

# **CATHOLIC DEVELOPMENT + QUARTERLY +**

An informational DIGEST to guide development personnel in the emerging field of development.

Volume XII, Edition 1

## **OPEN LETTER TO MY BROTHER PRIESTS ABOUT THE MINISTRY OF DEVELOPMENT (Rev. Thomas Finucan)**

*Since 1987, our firm has presented the PASTORS NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONGRESS to more than 2,000 priests in 20 different dioceses around the country. Annually, we host the program in Phoenix in January. The keynote presentation is entitled "The Ministry of Development." This particular presentation is offered to clergy at the outset of the three-day program.*

*Rev. Thomas Finucan from the Diocese of LaCrosse, WI speaks to clergy about the spiritual dynamic of stewardship and development, the many perceived criticisms and apprehensions that clergy suffer as well as the joy of leading people to fuller lives through the giving their time, talent and treasure.*

The American Catholic population presents an interesting, yet, confusing picture. Catholics are no longer the poor, immigrant culture of the early 20th Century. Catholics "have arrived." But many dioceses and archdioceses are technically or actually bankrupt.

Amazingly enough, the immigrants who built the American Catholic Church, the parishes, schools, colleges, hospitals were at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, at that time.

We, their children and grandchildren are now saying "we can't afford" new churches, expanded social ministry, new Catholic schools and decent salaries for their lay employees.

American Catholics now represent four of the five of the most affluent groups of Americans: Italians, Irish, Poles, and Germans with American Jews rounding out the top groups. Hispanics are also rapidly rising economically. But many Catholic inner city parishes and schools are closing and parishes are struggling to pay for the ministries a new clientele must receive. Most lay employees of the Church might say they were underpaid.

Why? Some will argue that the Church's views on certain issues have "alienated" Catholic donors. But Catholics give less to all charities. Are they alienated from the United Way, the Salvation Army and the Red Cross? Surely they are not.

Bishops and priests are continually challenged to make good ministry happen. Most ministry requires financial resources. If our Catholic people are the Church, then the Church is rich. Unfortunately, the "riches" are staying in the pockets and retirement plans of our people, and the actual giving in the last 20-30 years has declined from 2.1% in 1965 to 1.2%. Often lost in these statistics is the impact of "1965 dollars and today's dollars."

Some prevailing attitudes imply that it is offensive or unholy to talk about money. Lets think about Jesus' attitude toward money reflected in the Gospel and think about these radical questions:

- Was Jesus a wonderful development officer?
- Did He have a case statement given to Him by his Father?
- Did He have a plan? A strong, personal involvement with people and their riches?
- Did He invite people to serve and proclaim the Gospel?

The answer to all of these questions is a resounding yes! The Gospel was His "case." He required resources: people, food, travel. If it is noble, and a ministry, to feed and clothe the poor, minister to the sick, teach the young, than how can it be unseemly or unworthy to find the financial resources to provide those ministries?

We all have unique gifts and skills. Sometimes those skills are not reinforced positively among our fraternity of priests. When we as priests tell another priest he is a "good fundraiser," do we really mean it as a true and genuine compliment, or do we say it in jest?

I contend that not only is it a ministry to attract the resources for quality ministry, but it is a way of teaching stewardship and the means of salvation for those who have been blessed with material wealth. Just as cholesterol can clog the heart, so too can too much wealth, possessions and the material "clog" the heart. Our wants become our needs, and in our culture we have difficulty telling the difference.

The god of money and materialism is a powerful force. When we ask people to share those material blessings, often times we get a strong reaction. The reason for this response is simple: material things are so important to us, and it is difficult to let go.

We hear the following in an attempt to deflect the real issue:

"The Church is always asking for money!"

"Father is always asking for money!"

"Real priests should spend their time doing ministry, not asking for money!"

Consequently, we hardly ever ask, our people are NOT conditioned to give and when we do ask the reaction is so strong we run for cover.

## ATTENTION GETTERS

Many wealthy Catholics are making major gifts to secular universities, local charities and community foundations. Many Catholics are giving to televangelists. Many Catholics, now wealthy are discovering what Jesus meant by the "eye of the needle and the rich man."

We hear significant comments that the Church was far better helping people to be poor than to be wealthy.

