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A Parish Guide to the Use of Creative Problem Solving in Marketing Plan Development

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**SUNY – Buffalo State
International Center for Studies in Creativity**

**A Parish Guide to the Use of Creative Problem Solving
In Marketing Plan Development**

**A Project
In Creative Studies
by
Patricia H. Meyer
SUNY at Buffalo State
International Center for Studies in Creativity**

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements
For the Degree of
Master of Science**

December 2016

Abstract

The purpose of this project is to show how Creative Problem Solving can be introduced into the development of a marketing plan for a church parish. Background as to the need for a marketing plan and the advantages of using Creative Problem Solving techniques will be discussed, as well as some of the theology which might underlie the process undertaken by a marketing committee. Particular attention will be given to the context of the Catholic Church and theology, as that is my personal background and training. A sample process guide will be included to provide a parish with a model to initiate the development of such a plan.

Keywords: creativity, ministry, marketing



12/1/16

Date

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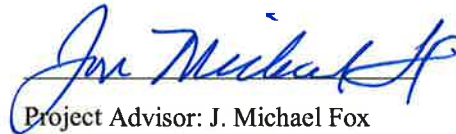
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Table of Contents

Title Page.....1

Abstract.....2

Signatory Page.....3

Table of Contents.....4

Acknowledgments.....5

Project Purpose and Description.....7

Rationale for Using CPS in the Creation of a Church Marketing Plan.....8

How Theology, Marketing and Creative Problem Solving Interact.....9

Why Use Creative Problem Solving in the Development of a Marketing Plan at the Newman Center?.....9

Details of Newman Center Marketing Planning.....12

Developing A Plan.....13

Planning the First Meeting.....15

Planning Meeting #1.....16

Planning Meeting #2.....21

Planning Meeting #3.....23

Benefits Derived from this Method/Process.....24

Blocks to Creativity in Relation to Ministry.....24

Key Questions Going Forward.....26

References.....27

Appendices

Appendix A: Guide to the Development of a Parish Marketing Plan.....29

List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1: The three components of creativity.....9

Figure 2: Summary of differences between different teams’ drawings.....14

Figure 3: Osborne’s seven-step model for creative thinking (1953).....16

Figure 4: Qualities of a “Hit”.....22

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The foundation for this project was begun years ago, when I took my first class in Creative Problem Solving at SUNY Buffalo State. It is most gratifying to finish this masters program at this time, by combining the professional experiences of my life. Underlying all of these experiences, however, are the personal experiences which make me the person that I am, and which I bring into every professional endeavor.

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Finally, I am grateful to my colleagues at Foit-Albert Associates, who have encouraged me and offered their support in many ways. Their encouragement was the final piece I needed to engage in this process.

Project Purpose and Description

This project explores the role of Creative Problem Solving in the development of a marketing plan for a church parish.

This topic was chosen for several reasons. First, there is an urgent need for the development of marketing strategies and the mobilization of resources for parishes in all religious denominations. Although this project focuses on marketing within a Roman Catholic parish, it is transferrable to religious communities of various kinds. The Catholic Church, in particular, is in crisis, bleeding in numbers of parishioners and seeking to attract priests and religious leaders in the modern world.

The need for marketing is drawing attention from both local and international leaders, but the average parish finds few real resources in executing any viable strategies. Their best bet in the current environment is to find talented parishioners and community members who are willing to help in the development of marketing strategies. One of the reasons each parish is starting from “scratch” is the truly unique character of each parish. As any marketing professional will tell you, a plan must be tailored to the audience, which is different in each parish. Add to this the transient character of the parish, due in part to consolidations and unpredictable attendance, and priests and parish administrators are struggling to find innovative solutions to fulfill their mission.

It is my hope that the introduction of Creative Problem Solving as a process can rejuvenate the staff and parishioners at the parish level and give them a structure through which innovative solutions can be found. Often in the Church, those breakthroughs can be shared through the collaborative process, which is a strong strength of the Church.

Second, this project blends my backgrounds in parish administration, marketing and creative studies. It is the culmination of years of study in these fields, and yet, the beginning of a lifetime of exploration. In searching for a topic for this project, it became nearly impossible to separate these topics from my consciousness, as the study of these areas had become integrated into my thinking process at a core level.

Trying to push one away in favor of the other was clearly not working, with the others creeping into the thought process at every turn.

Truly, this is the exact combination of unique subject matters which can spur true innovation. It occurred to me that seeking to combine, rather than isolate these domains may result in something novel.

Third, there is an inherent aspect of the fields of creativity, marketing and spirituality which is similar, and worth exploring. A sense of altruism and strongly intuitive character lies in the personality of many who pursue these endeavors, and the role of spirituality in creativity, for example, is very strong for some people. The same can be said in the combination of the others. In many ways, this project is a small experiment in the outward expression of these traits.

Rationale for Using CPS in the Creation of a Church Marketing Plan

With previous background in marketing, pastoral ministry for the Catholic Church and Creative Problem Solving, my intent was to find a project which would combine at least two of these fields in order to synthesize the knowledge I have accrued into a single piece of work.

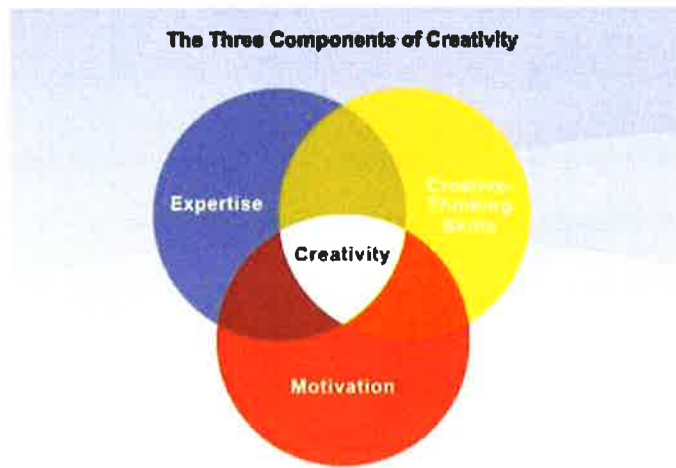
As a happy coincidence, an opportunity was presented, which I believe blends not just two, but all three fields into a singular work. As a current parishioner of the Newman Center parish at SUNY at Buffalo, I read in the bulletin about a request for volunteers to contribute to a brainstorming project to further the Newman Center's marketing efforts.

