



The Light of Orthodoxy

ARCHDIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH AND
WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA
WINTER 2017

Insights into Parish Decline & Revitalization

By Joe Kormos, Parish Development Ministry Leader

While working with various Orthodox Parishes over the past years certain patterns emerge. In an effort to share what we have learned the following is a summary of important and hopefully helpful insights about revitalization -- and lack of same -- in 21st century Orthodox parishes in America.

“One Christian is No Christian” St. Cyprian + 243 AD

Your parish is necessary to live your life as a Christian. Being a Christian – worship – study – acts of mercy - alone doesn’t work.

Parishes Can Die. “The greatest danger is the illusion that all is well.” C.S. Lewis

For some it takes decades. Others may wither rapidly. No parish is exempt no matter how robust the parish may seem to be today. Be vigilant. Ask tough questions. Identify leading indicators of decline.

Yet Any Parish Can Become Healthy.

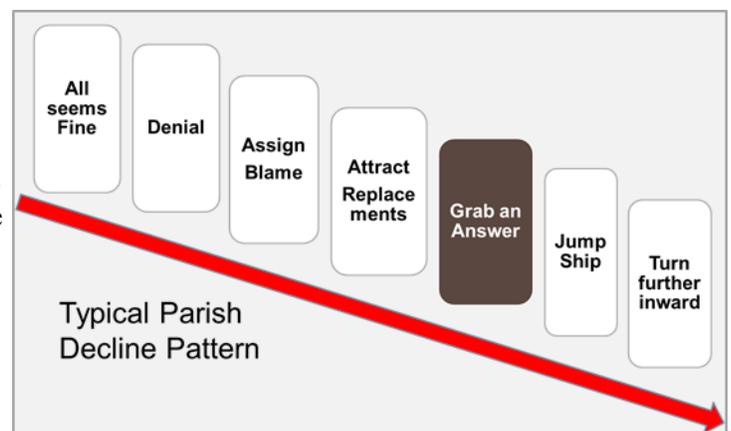
All that is required is that its members, beginning with its leaders, be firmly resolved to have it so. This does not make it easy. But possible.

“Do you want to be made well?” John 5:6

Like the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, not everyone who is ill actually desires healing. Some people and parishes prefer to remain infirm in order to have license to complain, avoid responsibility and receive pity of others. Who do we blame for our parish limitations?

Typical Decline Pattern

Decline and denial go hand in hand. The life cycle of decline often proceeds as in the nearby chart. To whom are we most likely to assign blame?



Continued on pg. 11



May He
Who was born
In a cavern and
Lay in a manger
For our
Salvation sake,
Christ
Our true God,
Bless you this
Nativity Season
And in the
Coming
New Year
With every
Good thing.



What We Believe Part IX

In the previous Article of this series we left off our discussion with a famous passage from the New Testament:

John 1:1-14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. 4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. 9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. 10

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. 11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not. 12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: 13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

This is one of the most important passages in the scriptures concerning Who Jesus Christ is. To begin to understand it we must go to the beginning of the Old Testament Scriptures:

Genesis 1:1-3 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. 2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. 3 And God said...

Let us make a brief comparison of these two passages. In the passage from Genesis, we are told that "in the beginning", that is at the beginning of space and time, God was already there. Before the created universe existed in any form whatever, God is and was there. That is, God is not "part" of creation. Secondly, we are told that God "created" the heavens and earth – that is, where there was no thing, there was now some thing – the chaos which existed before things were given shape and form. There was a point before which there was neither time nor space – there was nothing, there was no place, and there was no past, present, nor future, But there was/is God. But what else are we told? First we are told that the Spirit of God (in some translations this is taken to be the "breath" of God) was over the void which was the first result of the creative fiat, and then we are told that God "said". And what did God say? He said His Word. That is, we have God, the Spirit by Whom God speaks the Word, and we have the Word by Whom God manifests the Spirit. God is distinguished by the fact that He does not have a beginning in any sense of the word, and He does not have any point of origin outside of Himself. The Word, however, is "begotten" of God, and the Spirit "proceeds" from God. Thus, while the Word and Spirit have no beginning, in terms of either time or space – i.e. they are both eternal with the God – they each have a distinct origin from God, which is such that the Word is "begotten" of God, and the Spirit "proceeds" from God. They are both everything that God is except for the "begottenness" in the case of the Word, and the "procession" in the case of the Spirit. We then see how it is that there is one God Who we call Father, Who has His Word, known as the Son, and His Spirit. Furthermore, we see that the Son and Spirit have the same properties as the Father, and are distinguished from Him only by virtue of the begottenness of the Son, and the procession of the Spirit. In every other aspect of being, will, and activity, the three are the same, and therefore one. In technical theological terms we have three hypostases, activity, the three are the same, and therefore one.

