

## BC's Matthew Eynon Teaches Building Blocks for Annual Giving

Small gifts given every year to a Catholic school can make all the difference in increasing that school's vitality and financial strength, said Matthew K. Eynon, Associate Vice President for Annual Giving at Boston College. He spoke to 60 Catholic elementary school principals and development officers recently at a workshop on fundraising and advancement for Catholic schools. Eynon's presentation was held on the BC campus and was sponsored by the Catholic Schools Office of the Archdiocese of Boston and the Center for Catholic Education at BC.

"Annual giving is back," emphasized Eynon, who noted that the era of large, one-time gifts had faded due to the "perfect storm" of a bad economy, endowment losses, and the demonstrated power of small donations used to elect President Obama. Although BC's circumstances are different than those of Catholic elementary schools, (the university, for instance, is in the midst of a \$1.5 billion capital campaign) certain lessons can be applied across the board, Eynon said.



**Matthew Eynon, Associate Vice President, Annual Giving**

In discussing "building blocks" for annual giving, Eynon stressed the importance of establishing core priorities, deciding on outreach channels to potential donors (such as direct marketing, e-appeals, and telemarketing), embracing technology (including social media like Facebook), and stretching current dollars. "A nickel equals six cents if you are smart and creative in managing your resources wisely," Eynon said.

Setting specific goals for annual giving also makes a difference, according to Eynon. He suggested not only coming up with a dollar figure (and a deadline) for annual fundraising for your school, but also with precise goals for things like volunteer involvement and alumni support. BC, he noted, began its campaign in October 2008 with 1,800 volunteers and seeks to have 4,000 volunteers before the campaign ends in 2015. The university also wants to grow financial support from alumni – from 20,000 donors to 40,000 donors.

Annual fund goals never change, Eynon said. They include raising current operating dollars, establishing a base of donors, soliciting larger annual gifts, creating a pipeline for leadership gifts, and most especially, focusing on stewardship and retention. "It's important to say thank you to donors in a timely

way,” said Eynon, whether through a thank-you note or a simple awards ceremony. Charlotte Kelly, principal of St. John the Evangelist School in Canton, reinforced Eynon’s message about saying thank you. “We always send a personalized thank you note for any gift the school receives, and it makes a difference,” she said. “The donor is always appreciative.”



**Kathy Aldridge, Principal, St. John the Evangelist School, Wellesley**

Archdiocesan elementary schools may want to consider coming together for an annual appeal and/or to share resources regarding development personnel, student telemarketers, and social media efforts, continued Eynon. He also cautioned school leaders to beware of special events. “Special fundraising events can be very expensive and time-consuming,” he said. “For this reason, BC puts on only two of these events a year.”

During a group-wide conversation after Eynon’s presentation, many school leaders agreed to rethink their fundraising events and find new ways to pool their resources to raise annual funds for their schools. Sheila Kukstis, principal of St. Jerome Elementary School in Weymouth, noted that her school wants to reach

out to grandparents of children at St. Jerome’s in its development efforts. “The grandparents tend to be really tied into the grandchildren and care greatly about the future of the school,” Kukstis said.

Bernadette Leahy, principal of St. Peter Elementary School in Cambridge, noted: “Getting the word out about your Annual Fund through a good newsletter and school website can have a big impact on giving.”

St. Peter’s Annual Fund has grown rapidly over the last four years, and approached \$250,000 for the 2008-2009 school year. Attending Eynon’s session with Leahy was Karen Trainor, St. Peter’s Director of Advancement.

Reflections on the workshop were posted in the days following on the electronic bulletin board of the Catholic Schools Office. One principal promised to review the ease of her school’s online giving site and to update its lost alumni pages. Another principal announced that her school was about to launch a \$25,000 Annual Fund campaign for the current academic year, targeting current families, alumni and parishioners. “We just know that we need to START, despite the less than refined data we have at the moment!”

***By Catherine Walsh***