This effort will assist the Newman Center in developing a marketing plan designed to attract and retain students, as well as integrate the student parish base with the non-student parish base (which has been growing steadily and threatens to overwhelm the student population).

How Theology, Marketing and Creative Problem Solving Interact

Creativity expert Ruth Noller defined creativity as a mathematical equation ($C=f(K,I,E)$) (Puccio, 2012). It is the result of knowledge, imagination and evaluation coming together. There is a parallel which can be drawn between the combination of these variables and the combination of theology, creativity and marketing strategy.

Terese Amabile describes creativity according the diagram below, which bears similarity in the categorization of elements. It is my belief that spirituality and faith can become motivation, and that expertise and marketing strategy may also be seen similarly. Add creative thinking skills, and the formula becomes complete (Amabile, 1998).



Source: Teresa M. Amabile, "How to Kill Creativity," *Harvard Business Review*, September-October 1998, 77-87

Table 1: *The Three Components of Creativity*

Why Use Creative Problem Solving in the Development of A Marketing Plan at the Newman Center?

There are potentially hundreds of legitimate reasons for the use of Creative Problem Solving in the development of marketing strategies. For the churches, however, there are some which will help ministry at-

large, and will assist in the changing of an overall mindset, resulting in innovations shared among parishes and denominations. Important ones are:

- Development of Creativity Habits
- Fostering collaboration
- Openness to ideas outside the current paradigm
- CPS rejuvenates the inner working life of ministers, volunteers and parishioners
- Prevent floundering/provide focus

Churches, especially the Catholic Church, have a rich history which is steeped in traditions and rituals. These traditions keep the church uniform, which means that the liturgy is the same, no matter what Church in the world one might visit. It is an incredibly meaningful thing to bring the new problems of each week to the same God in the same way, reminding us of our oneness with God and each other.

However, this causes problems with openness to ideas outside the current paradigm. Roger Firestien, Ph.D. reminds us to “look for connections for solving problems from other areas” in his book entitled *Why Didn't I Think of That?* (Firestien, 1989, p. 50)

The development of theology generally falls into the category of “adaptive” creativity. It builds on previous tradition and reaches back to scripture and forward in an eschatological sense, at the same time. That continuum can sometimes cause a creativity vacuum, which does not allow new ideas to permeate the process. There is also a fear that innovative ideas may be met with skepticism, or even rebuke. Even the best, most prestigious theologians do not want to cause conflict in the church, and can even risk excommunication for their actions.

Those trained in theology are specialized, and not as large in number as the church would like. This lends itself to “inbreeding,” and the ability to bring in other disciplines and fields of study, or even concepts from other aspects of life, can be limited to the traditional sense of theology. In fact, it would be interesting to explore theology beyond text and words, to study and practice theology using the other senses.

Resistance to allow new ideas also happens at the parish level, and new ideas for marketing must be supported by a strong spirit and willful tolerance for nay-sayers. There are many who are content doing things the way they have been done. Those patterns are predictable, and that causes some to be comfortable. But discomfort must come with growth, and this will be a challenge for ministers and those who seek to implement new marketing strategies. For that reason, Creative Problem Solving can be introduced to enhance what Amabile calls the “inner work life” of a parish. She calls this inner work life “the confluence of perceptions, emotions and motivations that individuals experience as they react to and make sense of the events of their workday” (Amabile, 2011).

As a model, CPS has the unique advantage of providing focus to the strategic activities of the parish. Without it, ideas can bounce around the room, without deliberate thought to their possibilities and potential drawbacks. In this scenario, the loudest voice usually wins (or the person wearing the collar!!). This is not the ideal solution, as some of the most innovative and functional solutions just might come from those who are least involved in the administration of the parish. Without innovation, the church does what it has always done. If that was working, we would not need a marketing plan.

A marketing committee may also be able to use convergent tools to test the current marketing activities of the parish, to save any which are effective.

Details of Newman Center Marketing Planning

In discussing goals and potential problem statements with Newman Center pastoral staff, there are several key aspects to this issue. They include:

- Large SUNY environment with three campuses (North, South and Medical campus)
- Large population of non-students, who comprise an "intentional community," with great investment and activity in the parish

- Transient student population
- Multicultural challenges and opportunities
- Changing roles of lay ministers and shortage of priests
- Difficulty integrating campus parish cultures and forming a single branded identity
- Lack of diocesan marketing support
- Desire to integrate parishioners in the process

The Newman Center staff have agreed that I should act as facilitator of the newly formed Marketing Committee. This fulfills several intentions:

1. Desire to make the process "of the people, by the people," rather than a top-down approach
2. Desire to have a trained facilitator manage the process. This is an extremely liberal parish, with highly intelligent, motivated and innovative individuals, who may be difficult to manage.
3. Desire to utilize my ability to synthesize theology, marketing strategies and CPS for the benefit of the group/process.

Developing A Plan

As the first step in the planning process, parish administrative staff should strive to identify the current problem and prepare background data. This will be used by a committee of volunteers to develop a problem statement, identify the audience(s), generate possible ideas or solutions and develop a schedule and budget for the project.

Data may include:

- Parish size and demographics
- Background on neighboring parishes of the same faith
- Background on neighboring parishes of other faiths
- Current issues or events affecting the parish or the mother church
- Trends in envelope collections and church attendance for the last 5-10 years
- Information about current marketing efforts and the amount already invested

The last bullet point illustrates a vital piece of information. How much time, money and identity of the parish is wrapped up in current branding by the parish? Are there nicknames which are ingrained, or events which define the parish in some way, such as a historical activity or tradition which is well known and loved? Are there slogans or products which are well known to the parishioners or community? Are there any which have been thrown out there, but are not doing well and have not “taken off?” This information may prompt different aspects of idea generation. In fact, a facilitator may be able to bring this into the process at a later time, as well, perhaps as a forced relationship with another idea or concept.

Next, a committee should be identified. The Parish Data System (PDS) or a similar database can be utilized to identify parishioners or friends of the church who may have expertise in marketing or organizational development. However, selection of individuals whose expertise is varied may assist in the development of innovative, creative solutions. While marketing professionals have good concepts, they can be established in their patterns, which creates a standard plan, but does not introduce innovation or apply marketing concepts to the church in unique ways. People of varying backgrounds can be helpful in idea generation. Varying ages, backgrounds, professions and even religious preferences may lead to interesting concepts.