What We Believe Part IX Continued

In technical theological terms we have three hypostases, or persons, Who are one God because they are one indivisible Nature or Physis. In other words the three persons of God, do not “share” in a common essence (ousia) or nature (physis). They are not like a lump of precious metal (say, gold) which is divided up and stamped to make coins. Rather, each person of the Holy Trinity is the entirety of the Divine essence or nature, but are distinguished only by their origin or lack of it.

It is at this point that we return to the statement in the Creed where it says that Jesus: “came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man.” What we are saying here is that the Person Who was completely divine with the total Divinity of the Father, became completely human with our humanity – a humanity capable of dying – in order to destroy death by death, so that we can become by grace what He is by nature.

PITTSBURGH DISTRICT FOCA CONVENTION

On October 15, the members of the Pittsburgh District of the Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America (FOCA) gathered at St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral for the District’s 91st Annual District Convention. District Spiritual Advisor Archpriest William Evansky opened the Convention with a prayer and after the opening ceremony, Governor Danielle Ilchuk called the meeting to order. Cathedral Dean Archpriest Michael Senyo welcomed all the attendees to the Cathedral.

The convention attendees reviewed the activities of District over the previous year. Convention business including reaffirming the District’s commitment to support the Archdiocesan Family Day with an annual donation of \$500.00. The Pittsburgh FOCA will continue to lead the program for Youth and Young Adult Activities for the Archdiocese. The District also decided to hold a Fellowship event for the District and Archdiocese as a fundraiser to support the charitable activities of the District. Please watch for details in the near future.

As part of her report Governor Ilchuk reviewed the activities of the National FOCA. She reported that the National FOCA presented over \$12,000.00 to His Grace Bishop DAVID. These funds were raised through the Gifts of Love Program and will be used to restore and renovate the historic St. Nicholas Chapel of the Holy Resurrection Russian Orthodox Church in Kenai, Alaska. The 2017-2018 Drive will raise funds for hurricane relief. A floor drive at the National Convention also raised over \$1,500.00 that was sent to two Orthodox Churches in Ohio that had been vandalized. The National and District FOCA also will continue programs of Seminarian Support including Adopt-a-Seminarian Family and St. Nicholas Day Gifts.

The District also elected new Officers for the 2017-2018 year. The newly elected District Governor is Dr. John Schultz (Weirton, Chapter #58), Lt. Governor Matushka Danielle Ilchuk (Ambridge, Chapter #5); Recording Secretary Matushka Debbie Evansky (Ambridge, Chapter #5), Administrative Secretary Taisia Zupancic (Canonsburg, Chapter #109), and Treasurer Sonia Schultz (Weirton, Chapter #58). Archpriest William Evansky will continue as District Spiritual Advisor. The 2018 District Convention was awarded to St. Nicholas, Weirton.

Anyone interested in joining the FOCA and helping with our many charitable programs may contact John Schultz at jpswv@comcast.net. You may also visit the National FOCA Website at orthodoxfellowship.org.

New Archdiocesan Funding Method

On November 4th, 2017, the Archdiocesan Assembly of the Archdiocese of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania, held in the city of Homestead, PA, passed as a resolution, the adoption of a new policy for the funding of the Archdiocese. This new method of funding is fundamentally different than anything she has done in the past. This being the case, there may be a number of questions people have about these changes. The following will hopefully, address some of those questions, and will attempt to explain clearly, how the new system works, and why the change was made.

Why did we need to change?

For decades, the National Church, our Orthodox Church in America, and our Archdiocese have acquired their funding by assessing each parishioner in the parishes a certain amount of money regardless of income. The parishes also often included their own assessment, and the combined amount owed per year made one a member in good standing. This system was commonly known as a “dues” system. Anyone familiar with social clubs and labor unions is familiar with a “dues” system. The fact that it was used for the funding of Churches in the US is understandable given the lack of outside funding from mother Churches, and a need to have some sort of consistent means by which the parishes and dioceses got their needed funds. It is however, not a historical method for funding Churches. It also gives a false impression about what constitutes membership in the body of Christ.

What were the options?

