

IC IS 4G!



GOD

GRATITUDE

GROWTH

"If God is for us, who can be against us?"

—Romans 8:31

Faith.

Academics.

Service.

GIFTS

Van Lunen Fellow Project 2012-13

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Immaculate Conception School

Van Lunen Fellow Project 2012-13

What I Did For This Project:

My Van Lunen Fellow project began with hopes and plans for a marketing and outreach plan that will raise enrollment and funding for the school at which I am principal, Immaculate Conception School in Columbia Heights, Minnesota.

Immaculate Conception School (ICS) serves a diverse population of students, PreK- Grade 8 in a first-tier suburb of Minneapolis. Established in 1939 by a parish community of Catholics faithful to their church and desiring a Catholic education for their children, the school has undergone significant change in the last decade as families moved from the area, parish membership decreased in numbers, and there were overall changes in community demographics. After participating in a sustainability review process in 2010-11, ICS needed a plan that would address the decrease in student enrollment and ways to reach out to parishioners, alumni and friends of the school for fundraising efforts.

Our school develops a theme each year, which is part of our prayer life throughout the school year. Inspired by the theme, I found myself drawn to using it as a guide for this project. I developed a marketing and outreach plan centered around the theme: *IC is 4G! God, Gifts, Gratitude, Growth*. Knowing the theme will change each year, the critical part, the 4 G's will always be a part of our work and our lives.

As we met with parents and children at the beginning of the school year, I shared the idea that we are all critical elements of this 4G Network. Of course, **God** is always at the center of all we do and at the heart of our school's mission. Our mission reads: *"The School of the Immaculate Conception is a Catholic community ministering to the children within the parish and throughout the surrounding neighborhoods. In the name of Jesus Christ, we are dedicated to fostering spiritual growth and academic excellence through our strong commitment to Gospel justice."*

Growth:

Enrollment Growth Plan: Increase enrollment from 99 to 120 by June of 2013. During the School Year 2012-13, we increased to 124 students. We are continuing to build again as we move forward after graduating an eighth grade class of 15. As of June 12, 2013, our enrollment is 106.

Strategy – Create a Marketing Plan that included the following activities, tasks, etc.:

ICS hired a Minneapolis Cable Channel to produce a new DVD for the school, with a long and short version, 30 minutes and 5 minutes, updating the current school video. This DVD has and will be given to interested families and is featured on the website. The Cable Channel runs the 30 minute version, which is 2 years old now, consistently during Catholic Schools Week and routinely during the year. The video contains interviews with parents, teachers and students with me asking them to share *"just one thing they want everyone to know about ICS"*. The profound and enthusiastic responses are gratifying and indicative of what the school

accomplishes with the children and adults that are a part of the community. Metro Cable Channel 6 reaches the seven county Metro area with a potential of 1.25 million viewers.

I worked with a photographer to have the students and staff photographed in church for a new “statement” photo of the school. The students are in the form of a Cross. This was an idea that I had wanted to put in place for a while. The photo will become a representation of the school in the next year. Posted on Facebook, our “Cross” photo was viewed by over 1,000 people.

We featured school activities on the Church and School Facebook page, thanks in particular to the help of our pastor

I ordered and have displayed new banners for the outside of school. One is in English and one is in Spanish.

We collaborated on and created a new updated brochure with a focus on what our school promises. This is still in process as of June 12th as we are using up to date photographs.

I conducted a Value Proposition Activity with the School Advisory Council and utilized the Value Proposition Statements from parents, developing them into testimonials as to why they chose ICS for the website and brochure.

We are updating the website with new photos, bio pages for the staff, testimonials from students and parents

I continued to build strong relationships with the parishioners and families through weekly letters and church bulletin articles

I provide school tours personally myself, answer questions for families and assist with registration/admission materials.

I follow up after tour(s) or after an inquiring phone call.

I attended 4 Marketing Workshops that the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis sponsored. Implemented the Aim Higher marketing materials that were provided to the school. Use the Aim Higher Logo on all of our materials.

