

Creating the Preferred Future

by Charles Schuetz, Executive Director

In the past several months, aggressive strategic planning has been on going in several of our sponsored ministries. This is a good thing! As Yogi Berra once said, “*The future ain’t what it used to be.*” And while we continue to get a chuckle out of Yogi’s malapropisms, we should look beyond the humorous aspects of this statement and recognize the inherent wisdom implied in these words.

And because, inevitably, our future is tied to the ever changing needs of those whom we serve - our dear neighbor - each of us, as organizations, needs to plan for meeting new needs.

There are two ways to create a strategic plan:

We can develop the technique of becoming *masters of extrication*, responding to ever-present and constantly changing challenges in the day-to-day management of our institutions. We can become quite efficient in developing “quick response” techniques, programs and the like in order to remain at a high level of effectiveness. In this somewhat passive approach to planning, we rely upon external and internal pressures to create the impetus for planning. An inherent danger in this approach is that we may not foresee a challenge or crisis in sufficient time to effectively incorporate its solution into the “plan” or, and maybe this is a worse condition, no challenge or crisis occurs over a long period of time which leads to the complacent attitude that everything must be going OK and “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” The reality is, *if today we meet yesterday’s standards, we have lowered our standards*, and we are in danger of not being able to respond in a timely fashion to emerging needs.

Another way of developing a plan is to be truly “strategic” about it. Rather than letting external stimuli be our prompts to improvement, we can become active agents for creating the future of our choice - our “*preferred future.*” By developing a strong strategic planning process which includes keeping a constant finger on the pulse of ever changing demographics, societal needs and emerging opportunities, we can plan for and finance those changes which will be essential to meeting the goals of our strategic plan. By creating the preferred future, we are in total control over who we are and what we do at any point in the future as an institution so that we can maintain fidelity with our mission.

This approach to planning also helps us, the sponsored ministry, fulfill our obligation to the Sponsor to create a CSJ environment in our institutions which thrives on the values inherent in the charism of the Sisters of Saint Joseph. We, in our sponsored ministries, are co-ministers with the Sisters of Saint Joseph in serving the dear neighbor. The history and heritage of the Sisters are a story of constant and consistent response to newly emerging dear neighbors with newly emerging needs. And as stewards of the Sisters’ sponsored ministries, we, in our local missions, must remain aware of our obligation to be sensitive to the emerging needs of those whom we serve; and through a *carefully developed, effectively implemented, and constantly monitored strategic plan*, we are truly in control of how we, as an institution or as a board of trustees, to respond to the emerging needs of those whom we serve.

Indeed, “the future ain’t what it used to be,” and it is vital to our success as a ministry to recognize this wisdom and to create our own preferred future so that we maintain our quality of ministry and mission effectiveness and be responsive to the need for change.

Glossary

Sponsor:

The Sisters of Saint Joseph who establish the sponsored ministries as vehicles for the Congregation to fulfill its mission.

Sponsored Ministries:

A ministry over which the Congregation has significant influence and ultimate control over mission.

Sponsorship:

The relationship between the Sponsor, the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Boston, and a ministry sponsored by them which is formally expressed in the Sponsorship Agreement.

Sponsorship Agreement:

This formal agreement spells out the mutual responsibilities of Sponsor and ministry and is signed by the President of the Congregation and the Chair of the local Board of Trustees.