The committee in charge of devising a new proportional method explored several options. The simplest idea was to use a flat percentage across all parishes. This would be simple, and in many ways a very fair option. Several problems became apparent with this idea, however.

The current assessments within the Archdiocese cover a wide range of effective rates. Some of the larger parishes are paying as much as 18.5% of their gross revenue to the support of the Archdiocese, and many of the small to moderate sized parishes paying close to 8%. Finding a single percentage that would work for all of them at the present time would simply be impossible.

We then explored the idea of two different rates. One for parishes with smaller revenue, and another for parishes with higher revenue. This was slightly better in terms of lessening the burden on the small parishes, since we could give them a lesser rate. However, this introduced a new problem. Since there was only two rates, and the higher had to be significantly higher than the other to raise the needed Archdiocesan funds, the jump from one bracket to the other places an extremely high burden on such parishes.

After some work on both of these methods, we realized that something more complicated might be needed in order to move to a proportional assessment method. So what did we come up with?

The New Method

The method that seems to work the best for our situation in the Archdiocese is a “progressive” system, going up incrementally with the Parish’s revenue.

The rate schedule is:

| Archdiocesan Entities Rate Chart | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| 8% | 0 to \$50,000 |
| 12% | \$50,001 to \$100,000 |
| 15% | \$100,001 to \$150,000 |
| 18% | \$150,001 to \$200,000 |
| 20% | \$200,000 and up |

New Archdiocesan Funding Method

Continued from page 4

The calculation works much like the US income tax, in that the percentage is only applied to the money within its bracket. This means that according to the above schedule the first \$50,000 of your Eligible Income is assessed at 8%; the next \$50,000 (\$50,001 through \$100,000) of income are assessed at 12%; the next \$50,000 (\$100,001 through \$150,000) of income are assessed at 15%; the next \$50,000 (\$150,001 through \$200,000) of income are assessed at 18%; and any Eligible Income of \$200,001 or above are assessed at 20%.

In order to not create too heavy a burden on parishes whose income falls into the 20% bracket, no matter the final effective rate based on calculation, **the actual effective rate will be capped at no more than 15%**

Exemptions

Since total income received by the parish can often include things that should not be included as revenue for the parish to spend, this new system includes several deductions to lower the income assessed (referred to by the policy as "Eligible Income").

Eligible Deductions are:

- Capital Campaign Contributions (Building Fund);
- Donor Restricted Contributions;
- Cemetery Upkeep Contributions;
- Candle/Flower Donations;
- Pass-Through Recorded Income;
- Charitable Expenses;
- Investment Income recorded to respective Restricted Fund
- Debt Payments

For a more detailed explanation of these deductions please refer to the full document (available on the Archdiocesan Website, www.ocadwpa.org)

Transition and stability

Due to the nature of this change, Archdiocesan revenue could fluctuate wildly, both during the transition away from the old assessment system, and in the years to come. Therefore, regardless of the newly calculated effective rate percentage, the change will be no more than 15% real dollar change from the prior year assessment. This limitation expires three years past the implementation

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**For events and
Archdiocesan news,
please visit
ocadwpa.org**

THE LIGHT OF ORTHODOXY

is the Quarterly Newsletter of the Archdiocese of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania, Orthodox Church in America. News, and photos can be submitted by e-mail to hieromonkpatrick@msn.com or by mail to Igumen Patrick, 105 S. 19th St., Pittsburgh, PA 15203.

New Archdiocesan Funding Method

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Examples

Let's look at a few examples, and how their assessment will work on the new policy, and how it compares to the old method.

Example A. Parish who had a revenue last year of \$107,510, and paid an assessment of \$12,886. This amount was 12% of their total revenue (this is commonly known as the "effective rate"). Under the new policy, the calculation would be as follows. The first \$50,000 of revenue would be assessed at 8%, coming to \$4,000. The next \$50,000 would be assessed at 12%, coming to \$6,000. The last \$7,510 of revenue would be assessed at 15%, coming to \$1,126.50. This would bring the total assessment for the next year to:

\$4,000
+\$6,000
+\$1,126.50

Total = $\$11,126.50 \div 12 \text{ months} = \927.21 per month

The effective rate for this coming year is 10.35%

Example B. Parish who had a revenue last year of \$152,650, and paid an assessment of \$28,362. This amount was 18.58% of their total revenue (effective rate). Under the new policy, the calculation would be as follows. The first \$50,000 of revenue would be assessed at 8%, coming to \$4,000. The next \$50,000 would be assessed at 12%, coming to \$6,000. The next \$50,000 would be assessed at 15%, coming to \$7,500. The last \$2,650 of revenue would be assessed at 18%, coming to \$477. This would bring the total assessment for the next year to:

\$4,000
+\$6,000
+\$7,500
+ \$477

Total = $\$17,977 \div 12 \text{ months} = \$1,498.08 \text{ per month}$

The effective rate for this coming year is 11.77%

Conclusion

This probably does seem a bit confusing, and admittedly, it's certainly a bit more complicated than the dues method. But remember that this calculation only needs to be done by the parish once a year. Additionally, the Archdiocese is going to make this as easy as possible. In the coming weeks, we'll be posting an assessment calculator on the Archdiocesan website, so that all the parish treasurer needs to do is plug in their final Eligible Income for the parish and the website will do all the math. Also, any specific questions any parish treasurers have regarding any deductions can be emailed to assessment@ocadwpa.org. The Archdiocese is going to be making every effort to make this new assessment policy transition as smooth as possible.

FOCA NATIONAL BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT

On April 28-30, 2017. The National Basketball Tournament of the Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America (FOCA) was hosted by the Weirton "O" Club of St. Nicholas Orthodox Church in Weirton, WV. A Committee of dedicated workers was led by Tournament Chair Dr. John Schultz, Past National President of the FOCA and Parish President of St. Nicholas. Committee Members included Sonia Schultz, Michael Schultz, George Gresko, Julie Gresko, Helen Petrovich, Patricia Schultz, and John Schultz, Jr. The Chapter was also aided by many members of the Parish.

The weekend began on Friday evening as teams registered and enjoyed an evening of fun, food and games on the parish grounds.

Beginning early Saturday morning, the basketball games were played across the Ohio River at Steubenville Big Red High School (new & old gyms) in nearby Steubenville, OH. Father Andrew Nelko, who will become Pastor of St. Nicholas Church after graduating from St. Tikhon's Seminary, led the opening prayer and singing of "Christ is Risen." The Tournament was coordinated by Melanie Clark, National FOCA Sports Director, and Department Members, Anthony Schultz, and Michelle Janiszewski, all the way from Florida.

Players hailed from Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, New Jersey, and even Minnesota as St. Mary's Cathedral in Minneapolis sent a bus supervised by Father Benjamin Tucci, FOCA Junior Department Director. Archdiocesan participants came from Weirton, Canonsburg, Allison Park, Ambridge,

After the games (and a heavy thunderstorm), Great Vespers was served by Fr. Nelko at the Church with a full choir conducted by FOCA Lory Nescott Director of St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral's Choir.

After Vespers, the banquet was then held in Pennsylvania, the third state of the Tri-State area, at the Pepsi-Cola Roadhouse, a concert venue featuring autographed photos of musicians of all types. Current National President Marge Kovach welcomed the crowd and urged the youth to "look around at the friends around you because they will be your friends for life." Melanie and Michelle announced the all-stars (as chosen by the referees) and awards were distributed. Dancing to a deejay closed out the busy day.

Other clergy present were Archdiocesan Chancellor, V. Rev. Bill Evansky and former Rector of St. Nicholas, Very Rev. John Steffaro, both Past FOCA National Spiritual Advisors, and V. Rev. Andrew D. Nelko of Campbell, OH. Also present were, Past FOCA National Presidents Nick Vansuch and Michael Steffaro as well as current National FOCA Recording Secretary Tammy Schultz, current National FOCA Vice President Allison Steffaro, and *Orthodox Christian Journal* Editor, Nick Ressetar. The Pittsburgh District was represented by Lt. Governor Justin Nescott.

On Sunday morning, Archbishop MELCHISEDEK of Pittsburgh and Western PA (OCA) celebrated the Divine Liturgy at St. Nicholas Church assisted by Fr. Nelko and Fr. Tucci as well as Deacon Peter Ilchuk, John Schultz and Justin Nescott served as Subdeacons. National FOCA CP&O Director. Matushka Tanya Nelko of Campbell directed the choir which included many ballplayers. The Church was SRO. A brunch followed Liturgy in the Fellowship Hall, and then it was back to Steubenville for the Championship Games and final awards.

