

Conference Delights as More than Just Software . . . A Spiritual Retreat!

Ann Arbor, Mich. — November 17, 2011 — More than 200 ParishSOFT users from churches and dioceses all across the U.S. came together November 7-8, 2011, in Anaheim, California, for the ParishSOFT Conference. So much more than a typical software company's "users" conference, ParishSOFT's fourth annual event took staff far beyond the "how-to" issues, giving staff a forum in which to recall the reasons they came to work for the Church in the first place and to gain new perspective on how their work is stewardship that serves a greater mission.

Building an Engaged Church

Following Mass on Monday morning, president and CEO Bill Pressprich set the stage for the workshops and keynotes by introducing the theme: *Building an Engaged Church*. Pressprich asked attendees to imagine what would happen if their parishioners were 13 times more likely to invite someone to their church. What if they were three times more satisfied with their lives, spent more than two hours each week serving and helping others in their community, and tripled their giving?

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"By being more engaging ourselves," said Pressprich, "We can build a strong sense of belonging, which leads to believing and engagement in our parishes." Pressprich challenged the audience to jump in with both feet, learn from each other, and use the wealth of information in their software to communicate with and engage God's people like never before.

Stewardship as Spirituality

Pressprich's welcome was the perfect segue to Fr. Daniel Mahan, executive director of the O'Meara Ferguson Center for Catholic Stewardship at Indiana's Marian University, who delivered the opening keynote, *Stewardship as Spirituality: Helping Busy People Grow Closer to the Lord*. "Holiness is our goal," Fr. Mahan told the group. "Stewardship is the practical spirituality that gets us there."

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These words struck a powerful chord with parish and diocesan staff, many of whom remarked that in their busy workplaces, it's easy to lose sight of how their day-to-day work answers their personal call to stewardship and evangelization. Between morning Mass and Fr. Mahan's keynote, more than 200 servants of the Church went off to their first workshops and training classes filled with a renewed sense of mission and hearts alive in Christ.

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Workshops and Training for All

Five hands-on training classes and 42 workshops, presented by both ParishSOFT users and staff, taught Church staff best practices and efficient use of ParishSOFT's integrated suite of products in tracks like accounting, administration, communications, fundraising, reporting. But what made this year's learning sessions especially outstanding were its new workshops on stewardship and engagement and its track of classes designed for the 27 priests who attended for free.

In these sessions, learning moved beyond the nuts and bolts of software functionality to help users connect the dots between the data and tools they use at work and the stewardship of their parishes and dioceses.

Strengths and Engagement

The energy continued to build through Tuesday's sessions and Msgr. Bill Hanson's keynote, *Building an Engaged Church – Why People Join, Stay and Serve*. Msgr. Hanson examined how helping people discover their own strengths leads to a true sense of belonging and fulfillment in parish life. Church staff who serve in every role imaginable, from diocesan IT to parish youth ministry, gained fresh perspective and were inspired to identify their own top five strengths and use those God-given talents to help others feel that they belong. For Msgr. Hanson's 4,000-family parish, St. Gerard Majella, Rockville Centre, NY, the proof is truly in the pudding. They have quadrupled participation and built lasting stewardship with the help of Gallup's [Clifton StrengthsFinder](#) and congregational engagement tools.

Declaring the conference "mindblowing," Msgr. Hanson shared what he learned in the sessions he attended, "All along I've thought of the mobile media communication component as a kind of accessory to supplement the face-to-face interaction in our parishes that promotes engagement. But what I realized is that the first three questions on the Gallup pyramid—What do I get? Give? And do I belong?—are all being asked and answered on the digital continent. We can use our mobile media presence to make a first connection and draw them into the in-person experience, as well as strengthen the relationships we have with those who are already there. And if the in-person experience matches what they pick up from the 'virtual parish' experience, they will be ours for life."

Spirituality and Fun

While morning Masses let us begin each day with the Eucharist and a spiritual focus, the conference's social events gave staff opportunities to network, share ideas, and have fun together. Monday evening featured a Disneyland twilight outing, and Tuesday night's highlight was a dessert reception with outstanding performances from Catholic comedian [Judy McDonald](#) and ParishSOFT's resident magician James Lantiegne.

Attendees reported their appreciation for the opportunity to pray and spend time getting to know each other during the conference. Interacting

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Next year's ParishSOFT Conference will be held October 8-10, 2012, in southeast Michigan.

with people who also work for the Church opens doors to the exchange of many ideas and best practices. Lisa Sliker, business manager at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Ellicott City, MD, said, "One of the greatest benefits of working for the Church is that unlike the secular business world, our knowledge is not proprietary but meant to be shared. It's a blessing to work with people who are so willing and able to help each other."

Bill Glover, CIO and Director of IT for the Archdiocese of Baltimore summed it up when he wrote, "The liturgies were uplifting, the priests brought us focus on the sacramental role of the Church, your staff lived their calling to be servant leaders and the participants brought forth the beauty of our universal Catholic Church. We came to witness a common ministry to serve the people of God no matter if they were from North Pole, Alaska, or New York City. What a wonderful gift to be given."

From 2011 to 2012

2011 presentations, photos, and quotes from ParishSOFT users are available at conference.parishsoft.com. Plans are already underway for next year's conference, which will be held October 8-10, 2012, in southeast Michigan.

As the ParishSOFT staff work to make the fifth annual conference the best event our users will attend in 2012, they'll be applying the lasting lessons learned on stewardship in Anaheim. To that end, we'll receive the seed of God's talent gratefully, nurture the soil of talent responsibly, share sacrificially, and return the whole harvest to God abundantly.

About ParishSOFT

Founded in 1998, ParishSOFT offers a complete suite of church and diocesan management software to connect people and the church and to reduce administrative work. ParishSOFT continually invests in improving its software and Web solutions, as well as adding new features and products. ParishSOFT presently serves more than 5,300 parishes and 52 arch/dioceses. Visit www.parishsoft.com for more information about ParishSOFT's products and services and conference.parishsoft.com for the latest conference news.

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2011-NOV-17 ParishSOFT Press Release