We partnered with a non-profit organization, *Kids in Need*, to supply a backpack for every student in the building filled with essential school supplies.

In partnership with *Kids in Need*, our school was visited by Crayola and Target representatives who presented students with Crayola gifts while facilitating the students in an art project. Our students’ artwork was featured at the *Kids in Need* Gala auction, raising \$3,000.00 for their organization.

I recorded three radio commercials with the Catholic Radio Station, Relevant Radio, in an agreement to provide them with tuition vouchers for the marketing time on-air. Thus far, the radio spots have not brought new students to the school. However, like all marketing efforts, one never knows when/who will hear the ad and respond. I have taken two students, who are twin sister and brother, with me to record and this has been well received by the public. Parishioners at our church and nearby parishes have commented a number of times that they have heard me on the radio and are pleased that the school is succeeding. Our own parish is grateful for the radio exposure and the sense of accomplishment for the growth that may come from this experience.

ICS partnered with the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis to assist in communicating more effectively with the Latino population. Two communication/marketing pieces were created: A postcard featuring Our Lady Of Guadalupe which arrived in time for that Feast Day, December 12th. The card gives details about our school. Secondly, a magnet has been produced that invites people to “Come visit us!” or “¡Venga a visitarnos!”. Again, the magnets feature Our Lady of Guadalupe who is of great importance to the Latino community. The magnets were issued to each family in the school to share with someone they know, inviting them to visit the school. During the summer of 2013, seminarians that are completing an internship at our parish will be visiting homes in the neighborhood as a form of outreach for the parish and school. They will take magnets with them as well as the new brochures. I will join them on several evenings as they visit homes.

ICS sponsored three events-Open House/Community Nights: Community Nights were held in December and May, featuring student art and academics, as well as a meal and a tour of the school. Our Open House was during Catholic Schools Week, which is a week-long celebration of Catholic Schools. Families are invited to tour the school. We expanded our Book Fair this year to include neighboring businesses and public services – fire, police and library. New visitors are sent a thank you for attending from the principal and a follow up phone call is made.

ICS hosted a Registration Event: *Leap into Next Year* which is in its second year. We create a festive event with food and a promotional item for students who submit all of the registration materials.

I reached out with promotions to area churches: I visited two area churches, St. Bridget’s and St. William’s, that do not have schools and spoke about the school, shared resources with interested parents, grandparents. St. William’s used to send students to our school, thus we have been rebuilding relationships with that parish that faltered during past administrations. Follow up phone calls are made to interested families by the principal.

I reached out with promotions to area preschool(s): The nearest preschool is 4 blocks away. I have reached out to them on three occasions, fostering a friendly and open relationship. Because they serve students younger than ours, they have referred families to our school and vice versa. For our Open House, flyers are taken to local preschools, promoting our Kindergarten-Grade 8 School.

I participate in the local parade with students. Small flyers and candy are shared with spectators.

Gifts:

Increase funding for the school through our three major fundraisers: Marathon for Nonpublic Education, Pohlad Family Foundation for Tuition Assistance, Queen of May Dinner and Benefit for Catholic Education. Consider additional opportunities as to how to raise revenues/gifts for the school.

Strategy: Mailings to parishioners, school alumni and Friends of ICS

September: Asked students to write letters to alumni sharing news of ICS and asking them for sponsorship during the Marathon for Nonpublic Education. This proved to be successful and continued to bring good feelings for the school. The monetary goal for the Marathon was \$23,000.00, after achieving \$20,000.00 in 2011. Amount earned in 2012-13: \$34,000.00.

February: The Pohlad Family Foundation will award urban schools in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis money to be used for tuition assistance if we are able to match a certain dollar amount. I wrote a letter to parishioners, alumni and Friends of ICS asking for donations toward tuition assistance. Amount to match this year: \$7,500.00. Amount earned in 2012-13: \$16,200.00 plus the \$7,500.00 we will receive from the Pohlad Family Foundation.

July: A mailing will be sent (and was also sent in 2012) to alumni of the school inviting them to attend our Fun Fest Summer Jam which is held at the beginning of August. Alumni are asked to visit with the principal and receive a gift. This proved to be another way to build and nurture relationships.

