**HISPANIC OUTREACH**

**STRATEGIES TO INCREASE LATINO ENROLLMENT**

Recently, Rev. Joseph V. Corpora, C.S.C. addressed the schools in the Archdiocese of Hartford regarding the need for outreach to the growing Hispanic population in order to increase their presence in our Catholic schools. Fr. Corpora is the Director of University-School Partnerships in the Alliance for Catholic Education program at the University of Notre Dame where he works on the Catholic School Advantage Campaign. He is a national authority on the topic of Latino outreach and had a great deal of valuable information to share with attendees of the April 29, 2015 workshop.

As background, Fr. Corpora told us that the “face of America is changing,” since Latinos comprise the fastest growing school aged population and are the fastest growing minority in the country. Currently, Hispanics make up 17% of the U.S. population at over 50 million, and their numbers have grown by 11 million in just the last ten years. One out of every 4 school children is now Latino, and 57% of Catholics below the age of ten are Hispanic. Clearly, this presents Catholic schools with an opportunity for both evangelization and enrollment growth, especially considering what is known as the “Catholic School Advantage.” These are the benefits to Latinos of attending Catholic schools, illustrated by their 47% graduation rate from public schools, but their 96% graduation rate from Catholic schools!

To increase the number of Hispanics in our Catholic schools, it is critical to enhance the **cultural responsiveness** of these schools, and the following recommendations for school administrators from Fr. Corpora will help us accomplish just that:

* Find a cultural mentor to provide a better understanding of Latinos and their traditions. Ideally, this should not be a current parent.
* Display culturally responsive imagery in the school. Images of Our Lady of Guadalupe, for example, can give Latino children the feeling that they belong.
* Consider hiring a Spanish-speaking secretary in the school office. Insure that the office welcome is a warm and personal one.
* Translate important forms and documents carefully for the Latino audience, ensuring proper usage of the Spanish language.
* Learn how to say 35 key phrases in Spanish – making an effort honors the culture.
* Encourage teachers to become students of their students’ culture, to learn about their “ways of being” in their home community.
* Expand parent volunteer hours to include members of the extended family.
* Extend personal invitations to Hispanic families to visit the school – this will work better than open houses. Welcome the entire family to visit.
* Initiate a Madrinas program to help connect inquiring families to the school. Invite some current Latino moms to be school Madrinas, serving as a point of contact and source of help and information for inquiring families. Madrinas can help new families fill out paperwork, provide information about school events, and encourage them to take the next enrollment step. In other words, Madrinas help new Latino families navigate the Catholic school world and provide a link to the school that is comfortable for them.
* Consider offering incentives to the Madrinas – this honors the work they are doing.
* Focus on building relationships with Hispanic families, since their culture is very relational.
* Be creative about tuition costs and consider different tuition rates and flexible payment.
* Provide role models for Latino children: i.e. teachers, administrators, school board members.
* Host parish formation and sacramental classes in the school; welcome people into the school so it is seen as a community center.
* Become familiar with Latino media outlets and establish relationships with them.
* Offer professional development and cultural competency training for faculty.
* Make sure the school is bright and attractive to appeal to the Hispanic love of color.

Many of these ideas can be implemented at little to no cost, but they all require a change of heart as we learn to welcome the Latino audience into our schools with an openness of mind and heart. Fr. Corpora assures us that not only will this enhance school enrollment, but it will “renew the face of the earth.”