This "Wild and Wonderful" Basketball Tournament marked the first National FOCA event of this magnitude hosted by the Weirton Chapter and held in Almost Heaven West Virginia. All participants expressed excitement in returning for a future Tournament. The proceeds of the Tournament help fund the various charitable efforts of the Weirton Chapter and the National FOCA.

UPDATE ON THE ONGOING WORK OF THE ST. CYRIL OF WHITE LAKE FOOD PANTRY

Weekly, the St. Cyril of White Lake Orthodox Food Pantry distributes food to those in need. Each week on Thursdays from 70 to 100 families receive needed food and toiletry items through the generosity of the you—the faithful of the Orthodox Church. This Nativity Season over 80 families received Christmas Meals in addition to the weekly help provided to them. This ministry, the St. Cyril of White Lake Orthodox Food Pantry enjoys the active support of local Orthodox churches of every jurisdiction, and tirelessly meets of the needs of all who draw near. The doors of this Archdiocesan Ministry opened on September 23, 2010. Since that day, over 35,000 people have been help with food assistance.

The Food Pantry enjoys not only the active support of you —the faithful, but also local Churches and businesses. With Meditera Bakehouse providing bread weekly,

It takes about \$600 a week to supply the needed food stocks of the St. Cyril of White Lake Food Pantry. And by God's grace and your kindness the food pantry has never ran out of supplies.

How can you help?

- 1) Volunteer—give of your self to help your neighbor.
- 2) Donate, every dollar you give is used to purchase supplies to help those in need.
- 3) Pray daily that the Master of the Storehouse continue to bless the resources provided to meet the needs of all who draw near.

Donations can be sent to:

**St. Cyril of White Lake Orthodox Food Pantry
105 S. 19th St.
Pittsburgh, PA 15203**

ARCHDIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH AND WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA (OCA) OFFICIAL CHANGES

GRESH, REV. STEPHAN, currently attached to the altar of the St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, Allison Park, PA, is appointed Acting Rector of the Holy Resurrection Church, Belle Vernon, PA, effective December 1, 2017.

MATHEWSON, REV. DANIEL, is released from his duties as Archdiocesan Youth Committee Spiritual Advisor, effective September 23, 2017.

SMOLCIC, V. REV. SAMUEL, is released from his duties as Rector of the Holy Resurrection Church, Belle Vernon, PA, and from his duties as Dean of the Southwest Deanery of the Archdiocese of Pgh and W PA; he is attached in retirement to the altar of the St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, Allison Park, PA, effective December 1, 2017.

SOCHKA, PDN. MICHAEL, is released from the Diocese of New York and New Jersey (OCA) and is accepted into the Archdiocese of Pgh and W PA effective November 15, 2017; he is attached to the altar of the Holy Ghost Church, Ambridge, PA.

Approved for distribution:

Archpriest William J. Evansky
Chancellor
Archdiocese of Pittsburgh and
Western Pennsylvania (OCA)
(2017-11-27)

STUFFED WITH LOVE

On Thanksgiving Day, St. Mary Orthodox Church in Southside Pittsburgh, together with the Pittsburgh area Rotary Clubs and the Pittsburgh Police produced 3500 Thanksgiving Dinners which were delivered by the Pittsburgh Police to area residents in need. This effort annually attracts hundreds of volunteers from through out the community, including numerous Orthodox Christians.



Helping to deliver the Thanksgiving Dinner were Pittsburgh Chief of Police Scott Schubert, command officers and community affair officers, as well as beat officers from throughout the city.



This year parishioners from St. Mary Church Southside, Holy Virgin Church, Carnegie, St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral and St. Michael Church, Rankin PA helped out.



ARCHDIOCESEAN YOUTH ACTIVITIES

On Saturday, November 11, 2017, sixteen children and six adults were welcomed by Archpriest Michael Senyo at St. Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Cathedral for a youth retreat sponsored by the Archdiocesan Youth Committee. The theme of the retreat was "Why We Go to Church." After a prayer service offered by Fr. Michael, the children went to the church hall to discuss the importance of attending Divine Liturgy and other worship services offered by the Church. The children assembled crosses for their bedrooms, made bead prayer ropes for praying The Jesus Prayer and participated in two informative discussion sessions.

They also enjoyed a pizza lunch and snacks. It was a lovely retreat for everyone in attendance. Special thanks are extended to the teachers at the retreat.

Please be on the lookout for fliers about upcoming 2018 events in the Archdiocese for all Orthodox youth and families!