Olesya Kozhevnikov and Maria Blazhenkova studied the drawings of people from varying backgrounds, and confirmed that their end products varied in ways which are important. The diagram below shows just how different our backgrounds can be, and how different the results can be from these groups. A

mixed group drew “non-conventional results,” which is precisely what we are looking for in introducing creativity (Kozhevnikov & Blazhenkova & Maria, 2016).

TABLE 2
Summary of differences between different teams' drawings

<i>Visual Art</i>	<i>Science</i>	<i>Humanities</i>	<i>Mixed</i>
<i>Shape</i> All groups drew non-spherical planets in shapes of different objects.	All groups drew spherical/circular conventional planets.	Half drew assortments of objects without outlining the shape of the planet; half drew round planets.	Majority (3/4) drew non-conventional shapes; only 1/4 drew round-shaped planet.
<i>Perspective and composition</i> All groups represented planet as one large central object.	All groups drew the planets (one or several) in the Universe surrounded by other cosmic objects, as in the conventional textbook perspective.	Most of drawings did not have a consistent perspective, and the objects were oriented differently from one another.	Majority (3/4) drew complex perspectives and orientations, used 3D folding, cross-sections, and combining perspectives.
<i>Use of colors and materials</i> All groups painted primarily with paints. Rich palettes, extensive blending colors, fully filled in backgrounds.	Used mixed media, limited palettes, no blending of colors, all drawn on a monochromatic or white background.	Mixed media, limited palette and little blending. Monochromatic, muddled color patterned, or uncolored background.	Mixed media, but primarily paints, broad palettes, unusual color choices, and extensive blending. 1/4 filled backgrounds.
<i>Use of verbal labels</i> Drawings did not have any text.	Only 1/4 used verbal labels.	The majority (3/4) used words.	Only 1/4 used words.
<i>Represented meaning</i> The drawings were non-literal representations of planets, though some contained realistic elements used in non-conventional contexts.	Less or more realistic, literal representations of planets' contents and their surrounding objects, consistent with conventional knowledge, textbooks or fiction.	Mostly realistic objects, but the arrangement was not realistic, and not related to planet context. Some abstractions, but without assigning complex symbolic meanings.	Objects ranging from realistic objects, to fantastical creatures, to unidentifiable splotches of color. Most drawings had complex, well-developed stories behind.

Table 2: Types of Creativity and Visualization in Teams of Different Educational Specialization

Olesya Blazhenkova & Maria Kozhevnikov, *Creativity Research Journal*, May 9, 2016

It will be important to communicate this to committee members, to gain support for the process. The theology behind this can be found in the theology of ecclesiology, among others. In order to be truly ecclesial, we must find a transcendent reality which is bigger than ourselves -- a place where true Christian love is rooted in Christ, and in our community. In doing this, we participate in the divine nature of the Trinity, and allow ourselves to express the priestly role of the laity. We are called, after all, to be priest, prophet and king to each other.

This participation allows us to accomplish the three goals of ministry, as expressed by the apostolic exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 26. They are: Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care. Just as in this case

study, they are often happening simultaneously, weaving in and out of each other. In and through these means, we communicate with God and are brought to our eternal destiny in His kingdom (John Paul II, 1992)

Planning the First Meeting

There will be several goals to the first meeting, and it is nearly certain that multiple meetings will be required to complete the marketing plan process. After all, if the goal is to repeat previous strategies, a marketing planning process is not necessary. The idea is to break the mold and add creative new concepts, not to repeat old tactics which may or may not be working.

One of the benefits to multiple meetings is the ability for members to use incubation time to further develop ideas and generate additional ideas over a period of time. “By putting the problem aside temporarily,” explains Jose Gomez, “creative students allow the unconscious mind to take over, make various associations and connections that the conscious mind is unable to do. The incubation may be long or short, but it must be utilized. Sleep or almost any change of activity helps to encourage illumination (Gomez, 2007).

This period of purposeful relaxation permits the mind to run free, claim Reeves & Clark, who studied the idea (Clark, 2007). Some frustration may occur, followed by a sudden ability to solve a problem. This “flash of insight” is unleashed by the powers of association, which are allowed to connect during this free time for the mind. The flash usually occurs after a period of incubation, they say, when individuals are not actively pursuing the problem. A Japanese inventor says that his most creative ideas come when he forces himself to dive in his swimming pool until his lungs run out of oxygen (Reeves & Clark, 2000, p. 117).

Osborn's Seven-Step Model for Creative Thinking (1953)

"The most direct way to develop creativity is by practicing creativity...by actually thinking up solutions to specific problems." –Alex F. Osborn

- **Orientation:** pointing up the problem
- **Preparation:** gathering pertinent data
- **Analysis:** breaking down the relevant material
- **Ideation:** piling up alternatives by way of ideas
- **Incubation:** letting up, to invite illumination
- **Synthesis:** putting the pieces together
- **Evaluation:** judging the resulting ideas

Figure 3: Osborne's Seven-Step Model for Creative Thinking, 1953

As the graphic above shows, "incubation" is one of the essential parts of the creative process. While much attention is paid to ideation, there are other aspects which will help to gain good results, as long as participants and facilitators can give them proper attention. In fact, this model is one of the strongest in modern history, developed by Alex Osborn in 1953, but still considered a credible and foundational premise for the creative problem solving process.

Planning Meeting #1

The first meeting should include prayer which stresses unity and a servant attitude, setting the tone for collaboration and equality of members. Introductions can be made of team members and some explanation of why the process has been initiated. A synopsis of the current situation, problems and opportunities should be shared, as well as hopes for the process. Members can be offered the background information which has been compiled, and have the opportunity to ask questions.

Some apologetics may be necessary in the first meeting. According to Scripture, we are all called to be workers in the Lord's "vineyard." In the Gospel of Matthew, we hear the kingdom of heaven compared to a landowner who hires workers, all of whom are paid the same wage, in spite of differences in the amount of work. "You also go into the vineyard" the land owner told those searching for work. (Matt 20:4, New Revised Standard Version). Marketing was something in which even the earliest disciples, and arguably, Jesus himself also engaged. Committee members may benefit from being reminded of the connection to their process and how this fulfills this type of ministry.

One person should be identified in advance of this meeting to serve as the facilitator. Ideally, it should be someone with some experience in facilitation and who is knowledgeable about the CPS process. The role of this person is to remain impartial to the content, so it may work best if this individual is not an expert in marketing or theology to prevent this person's opinions from contaminating the process.

Rules for Creative Problem Solving can be introduced at this point in order to set the stage for idea generation. It also creates a truly collaborative environment, where all members are given equal importance and room for expression. This is important because we, as Christians, believe that all persons are to be respected as unique children of God.