Strategy: Seek funds for the school by personally asking alumni, parishioners and Friends of ICS that want to support the school with monetary gifts and the gift of prayer. Also, create opportunities to meet, give a tour of the school, ask for a gift for the school and provide service to the community.

We create opportunities for the students and staff to have their gifts shared with others. Students and staff serve the community by making weekly visits to a senior care center nearby, write to elderly pen pals at another care center and have one visit with them during the year, participate in highway clean-up, and we conduct a service project in both Advent and Lent in which we collect food for local food shelves or address another need. For example, this spring, we collected money for the victims of the Oklahoma tornadoes

I reached out to *Noodles and Company* Market Director, who is a parishioner and parent of school children, and asked for a sponsored event for the school. *Noodles and Company* agreed to offer all of their sales to our school for one day, totaling \$3,850.00. *Noodles and Company* also donates all of our Spaghetti Dinner product to the school.

I spoke with alumni of the school and asked them to support special projects that will help to sustain the the school's traditions and increase future possibilities. These conversations/meetings have brought in gifts of \$5,000.00 and \$1,500.00 in May.

I received an unsolicited gift of \$10,000.00 from a parent of a former teacher at the school. In speaking with her, she wants to support Catholic education. I will continue to nurture that relationship.

I wrote a letter to the family of a major donor. This donor had passed away in the summer of 2011 and he had been very generous to the school. In thinking that I should continue to connect with them, I sent the letter and received a check for \$27,000.00 to be used for tuition assistance.

I requested further assistance from the Archdiocese to be included in an Urban Schools group, so that we could receive additional funding for scholarships, testing and technology growth. We are now being provided with a lab of desktop computers and two SMART Boards, plus assistance with filing for E-Rate.

We continue the tradition of naming an individual Distinguished Graduate of the Year during Catholic Schools Week.

Strategy: Promote our three fundraising events through flyers, bulletin articles, phone calls and personal requests for supporters to attend an event or make a donation.

The Marathon, Pohlard Matching Grant and Queen of May have become solid traditions that are successful, but always need to be evaluated as to how to keep the events interesting and fresh.

The Marathon surpassed its goal of \$23,000.00 because of personally asking two individuals for increased donations, one of whom works for a company that matched the amount.

The Queen of May Dinner and Benefit for Catholic Education, in its fourth year, has become a highlight for parishioners and some alumni. The silent and live auctions are anticipated because of the quality items. The event had raised \$42,000.00 in 2012. Amount earned in 2013: \$55,000.00.

Gratitude:

Uphold the tradition of being a school that has an “attitude of gratitude” for its many gifts.

Strategy: Express thanks and gratitude to all who are gifting the school through monetary gifts and prayers.

We uphold the great tradition of being a school that has an “attitude of gratitude”. We are a people of thanksgiving.

I am now utilizing our new “Cross” photo for thank you cards.

I write thank you letters in the church bulletin informing parishioners of progress the school makes toward its enrollment and fundraising goals in the Marathon for Nonpublic Education, the Pohlard Family Matching Grant and the Queen of May Dinner and Benefit for Catholic Education.

I write and send thank you letters to the individuals that provide monetary gifts to the school.

I make phone calls expressing gratitude and invite donors to visit the school for a tour. I share with them the difference their gifts are making in the lives of children.

I invite benefactors for a tour of the school and share the progress their monetary gift made in the life of the school or a student.

Students send notes and letters of gratitude regularly after our events.

Gratitude is extended to teachers by inviting them for fellowship at parish activities, parties and an “art crawl”.

Our Music Teacher and students in chorus wrote a school anthem which debuted at our Queen of May Dinner as a thank you to all attendees. It was performed by the students.

Students, parents and staff performed two songs, *Be True to Your School* and *Wonderful World* at the Queen of May in gratitude for the generous gifts we received at this event.

Students have increased their participation in ministries at church in the roles of cantor and altar server. Students read essays to the congregation during Catholic Schools Week sharing the impact that Catholic education has made in their lives.

