

Parishes Should Build on Strengths, not Weaknesses

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I think often about a conference I attended several years ago. Dr. Kennon Callahan, a researcher, professor, author, and internationally known church consultant, spoke about Twelve Keys to an Effective Church. Callahan is brilliant, instantly likeable, and disarmingly direct. He sees the role of the church through the lenses of community, compassion and hope. Community, he says, is good fun, good times, belonging, and family. Compassion is sharing, caring, giving, loving, and serving, and hope is confidence and assurance in the grace of God.

Callahan began his presentation with this advice: build on your strengths, not your weaknesses. Here's an example. As he defines it, stewardship is clearly about compassion. But if a parish's stewardship campaign is not scripturally related to compassion, it's attempting to build on an inherent weakness, and that increases passive aggressive behaviour, anger, and subliminal resentment. Meanwhile in the secular world, charitable giving has been increasing as people give to causes that stir their compassion such as tsunami relief in South East Asia

So how can a parish build on its strengths? It starts with lots of scriptural references and solid preaching about stewardship. It "prays the campaign" with active prayer about stewardship. It recruits parishioners to write a newsletter based on compassion and people news, and expands it into a long range plan and a narrative budget built on compassion. Then it finds others who speak passionately and often about their own particular area of ministry and why it's important to support it. It utilizes a "compassion card" rather than a commitment card, with wording like this: "we are grateful for the compassion and generosity of God's gifts in our lives . . . we are thankful for the hope which God blesses us . . . we generously pledge \$\$\$ to advance God's mission in 2009"

Strong parish leaders are able to associate compassion, community, and hope with challenge, reasonability, and commitment. Callahan says think about what your parish has fun doing, and about your strengths, gifts, and competencies. According to him, that's the mission to which God invites you.