In the words of the United Catholic Conference of Bishops, "The source of the call addressed to all members of the Mystical Body to participate actively in the mission and edification of the People of God is to be found in the mystery of the Church. The people of God participate in this call through the dynamic of an organic communion in accord with their diverse ministries and charisms" (USCCB, 2005, p. 20). In other words, our gifts, which are from God, become part of a transcendent and living system of unity rooted in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

God calls *all* of us to serve one another, not just an elite few. We all have different gifts, which may be used for the benefit of God's ministry. This belief is expressed clearly in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium, art. 40)* affirms that "all

Christians in whatever state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity, and this holiness is conducive to a more human way of living, even in society here on earth."

Therefore, ministry belongs to all of us, and is the responsibility of every person, not just a mission left to the clergy or parish staff. The faith life of each person affects and is affected by every other person. The Council clearly laid out the universal call to all people and the important roles which they play in Church life.

A connection to the theology of the Body of Christ can also be made at this point, drawing a connection between the rules of CPS and the faith which is part of this process. This communion ecclesiology also has a dimension which recognizes the dignity of the human person, another important element of Vatican II. As Pope Benedict has said, "One gains access to communion with God through the realization of God's communion with man—it is Christ in person. To meet Christ creates communion with Him and therefore with the Father in the Holy Spirit. This unites men with one another" (Benedict XVI, 2001).

Therefore, ministry, as an ecclesial experience, is also a graced experience, according to the Second Vatican Council. *Lumen Gentium* tell us, "In its essence, grace will manifest this imprint of the Trinity, and the church, which is by right the organ of that grace which conforms the persons to Christ by means of animation of the Spirit, is defined by Saint Cyprian to be 'a people gathered together out of the unity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.' Thus, grace unifies the church's members among themselves, making them into a community" (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 4)

Then, the formation of a problem statement can begin. Ideally, this should be framed more as an opportunity, in the positive context, rather than something to be overcome. It may be best to begin this phrase with the words "How can we...?" or "How to...?"

Again, the idea of incubation between meetings cannot be diminished. Not only does it help the creative process, as we have discussed, but it also allows for time for prayer and divine intervention. If we believe that the will of God is part of this process and is leading us as participants in the process, there is a natural bridge between time for meetings and time for prayer. Members of the marketing committee can bring their experience with CPS to mass and offer it as part of a Eucharistic sacrifice.

John Paul II speaks of the "cosmic" character of the Eucharist, as it puts us in communication with the divine. "Even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated *on the altar of the world*. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all creation" (John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharista*, 2003).

The Gospel of John makes it clear that the Eucharist is meant to be life-giving. He refers to it as the "bread of life" and the "living bread." If we believe that the Body and Blood are part of our ecclesiology, then it must be life-giving, as well (John 6:35, 48).

The meditative, ritualistic experience of the Mass can be ripe for idea generation, either at the time or later, as the brain is able to process the content and context together.

With this idea in mind, it would be beneficial to consider holding the first for this group on Sunday morning, following Mass. Not only does the Mass set a nice, reflective tone for the group, but it also follows some of the stages which are essential in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1970). In researching this project, one of the first sources which came to mind was Abraham Maslow. He is an important point of reference in theology, and many of the self-actualizing characteristics which are present in the religious experience are also present in the creative problems solving process. Instead of meeting after working hours in the dark, after fatigue and hunger and the annoyances of the day have set in, why not offer to feed the group and catch them when they are rested, relaxed and feeling loved and secure following a little interaction with church family members? If they are with their families, it may even be interesting to invite them to join the process. Some of the best marketing ideas can come from the mouths of our young people, and Jesus always fed people before trying to preach to them.

The rules of marketing say that the following structure should be followed in developing a marketing plan:

- Audience
- Goals

- Tactics and Strategies

The first meeting, in terms of Creative Problem Solving, can focus on the first two steps – defining the audience and developing potential goals or problem statements. The first meeting is an important time to do the following:

- Introduce the team, the facilitator and the parish staff
- Ask the pastors to define the background of the task, and their motivation for recruiting volunteers, as well as their wishes for the future of the parish.
- Check the problem statement against stated goals. If necessary, use CPS to redefine the problem statement.
- Introduce the CPS process and establish ground rules for diverging.
- Lead the group in divergent and convergent processes to begin to establish areas for improvement, as well as specific ideas within those areas.
- Document the results and disseminate information
- Identify core individuals to begin draft of marketing plan
- Identify possible roles for other committee members to encourage continued involvement. Use CPS to assist them in defining their own roles going forward

As an initial activity, the rules of brainstorming can be introduced, and the group can use stick-it notes to brainstorm potential audiences, based on the information and background presented. The convergent process will be held until the second meeting, so that any additional ideas can be added following incubation.

Planning Meeting #2

In direct opposition to the first meeting, it may be interesting to hold the next session of brainstorming out of the context and even off the grounds of the church property. In a way, many churches, and the Catholic Church, in particular, has had an identity complex. Nothing ever changes, which can be good. It is one of the greatest characteristics of the church that, regardless of where in the world you are, the church and the Mass is the same. However, when looking for innovation, it can be a block to the creative process.

Von Oech, in his book entitled *A Whack on the Side of the Head: How can you be more creative?* contends that it is important to explore the things which stop people from delving into their creative sides. He says that changing the environment, new stimuli is introduced, and we cease to “solve current problems with yesterday’s solutions” (Oech, 2008, p. 5). In the comfort of the church, we can begin the process, by retraining members from the rigor of their current environment and reminding them that God made all people in His image.

In the same way, we are all creative, but have forgotten how to access this part of our brain. Our routines and lives have inhibited this process, and we can be opened to a more innovative starting point.

Maslow claimed that creativity is a characteristic which all persons possess, and everyone has an innate quality of “originality or inventiveness” (Maslow, 1970). Of particular interest in breaking this group’s activities out of the normal routine is the security need, which is an aspect which can be particularly strong. By introducing the rules of diverging at the first meeting, we have provided a structure which is safe, agreed upon and expressed as an acknowledged part of the process.

At this second session, the stick-it notes from the first session can be displayed. The group members will be allowed to add any additional ideas for a limited period of about five minutes, then the group can be led into techniques for converging and narrowing the selections to a few potential audiences. While members are adding any additional ideas on stick-it notes, food is offered. Again, Maslow’s hierarchy suggests that we don’t need grumpy committee members!

