

Kicanas: communications candor

Tom Roberts | Jul. 16, 2009 NCR Today

When discussion turns to the matter of communicating the church's message (the churchspeak is "use of the social means of communication"), too often the occasion becomes just one more opportunity to tee off on the messenger.

Rarely do church leaders reflect on their own roles and what they may need to do to be more effective communicators.

Tucson Bishop Gerald Kicanas took a refreshingly different tack in a speech last month during a meeting in Philadelphia of the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management, which this year is focusing on communication.

It's a fairly lengthy [speech](#) [1], but worth the time, and worth especially getting to his "What we can do" list at the end.

Early in his talk, Kicanas discusses his love of theater and draws five "ingredients" necessary for effective communication:

- Those telling the story must themselves be taken up by it;
- The church's message is best communicated succinctly with emotion and color, and in concrete language people understand and that engages them;
- The church, like theater, faces competing messages, so it must light up its marquee to entice people to come in to hear the story;
- While modern technology must be incorporated, these important tools are not the message nor alone can they deliver the message effectively.
- Finally, in dioceses and parishes it is important to create a "climate of candor."

That last bullet item, of course, gets the attention. Later in the paper, Kicanas expands on the idea by citing a recent Harvard Business Review article on creating a culture of candor. The authors of that piece, James O'Toole and Warren Bennis, list eight characteristics: tell the truth; encourage people to speak truth to power; reward contrarians; practice having unpleasant conversations; diversify your sources of information; admit your mistakes; build organizational support for transparency; set information free.

Please let us know when the workshop on those ideas hits your diocese. Kidding, of course.

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Links:

[1] <http://nlrcm.org/Wharton/2009/KicanasTranscript.html>