More than 80% of probated wills DO NOT include any gifts to charity. In 1992, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops published its pastoral letter on stewardship. It is entitled "Stewardship: A Disciple's Response." Within the pastoral is the following commentary, "While many Catholics are generous in giving of themselves and their resources to the Church, others do not respond to the needs in proportion to what they possess. The result now is a lack of resources which seriously hampers the Church's ability to carry out its mission" Some facts about charitable giving:

<b>HOW AMERICANS GIVE</b>			
HOUSEHOLD INCOME	% WHO GIVE	% OF INCOME	AVG. DONATED
Under \$20,000	47.9%	2.7%	\$207
\$10,000-19,999	66.9%	2.3%	\$332
\$20,000-29,999	68.1%	2.7%	\$668
\$30,000-39,999	81.4%	2.0%	\$715
\$40,000-49,999	83.5%	1.3%	\$572
\$50,000-59,999	92.4%	1.1%	\$632
\$60,000-74,999	96.1%	2.3%	\$1,572
\$75,000-99,999	86.8%	2.0%	\$1,720
Over \$100,000	92.3%	3.2%	\$3,213
<b>BY RELIGION</b>			
All Religions	75.8%		\$890
Catholics	75.5%		\$508
All Protestants	74.1%		\$969
Other Religions	83.3%		\$1,406
No Religion	49.3%		\$848
Source: Independent Sector			

The resources are out there. Between now and the year 2017, 10-17 trillion dollars will pass from people who are currently 55-75 years of age. It can only go four places: government, personal spending, children or charity.

## **THEOLOGY RATHER THAN APOLOGY**

As one who has been heavily involved in development as ministry since 1965, I have learned that Jesus "talked about money" all the time -- and very directly, too. Only heaven is mentioned more in his recorded words. Bishops and priests must do more by catechizing, challenging, preaching and asking in the name of the Lord -- despite the reaction. The late Bishop William McManus may have stated the problem clearly when he said that the problem resides with bishops and priests who are ashamed or don't really know how to appeal for funds. They also underestimate the financial strength and generosity of their people, and when small or poor givers complain, they tend to generalize and think that two or three people speak for the entire community.

For us as priests to seek out the people and resources to do the Lord's work is a shameless task. It is indeed a ministry! In my travels doing speaking, consulting and development work, I hear constantly from priests about the enormous stress of being the "CEO," like it or not, of parishes and schools with ever-growing needs and ever-tighter resources. This could well be one of the major causes of resignations, the fear of accepting larger parishes, and the seeming antipathy of many priests toward Catholic schools.

But priests who acquire some skills in these areas, establish good catechesis and offer invitations which are personal and relevant, to devout generous people to serve on Development Councils will find that people can be astonishingly generous.

## **SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION**

- **SPECIFIC PREACHING** -- about the privileges and obligations of prosperity-not tied to an appeal (the rich young man, Dives and Lazarus, the ten lepers, rich man who will build more grain bins, etc.).
- **DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS** -- invite devout, influential and generous lay people to serve on a standing Development Councils.
- **PLANNED GIVING** -- parishes and schools can readily do quarterly estate planning mailings and wills/tax seminars.
- **INTRODUCE STEWARDSHIP** -- Catholics can be taught about the theology of giving through stewardship. Stewardship isn't the Sunday Collection but a Christian Lifestyle and relationship with God.
- **MARK YOUR CALENDAR** -- for some skills. Every January, in Phoenix, AZ the **PASTORS NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONGRESS** is hosted by Richard P. Garrigan & Associates, Inc. (1-800-426-8198).

We have done a lot of fishing in traditional ways: regular collections, special appeals, dinners, auctions, bake sales, second collections and all the rest. As we now recognize the actual wealth of American Catholics, and contemplate the transfer of trillions of dollars of wealth over the next

20 years, it may be that the Lord is telling us to fish on the other side of the boat: to recognize that the baskets and nets of many are overflowing; to invite people to multiply and share their talents, their loaves and fishes, stock and real estate as they never could before. Just think what we can do together for the Lord. The need of the giver to give and save his/her eternal soul is greater than the Church's need to receive.

-- Rev. Thomas Finucan, Immaculate Conception Church, Fountain City, WI, (608) 687-3496

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