Until now, the process has only included brainstorming, which is a divergent Creative Problem Solving tool. In other words, its purpose is to generate a large quantity of ideas. Now, they must be qualified in some way to transform them into useful solutions. This process of transformation is another wonderful place to introduce some theology.

Using colored sticky dots, members are asked by the facilitator to place a “hit” on those ideas which follow the standards of the following diagram:



Figure 4: Qualities of a “Hit”

Participants can repeat this process for brainstorming potential problem statements. They should begin with positive statements, such as:

- “In what ways might we...?”
- “How to...?” or
- “How might we...?”

Then, they can begin clustering problem statements in order to settle on a single goal for the project.

Planning Meeting #3

Finally, it is time to proceed toward the final stage of the marketing planning process – defining strategies and tactics, budgets and details for bringing the ideas into reality. By now, participants have become more comfortable with brainstorming, are following the rules and feeling energized by the success of the CPS process.

Clustering at the last meeting should have defined some areas where the parish can begin to focus its energy and resources. Taking them one at a time, it is time to brainstorm specific tactics and details for each area. Then, sticky dots can once again be used to make “hits.” Alas, a marketing plan with specific strategies has emerged. It will continue to need some refinement. Some areas to consider are:

- Is there money for the activity?
- Can the parish do it alone or will collaboration be necessary?
- Is it aligned with diocesan and Vatican initiatives? Is it in conflict with any of them, even in terms of schedule or fundraising?
- Is any other parish doing this? How might that affect it?
- What resources will it require?
- Who might become allies in the process?

This process could theoretically continue forever, but it is not productive or practical to diverge and converge forever. Remember, refinement and usefulness are very important, and ideas should be strengthened as much as possible. However, perfection is not key, and theological reflection will continue to occur as the idea is developed and rolled out.

Now that members have made such strides, it is time to celebrate! Thank God for all that he has done to guide the process, and ask His blessing on the parish and the members of the committee who so willingly devoted themselves to this creative process. As for the continued guidance of the Spirit in the implementation stage of the plan.

Benefits Derived from this Method/Process

The Creative Problem Solving process can be spiritually uplifting. In the combination of marketing, CPS and ministry, a renewal can be made which brings new energy to the marketing efforts. One aspect builds essentially on the other.

When we minister to each other, we tap into the "cosmic" character which Pope John Paul II spoke about. By relating to one another, we are creating a transcendent, graced communication with the Divine. As St. Augustine explained it, "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it," recalling the words of St. Paul to the people of Corinth. He went on to say: "If you are his body and members of him, then you will find set on the Lord's table your own mystery. Yes, you receive your own mystery" (John Paul II, 2003).

Blocks to Creativity in Relation to Ministry

One of the greatest aspects of the church is its tradition. However, I wonder if it is possible for the tradition to overwhelm administrative functions, and therefore, serve as a block or hindrance to creativity. While openness is trait of ministry, it often is not acceptable in marketing strategy for parishes. Fear of compromising the theological elements prevents new ideas from making it off the starting block. In many ways, the early church was more open than we are today.

In his book entitled *The Church According to the New Testament*, Daniel J. Harrington provides a perspective on the Church using the New Testament as a lens (Harrington, 2001). Through the synoptic

Gospels, the Gospel of John, the writings of St. Paul and other early Christian writings, he frames the community of Christ, its purpose, mission and characteristics. The book reminds us that there was, in some ways, more clarity of purpose in the early Christian Church. Their identity as disciples and the shared gift of faith was the focal point from which they were called into service. Political struggles and societal influences have often clouded the identity and mission of the Church throughout history. Harrington brings the broad issue of Church theology down to some simple points which we share with each other and with the larger, worldwide community. They are valuable lessons and important reminders that this ecclesiology is a continuation of God's revelation throughout history.

As ministers, we can look to church life in the New Testament and recognize the failures of the disciples and the struggles they encountered. We can identify with their humanity and strive to continue the work of the Church with the same fire of the Holy Spirit, and the same determined faith upon which they formed what we now know as "Church."

As a Creative Problem Solving facilitator, a theologian and a marketing strategist, I would suggest that this group of marketing volunteers may be more prone to creative blocks than others. It may take more than the standard toolbox of CPS tools to loosen those habits. The theology which might be useful here is that which Harrington describes – go back to the days and mindset of the early church and consider what Jesus and the early disciples may have done in marketing for their era. Is that time the same as ours? How is it different? How is the audience different? How may our strategies change to respond to these shifts? In what ways might we change our strategies, while maintaining our values and traditions?

While this is not the standard piece of the CPS process, if it is necessary to adjust to the context of the goals and makeup of the group. This may be an issue which needs to be addressed in order to make significant progress.

Key Questions for Going Forward

Certainly, discussion of the blocks a parish marketing group might face is the biggest challenge for the church in developing a unique and functional marketing strategy. Those blocks have prohibited the parishes from making progress to this point, and will continue to do so without being addressed. That being said, I could write ten books on this theme alone. Many others could add substantial good to this field by offering ways to identify and alleviate these blocks to innovation in marketing for the church.

Some of my colleagues have already delved into the idea of Creative Problem Solving as a transformative process. It holds powerful potential for building up the church and inspiring transformation. Building God's Church on earth is not something which can be done without a collective context. Theologian Kevin Irwin asserts that "all acts of 'communion' relate us to each other in the union brought about in Christ...No act of communion is ever from oneself alone. It always signifies relatedness to each other through Christ" (Irwin, 2005, p. 86).

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APPENDIX A

Guide to the Development of a Parish Marketing Plan

Using Creative Problem Solving



by [Patricia Meyer](#)

Presented as part of the requirements for the
Master of Science Degree in Creative Studies
at SUNY at Buffalo State
December 2016

Why Does A Parish Needs A Marketing Plan?

There is little doubt that the climate of the church is changing. While the parish is still the center of many communities, there are more and more things vying for the attention of parishioners and potential worshippers. Parish leaders are struggling to draw people to events and offer opportunities for people to come closer to God.

Things do not happen by chance. A deliberate approach to parish marketing is a necessary process in the modern age. Without one, a church is “shooting arrows in the dark,” and hoping that one hits the target. With limited staff, volunteers and money, churches cannot afford to waste efforts on things which may or may not work. They need to focus their time and money finding out where the target is, and how they might hit it quickly and efficiently.