What I Learned From This Project:

Many people believe in the school and want it to succeed. Parishioners, parents of alumni, alumni, community members and new Friends of ICS. When we communicate the gifts that a school like ICS provides to children, people want to see it thrive.

We have faithful alumni that want to learn more about the school and be included in future events.

Ask, Ask, Ask:

Ask for donations and prayers for the school

Ask for people to help me in my position

Ask the Archdiocese for help in the areas of technology, scholarships for children in poverty and in marketing

Building and nurturing relationships with donors, major or not, does take time but is critical to the sustainability of the school.

Marketing strategies are many in number, yet it is not always clear which one(s) made the difference for a family to decide to enroll. Frequently, it is “word of mouth” from parents of current students that makes a lasting impression. Alumni like to send their children to the school and I have asked them to speak out on the DVD, in testimonials and at Open Houses.

Maintaining our foundation of a school committed to Faith, Academics and Service is vital to sustainability. Yet, being open and able to try new approaches in academics, marketing and outreach is important to encourage growth in the school.

Expect to be overwhelmed with the administration of running a small school and seeking ways for it to grow.

I am a fisherperson with a rod and reel. My desire to cast a net out and pull in more students is one that continues to be a hope and prayer for the future. Currently, I reel one or two students in at a time and it does make a difference in our school community.

I am learning to be more grateful for small growth, as well as significant growth.

The highs and lows of the principal position are significant.

Working in Catholic education is a ministry. We are evangelizers.

Remember to pray and really believe in the Scripture that is part of our theme this year, “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*” Romans 8:31

God is in charge.

What has changed in the school as a result of the project:

Change is something that is experienced in both quantitative and qualitative measures. I strived for both types of change in this project.

Quantitatively, there have been increases in our fundraising efforts and their results. We also have made significant efforts to reach out through marketing strategies and relationship building so we can grow the student enrollment, and I focused on children of diverse populations.

As the teaching staff and I evaluated the year, I asked them what changes they see. Their responses were more qualitative. Comments included, “The atmosphere is different now.” “It feels good here.” “We know there is still stress on the school. Now, it is *stress with possibility.*” I would conclude that there is an attitude of optimism. I have been nicknamed the “Pollyanna” of ICS. I believe in possibility for the school community. There is a feeling of optimism that we are growing.

The teaching staff is more willing to come forward and volunteer for the many functions that the school hosts. We know that we can and will achieve great things as we work together.

Positive Changes and Challenges I Encountered Along the Way:

Sustainable change can take at least 5 years to truly take place in an organization. It is a constant challenge to remember this and to remember that it can take quite some time to change perceptions of a school that has always maintained its strength in faith, academics and service, but has suffered due to a number of extenuating circumstances.

The challenges of successfully raising enrollment and fundraising are never going to go away. Competition between schools, the economy, changing demographics and a waning commitment to Catholic/Christian education are hurdles that will continue to present themselves.

Being mindful of these challenges is more manageable when we focus on the Holy Spirit moments/blessings of each day. Each time, I would meet discouraging moments, something would happen that would lift my spirits and remind me that we are making a difference in the lives of the children and families. One of those moments came for me on the last day of this school year. We had ended on a spiritual high with prayer and farewells for the summer. After saying goodbye to the kids, I returned to my office, focused intently on the two upcoming days of professional development. I wanted to dig into the agenda I was preparing.

Several minutes later a middle school student came in to visit with me as she was leaving. This visit was a complete surprise because the entire school year had provided ongoing difficult encounters for me with this young woman. Moments that were not ones that I held as happy memories. I had to enforce a court order against her father in the fall. I needed to reprimand her

with a fair amount of frequency for her behavior choices, and overall, it certainly was not the kind of relationship I longed to have with any student. We had made some recent breakthroughs however, and Christ was smiling down on me that day as she walked in and just hung out, talking for 15 minutes before she left for the summer. It seemed as if all the tough times of the school year melted away between us. Those moments with her will carry me through the summer, reminding me why I am at this school at this point in my life.

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