

Sacred Heart Parish

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COME 426: Organizational Communication

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Introduction:

Every organization is structured differently, from major conglomerates to local nonprofits. The functions of each organization are different, and it follows logically that they also have different cultures, rules, and beliefs. One organization that has been an institution in Wisconsin for over one hundred years is Sacred Heart parish in Appleton. It is one of seven Catholic churches in Appleton alone, which means it has had to work hard over the years to differentiate itself from the other parishes. Sacred Heart parish is working hard to be a successful organization, but many factors are holding it back from reaching its true potential.

Organizational Framework:

There are many frameworks to look at an organization through. One such framework is the classical framework. This framework uses the machine metaphor, which states that an organization needs to have members that are specialized. (Miller, 2013) As in any parish, each member has a specific role to fill. Father John runs the mass, which is the most crucial function of a Catholic church. However, there is also Laura, who plans events outside of mass for faith formation and meetings, and Dave, who cooks meals for events throughout the year. Though only two were listed, there are dozens of people who work to keep the parish running.

Another framework is human relations. This way of structuring an organization includes noting a concept called the Hawthorne effect. The name of this effect comes from the Hawthorne studies that discovered it, and it states that workers will work harder and do better work when management pays attention to them. (Miller, 2013) Though there are employees at Sacred Heart, the lay people who go to the parish show this effect more noticeably. The parish council members and priest make sure to run polls, ask the congregation questions, and check the

suggestion box in the parish hallway consistently. The parishioners feel appreciated and like their feedback matters because of these systems.

Similarly, there is an approach titled human resources. One of the management styles described in this approach is country club management, where management cares about the people at the cost of productivity. (Miller, 2013) The parish is very focused on its people, but it tends to do things in ways that are not effective or strategic, as the parish budget is often off the marker of what it should be. A concept similar to specialization appears in the systems approach, and it is called interdependence. This states that everyone in the organization relies on each other to function. (Miller, 2013) Once again, every member of Sacred Heart has specialized knowledge and skills, so they must work together. For example, Laura planning an event may need a social media coordinator to reach out so that people know it is happening. People must work together for everything to run smoothly.

Moving forward, there is another approach titled the constitutive approach, which involves membership negotiation. These negotiations are not a one time event; they are a constant part of an organization, since boundaries are not always explicit. (Miller, 2013) As a member of the parish, this paper's author has had difficulty with knowing their place. Being away at college most of the year and never officially signing up for the parish makes it unclear to know if they are truly a member. This struggle is true for many students at the parish.

Finally, the critical approach has a concept called the unitary frame of reference. This concept describes the way an organization views conflict. In the unitary frame, conflict is seen as rare and negative, not common and constructive. (Miller, 2013) Sacred Heart does not deal with conflict well. Raising objections at parish council meetings oftentimes involves getting shut down immediately, even if the person is arguing a valid point. This negative view of conflict

almost convinced the parish to install expensive water sprinklers when the ones that they had were already functional and up to code.

Organizational Process Analyses:

All organizations have major processes that they follow, and Sacred Heart is no exception. The two most notable processes are decision making and organizational change/leadership. Decision making covers a large variety of choices. The decisions can be major or minor and happen daily or rarely, as well as everywhere in between. They are a major part of working in an organization, but some studies have found that about fifty percent of decisions made in an organization are ineffective or have room for improvement. (Miller, 2013) Sacred Heart's decision making can be seen through a variety of the concepts the topic covers.

The first major idea is that of groupthink. Groupthink is when people work in groups and value unanimous decision making over logical decisions. It makes people less likely to consider alternate courses of action. (Miller, 2013) There were considerations to turn part of the parish into a daycare of sorts, which most people agreed would increase parishioners' satisfaction with the parish. However, someone brought up concerns regarding the legal rules about running a daycare, and they were mostly ignored. After months of debate, the daycare idea was decided against, in favor of other plans. This debate took valuable time and resources that could have been used elsewhere.

The next major idea is that of bounded rationality. It states that everyone tries to make logical and rational decisions, but it is not always possible. Humans have biases and beliefs that make purely logical decision-making almost impossible, in some circumstances. (Miller, 2013) The parish is run by people who can make mistakes, so decision-making is always going to be

flawed in some way. Everyone does typically try to make the best decisions possible in the parish, which is important to remember even when discussing the decisions that have not gone well.