A Marketing Plan Will:

- ⇒ Define Goals
- ⇒ Identify your target audience
- ⇒ Outline Strategies
- ⇒ Control Costs
- ⇒ Measure Results

Defining Goals

One of the biggest mistakes a parish can make is starting with the wrong goals. Measuring success by mass attendance, or worse, by envelope contributions, starts at the end of the process. Is the goal to market to those in the pews, or to attract new members and keep them? Most people don't start off renewing their faith by coming to church and participating fully. They often start with smaller moments at key points in their lives. How can we, as ministers, share those moments with them and use them to bring people closer to God? How can we enrich their faith, in order to bring them closer to that longing for the sacraments that we treasure ourselves?



Identifying Your Target Audience

I have heard many church administrators say that they do not have a “target audience.” Everyone, they contend, is their audience. Maybe this is true in the larger sense, but every marketing campaign is geared toward a smaller goal. Certainly, parishes can undertake another marketing goal later on, but at this time, for this campaign, who does the parish wish to reach? Marketing to everyone at once is like trying to feed 5,000 with only two fish and a loaf of bread...only Jesus can do it!!



Outlining Strategies

Praying for solutions is part of the equation, but there need to be specific ways to reach a target audience. What events or activities are we going to undertake? When will they happen, and who will be involved? What are the details? How do they fulfill our goals and reach our target audience?



Controlling Costs

Failing to plan for marketing efforts often leads to “rogue last ditch efforts.” Picture a staff meeting where someone comes up with a “woodcarving theme basket raffle theology speaker chicken dinner” as a marketing strategy. Think this is strategic marketing? Deliberate planning prevents knee-jerk marketing strategies which may end in failure and have few benefits. It also prevents last-minute efforts which are not part of the parish budget.



Measuring Results

Many parishes throw programs and events out there without any way to measure whether the effort was worth the cost. Is the event a friend raiser or a fund raiser? How many people attended? What was the actual cost per person? Who was invited? Were they the right people? What was their feedback? Did the event meet its goal? Did it fit in with the overall marketing strategy? Was it aligned with the theology of the church? How many volunteers were needed? Did people take any positive or negative action as a result of the event? What external factors played a role in the success or failure of the activity? How can the activity be improved or eliminated?

Why Use Creative Problem Solving?

Marketing Committees in a parish are more than just meetings. Our theology tells us that clergy, administration and lay ministers come together in a collaborative way, along with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to bring people closer to God. The use of Creative Problem Solving gives everyone a voice, and allows for the expression of ideas that might otherwise be suppressed. It prevents ideas from being judged prematurely, and prevents negative judgement of participants.

A skilled facilitator has a lot to offer the process. As a person who is not a clergy member or someone with a history within the parish, he or she is able to ignore the politics and create a climate of acceptance and openness, where ideas can flourish and committee members can see things with fresh eyes. The church has been around for thousands of years, and it is certainly possible to fall into old patterns without a fresh perspective on the process. Additionally, this person is attentive to the process, not necessarily the content. By making the process a positive one, and encouraging large numbers of ideas, the process begins to reinvigorate the volunteers, who can spread that positive energy throughout the parish.



Creative Problem Solving Will:

- ➡ Develop Creativity Habits
- ➡ Create Openness to Ideas
- ➡ Prevent Floundering
- ➡ Foster Collaboration
- ➡ Reinvigorate Participants

Before the First Meeting

As the first step in the planning process, parish administrative staff should strive to identify the current problem and prepare background data. This will be used by a parish committee of volunteers to develop a problem statement, identify the audience(s), generate possible ideas or solutions and develop a schedule and budget for the project.



Data may include:

- Parish size and demographics
- Background on neighboring parishes of the same faith
- Background on neighboring parishes of other faiths
- Current issues or events affecting the parish or the mother church
- Trends in envelope collections and church attendance for the last 5-10 years
- Information about current marketing efforts and the amount already invested

The last bullet point illustrates a vital piece of information. How much time, money and identity of the parish is wrapped up in current branding by the parish? Are there nicknames which are ingrained, or events which define the parish in some way, such as a historical activity or tradition which is well known and loved? Are there slogans or products which are well known to the parishioners or community? Are there any which have been thrown out there, but are not doing well and have not “taken off?” This information may prompt different aspects of idea generation. In fact, a facilitator may be able to bring this into the process at a later time, as well, perhaps as a forced relationship with another idea or concept.



Next, a committee should be identified. ask for volunteers to serve on the parish marketing committee with the goal of developing a marketing plan. Let the volunteers know this, so they are committing to a finite, real goal, not a lifetime of meetings with no progress. It is ok to advertise in the bulletin, but might be fruitful to ask a person or two who is not part of the parish, but who may have talents or a fresh perspective. A wide range of ages,



backgrounds and God-given talents is desired. Strive for approximately a dozen people who have enough energy, commitment and openness to productively participate in the process.

The Parish Data System (PDS) or a similar database can be utilized to identify parishioners or friends of the church who may have expertise in marketing or organizational development. However, selection of individuals whose expertise is varied may assist in the development of innovative, creative solutions. While marketing professionals have good concepts, they can be established in their patterns, which creates a standard plan, but does not introduce innovation or apply marketing concepts to the church in unique ways. People of varying backgrounds can be helpful in idea generation. Varying ages, backgrounds, professions and even religious preferences may lead to interesting concepts.

Seek Committee Members Who:

May or may not be members of the parish

Represent diverse backgrounds

Vary in age

Have a range of talents - some marketing, some not

Are open to new ideas and processes

Have the commitment to show up for a few meetings

Want to help

There will be several goals to the first meeting, and it is nearly certain that multiple meetings will be required to complete the marketing plan process. After all, if the goal is to repeat previous strategies, a marketing planning process is not necessary. The idea is to break the mold and add creative new concepts, not to repeat old tactics which may or may not be working.

One of the benefits to multiple meetings is the ability for members to use incubation time to further develop ideas and generate additional ideas over a period of time. Often, ideas need some time to “ferment” in order to become fruitful.

The First Meeting

The first meeting should include prayer which stresses unity and a servant attitude, setting the tone for collaboration and equality of members. Introductions can be made of team members and some explanation of why the process has been initiated. A synopsis of the current situation, problems and opportunities should be shared, as well as hopes for the process. Members can be offered the background information which has been compiled, and have the opportunity to ask questions.

One person should be identified in advance of this meeting to serve as the facilitator. Ideally, it should be someone with some experience in facilitation and who is knowledgeable about the CPS process. The role of this person is to remain impartial to the content, so it may work best if this individual is not an expert in marketing or theology to prevent this person's opinions from contaminating the process.

