewardship Appreciation Dinners and showcase different ministries
- Many parishioners treat the parish as a gas station or rental car. They come and get what they need and go. **No one washes a rental car!**
- Personally invite people to participate – it is more effective than bulletin announcements
- Opportunities for invitations to serve can come during CCE registrations, marriage registrations etc.
- Get parishioner to think about parish mission and continue to reevaluate activities. **NO MISSION, NO MONEY!**
- Stewardship gives you a
 - A sense of gratitude of God's gift
 - Influences personal spirituality
 - Shared stories on faith and family – sense of community
 - Joy of serving that touches hearts
 - Builds relationships

8. More Lessons and Getting People back in the Pews. (Tommy Schulz Michigan)

To be Sustainable

- Need to engage everyone and have something for them to do
- Mentorship is very important
- Make people understand that Mass is not where you go to have fun but where you go to worship
- Integrate people into groups
- Encourage people to reach out to others and bring more people
- Support and pray for one another
- Figure out talents and use them
- Can establish a post card ministry to send out post cards from time to time via zip codes
- To support younger parents, have daycare at your events
- For the next conference in Louisiana, send some young adults and parish administrators. There are lots of resources for parish administrators at the conference.

The Presiding Bishop during the last Mass concluded appropriately with the song. “This Little Light of Mine”