Finally, a helpful concept when dealing with decision-making are the phases of normative decision-making. These phases are formulation, concept development, detailing, evaluation, and implementation. (Miller, 2013) Obviously, this method is only one way to describe the process, but it covers much of how Sacred Heart makes decisions. To make a decision about anything, the parish has people come up with ideas, plan out the details, consider and reconsider them, and enact them. They can ask parishioners or staff members exclusively for help in all of these phases, which is shown in how often parish council meetings have guest speakers.

The second major process is organizational change/leadership. Organizational change is about any kind of change, which means it can be anywhere between major and minor changes, as well as planned or unplanned. The concept of change includes two major concepts: schemata and problems in the change process. Schemata are beliefs on how an organization works and how change happens, and they are either confirmed or disrupted based on the actions of the organization. (Miller, 2013) These schemata can interfere with the process, as someone who is disillusioned due to groupthink may be more cynical about sharing ideas for changes in the future. In the daycare example, having no opposition could have resulted in massive losses for the parish if no one had argued against the change.

The second concept is problems in the change process. The two most notable problems at Sacred Heart parish are unrealistic expectations and lack of meaningful participation. (Miller, 2013) People may have higher standards for the parish, especially if they have attended it for many years. They have a greater connection to it and want it to succeed, making them want it to

be a perfect organization, which is not possible. Additionally, the parish may ask for responses to surveys, etc, but not everyone fills them out or thinks deeply about their answers. This lack of participation makes decision-making and change much more difficult.

In terms of leadership, it can follow a variety of different models. It is a major factor in how an organization is run, and Sacred Heart has leadership in the form of the parish council and priests. One major part of leadership is framing, which is how leaders manage meaning to others by focusing on certain aspects. (Miller, 2013) The emails Sacred Heart sends out have limited information that is decided on by the main parish leadership. It makes sure people understand events and fundraisers a certain way, typically positively.

Organizational Challenges:

Organizations are bound to face different challenges as they move into the future. The two most notable challenges Sacred Heart is facing deal with technology and the identity of the organization. In terms of technology, Sacred Heart's greatest challenge is their communication media repertoire. This repertoire is a collection of methods used to spread information throughout an organization. (Miller, 2013) Sacred Heart exclusively emails people updates with only the occasional phone call for major events. These strategies are not enough for the parish's goals of increasing mass attendance.

Most young people do not enjoy receiving unplanned phone calls, and many people of all ages do not check their email regularly. The parish would benefit from creating an Instagram or other social media where they can reach out to more people. The focus on youth ministry would benefit from these updates the most, but having more information in the public benefits everyone. Additionally, sending text messages is a helpful way to get messages across in an

unobtrusive manner. People tend to check their texts more often than their email, and it does not require them to have a conversation with the person giving out the information. The problem has many solutions, but it is up to the parish to implement them.

The other notable challenge comes from the identity of the organization. People want to know where an organization stands on different issues, as well as what the organization does for the community via products or services. (Miller, 2013) The Catholic church as a whole is known for having divisive views on a variety of issues, and these beliefs must be reflected in the teachings of all Catholic churches. This divisiveness often drives people away, and the parish has little control over it. Sacred Heart attempts to interpret these teachings more loosely, but that also is a divisive choice for many people. There is no easy answer to this problem that the parish faces.

Assessment of the Organization:

Overall, I believe that Sacred Heart's culture is getting in the way of its success. Though people have the right intentions, they often do not make the best decisions for the organization as a whole. The structures and processes it follows are not always perfect either, which makes the organization as a whole suffer. The means they handle conflict in particular has been a detriment to the organization. However, the good intentions of the people running Sacred Heart makes change possible.

Being open to change and differing ideas of people who disagree will be critical going into the future. Having new ideas and making many minor changes will allow Sacred Heart to meet its goals much more effectively. In addition, the parishioners themselves who are not in any major councils need to ask more questions and make requests. Open communication will allow

for a greater flow of information and ideas, which will help the decision-making process. If change is going to happen in this organization, people need to want it and be willing to work towards a better future.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Sacred Heart parish is flawed but well-intentioned. Though there are issues in its management, they are not a guarantee of failure. Instead, they are a sign that change is needed. Even if people are trying their hardest to improve the parish, management still needs help, input, and support in order to improve the parish in the future. Some features of the parish are already good, and they will be the starting point for the future.

References:

Miller, K. (2013). *Organizational communication: Approaches and processes*. Cengage Learning.