Rules for Creative Problem Solving can be introduced at this point in order to set the stage for idea generation. It also creates a truly collaborative environment, where all members are given equal importance and room for expression.

God calls all of us to serve one another, not just an elite few. We all have different gifts, which may be used for the benefit of God's ministry. This belief is expressed clearly in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium, art.

40) affirms that "all Christians in whatever state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity, and this holiness is conducive to a more human way of living, even in society here on earth." Therefore, ministry belongs to all of us, and is the responsibility of every person, not just a mission left to the clergy or parish staff. The faith life of each person affects and is affected by every other person. The Council clearly laid out the universal call to all people and the important roles which they play in Church life.

Opening Prayer

Lord of All,
Send your Spirit to inspire
us to bring your Good News
to those who long to be
close to you. Make us open
to hearing your will as we
embark on this new journey,
and give us the strength we
need to make a difference in
the lives of our brothers and
sisters.
We ask this through Christ
our Lord...Amen.

Then, the formation of a problem statement can begin. Ideally, this should be framed more as an opportunity, in the positive context, rather than something to be overcome. It may be best to begin this phrase with the words “How can we...?” or “How to...?”





Again, the idea of incubation between meetings cannot be diminished. Not only does it help the creative process, as we have discussed, but it also allows for time for prayer and divine intervention. If we believe that the will of God is part of this process and is leading us as participants in the process, there is a natural bridge between time for meetings and time for prayer. Members of the marketing committee can bring their experience with CPS to mass and offer it as part of a Eucharistic sacrifice.

The meditative, ritualistic experience of the Mass can be ripe for idea generation, either at the time or later, as the brain is able to process the content and context together. With this idea in mind, it would be beneficial to consider holding the first for this group on Sunday morning, following Mass. Instead of meeting after working hours in the dark, after fatigue and hunger and the annoyances of the day have set in, why not offer to feed the group and catch them when they are rested, relaxed and feeling loved and secure following a little interaction with church family members? If they are with their families, it may even be interesting to invite them to join the process. Some of the best marketing ideas can come from the mouths of our young people, and Jesus always fed people before trying to preach to them!

The rules of marketing say that the following structure should be followed in developing a marketing plan:

- **Audience**
- **Goals**
- **Tactics and Strategies**

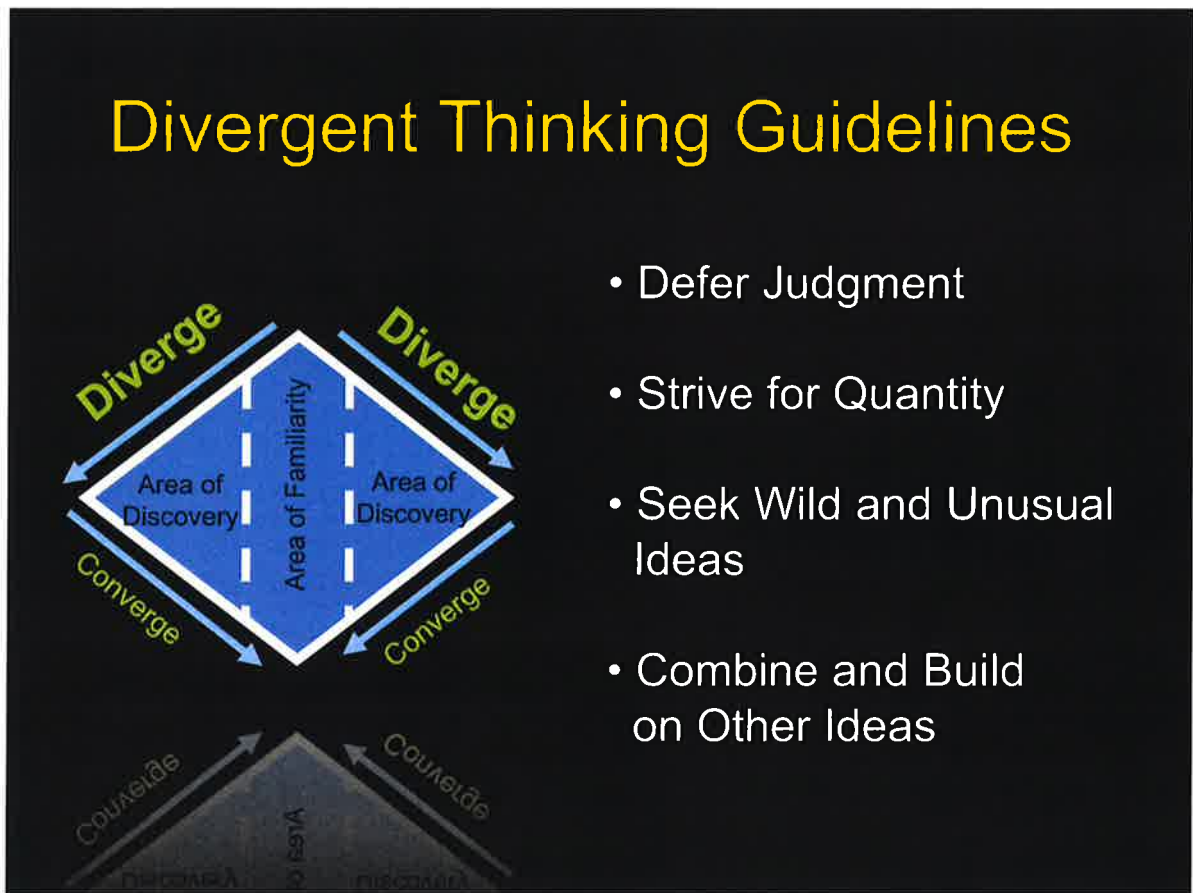
The first meeting, in terms of Creative Problem Solving, can focus on the first two steps – defining the audience and developing potential goals or problem statements. The first meeting is an important time to do the following:

-  Introduce the team, the facilitator and the parish staff
-  Ask the pastors to define the background of the task, and their motivation for recruiting volunteers, as well as their wishes for the future of the parish.
-  Check the problem statement against stated goals. If necessary, use CPS to re-define the problem statement.
-  Introduce the CPS process and establish ground rules for diverging.

- ➡ Lead the group in divergent and convergent processes to begin to establish areas for improvement, as well as specific ideas within those areas.
- ➡ Document the results and disseminate information
- ➡ Identify core individuals to begin draft of marketing plan
- ➡ Identify possible roles for other committee members to encourage continued involvement. Use CPS to assist them in defining their own roles going forward

As an initial activity, the rules of brainstorming can be introduced, and the group can use stick-it notes to brainstorm potential problem statements, based on the information and background presented. The convergent process will be held until the second meeting, so that any additional ideas can be added following incubation.

Divergent Thinking Guidelines



- Defer Judgment
- Strive for Quantity
- Seek Wild and Unusual Ideas
- Combine and Build on Other Ideas

Brainstorming (Classic Brainstorming)

**The Original Divergent Thinking Tool
used to generate many options with a group**

Directions:

1. Follow the guidelines for divergent thinking. The divergent guidelines were originally established for brainstorming!
2. Using a flipchart, positioned so every member of the group can see it, write the challenge or problem statement you are working on at the top.
3. Write each response from the resource group as given. The scribe or facilitator cannot shorten or modify the idea (option) without permission from the person giving the idea! If the idea is too long ask the person offering the idea to give it to you again in a headline.
4. Do not worry about spelling or grammar -- as Mark Twain said: a creative person can spell a word more than one way!
4. Write the ideas in columns.
5. Number each idea. Later, when converging using Highlighting, it is easier to write a cluster of numbers than to write the ideas over again.

The Second Meeting

In direct opposition to the first meeting, it may be interesting to hold the next session of brainstorming out of the context and even off the grounds of the church property. In a way, many churches, and the Catholic Church, in particular, has had an identity complex. Nothing ever changes, which can be good. It is one of the greatest characteristics of the church that, regardless of where in the world you are, the church and the Mass is the same. However, when looking for innovation, it can be a block to the creative process.

Von Oech, in his book entitled *A Whack on the Side of the Head: How can you be more creative?* contends that it is important to explore the things which stop people from delving into their creative sides. He says that changing the environment, new stimuli is introduced, and we cease to “solve current problems with yesterday’s solutions.” (Oech, 2008) In the comfort of the church, we can begin the process, by retraining members from the rigor of their current environment and reminding them that God made all people in His image.

In the same way, we are all creative, but have forgotten how to access this part of our brain. Our routines and lives have inhibited this process, and we can be opened to a more innovative starting point. Of particular interest in breaking this group’s activities out of the normal routine is a need for security, which is an aspect which can be particularly strong. By introducing the rules for divergence at the first meeting, we have provided a structure which is safe, agreed upon and expressed as an acknowledged part of the process.

At this second session, the stick-it notes from the first session can be displayed. The group members will be allowed to add any additional ideas for a limited period of about five minutes, then the group can be led into techniques for converging and narrowing the selections to a single problem statement. While members are adding any additional ideas on stick-it notes, food is offered. Hungry committee members just may not be feeling that creative!

Now, we hopefully have a large number of ideas. As a group, it is important to begin the qualify the ideas and “converge” the



concepts into a few usable solutions. The rules for convergence can then be introduced. Otherwise, there are a whole bunch of ideas with no plan to use them. Just as there are rules for brainstorming, there are rules for “converging,” as well. The facilitator can introduce these rules, provided on the following page, and lead the group into the next activity.

Participants can be asked to place colored sticky dots on those ideas which qualify as a “hit to them.” Then, similar ideas can be clustered together in groups, so that a few stronger themes begin to emerge.

Finally, the group can identify which theme most closely reflects the problem statement on which they wish to work.

What Makes A “Hit?”:

Clear

Relevant

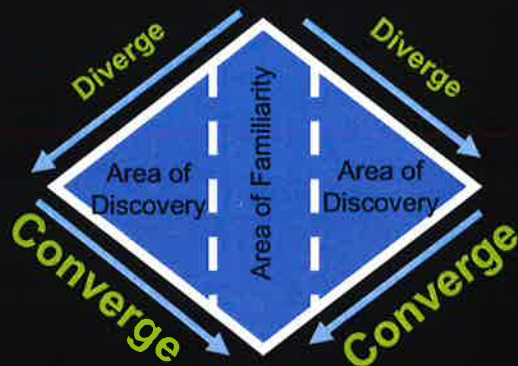
Stands Out

Interesting

Goes in the right direction

(Based on Vehar, Firestien & Miller, 1997)

Convergent Thinking Guidelines



- Use Affirmative Judgment
Find the advantages first
- Be Deliberate
Be planful and systematic
- Be Open to Novelty
Look for new and unusual options
- Work to Improve Options
Make your options better

PPCo...*A tool to evaluate and further develop ideas or products.*

Name of Idea or Product: _____

Pluses + Generate below the advantages or pluses of the idea:

- + _____
- + _____
- + _____
- + _____

Potentials * Generate below some positive outcomes or future spin offs that might occur as a result of this.

* It might _____

* It might _____

* It might _____

* It might _____

Concerns - Generate below the major limitations or concerns of the idea.

- How to _____ ?

- How to _____ ?

- How to _____ ?

Overcoming Major Concern #1:

Restate below a concern generated above that is the biggest obstacle. Generate ideas to overcome that concern.

How to _____ ?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

The Third Meeting

Finally, it is time to proceed toward the final stage of the marketing planning process – defining strategies and tactics, budgets and details for bringing the ideas into reality. By now, participants have become more comfortable with brainstorming, are following the rules and feeling energized by the success of the CPS process.

Clustering at the last meeting should have defined some areas where the parish can begin to focus its energy and resources. Taking them one at a time, it is time to brainstorm specific tactics and details for each area. Then, sticky dots can once again be used to make “hits.” Alas, a marketing plan with specific strategies has emerged. It will continue to need some refinement.



Some areas to consider are:

- **Is there money for the activity?**
- **Can the parish do it alone or will collaboration be necessary?**
- **Is it aligned with diocesan and Vatican initiatives?**
- **Is any other parish doing this? How might that affect it?**
- **What resources will it require?**
- **Who might become allies in the process?**

This process could theoretically continue forever, but it is not productive or practical to diverge and converge forever. Remember, refinement and usefulness are very important, and ideas should be strengthened as much as possible. However, perfection is not key, and theological reflection will continue to occur as the idea is developed and rolled out.

End in Prayer

Now that members have made such strides, it is time to celebrate! Thank God for all that he has done to guide the process, and ask His blessing on the parish and the members of the committee who so willingly devoted themselves to this creative process. As for the continued guidance of the Spirit in the implementation stage of the plan.