Ice skating at PPG Place, Sunday, January 21, 3-5:30 pm

Service Project at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church, Assembling IOCC Health Kits, Saturday, February 3

Principles of Small Parishes with a Future

The 2017 Small Parish Forum, held last July at St John the Baptist Church in New Kensington PA, welcomed a record crowd. Panel discussions, breakouts, videos and twelve speakers helped attendees to identify actions to become a “community of engagement”.

One of the primary efforts of the Forum was the creation of a consensus list of ten important “principles of vibrant small parishes”. The principles are based around the conference’s basic premise that “Small is NOT Big” AND “Small is OK.” (See box nearby)

Attendees agreed upon the following key values, beliefs and standards for Orthodox small parishes:

Foundational Principles

The Church is for Everyone – Often parishes, particularly small ones, can have a tendency to welcome only “people like us”.

Your Parish is a Living Organism - Not every parish can grow, but any parish can become more vibrant if it wants to do so. Clergy and laity are *co-responsible* for the health and future of their parish.

Vision and Aspiration – Small Parishes with a future *engage* with the future by asking good, tough questions. They express their mission, vision and values. They assess gifts, talents and resources. – And then, they *stop* doing things that are no longer useful.

Take Risks. Don’t Accept Mediocrity. - Small parishes with a future take (intelligent) risks. They try new things.

Don’t Take on Too Much – Realizing they cannot “fix”/strengthen everything at once, they make discerning choices to intentionally work to strengthen one or two areas at a time.

Critical Practices

Active Worship - Small parishes can and must worship well. Active. Participative. Holy. Joyous. Thankful.

Any Church Can be Charitable - No church is too small to reach out to others in need. Serving others breaks the parish free from the shackles of self-absorption.

Build Fellowship – Fellowship is the secret weapon of good small parishes. They pray for one another and assist one another. They build the social fabric of the parish by engaging across generations.

Replenishing Is Imperative – Parishes with a future need to retain current parishioners AND attract new ones. Current parishioners may move away and they will die. Growing is good. Replenishing is imperative. Communicate your parish in an honest, attractive and positive way to the local community.

Reasonable Clergy Compensation - Pay your priest according to reasonable standards. If the priest needs secular employment clarify the division of labor and priest’s expectations. (Saturday vespers? Sunday liturgy, Holy week schedules? Feast days? Visitations? Deanery meetings? Ministry participation? etc.) The greater the need for priest’ supplementary income (secular employment) the more lay persons need to assist.

What to do with these principles?

Of what value are the above principles? Here are some follow up actions:

- * Discuss at parish council meetings, Adult Ed, with youth, coffee hour.
- * Select one or at most two principle topics on which to focus as a parish.
- * Brainstorm some actions and select a few on which progress can be discerned in 6-9 months.
- * Evaluate. Celebrate. Begin again.
- * Ask for help.

The Parish Development ministry is available to assist your parish.
Contact Joe Kormos -513-683-1911 or joekormos@gmail.com

Insights into Parish Decline & Revitalization

By Joe Kormos, Parish Development Ministry Leader

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“The view of the gallows clarifies the mind” *Samuel Johnston*

Most parishes wait too long. Again *denial*.

I’ll do anything to lose weight –except diet and exercise.”

What are we as persons and as a parish unwilling to stop, start or strengthen? Parishes are highly resistant to outside change efforts. Yet change can happen quickly from within.

“...clothe yourselves with the new self...created according to the likeness of God.”

Ephesians 4:24”

Renewal is not about recreating the ‘good old days’. Facing forward means establishing a new model for our life in Christ. Rooted in: Holiness. Sacraments. Service. Apostolic zeal.

Unprofitable Parish?

In the context of MT 25:30 (parable of talents/”unprofitable servant”) is there such a thing as an “unprofitable parish”? What return is expected by the Master from a community? Have you received a legacy (talent) from previous generations?

God grows parishes; We prepare the soil for growth.

“(Paul) planted, Apollos watered but God gave the increase.” *1. Cor 4:6*; “...and the Lord added to their number daily” *Acts 2:47*

“The man who treats himself has a fool for a patient.”

Fresh eyes can be valuable to understand your parish situation. Ask for help.

“We deal not much in fact when we are contemplating ourselves.” *Mark Twain*

“For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound who will prepare for battle” *1 Cor. 14:8*

Find a core group of change agents. Decide on a path. Identify specific areas of growth. Describe the benefits of proposed new behaviors. Engage the parish. Push forward.

The Parish Development ministry is available to assist your parish.

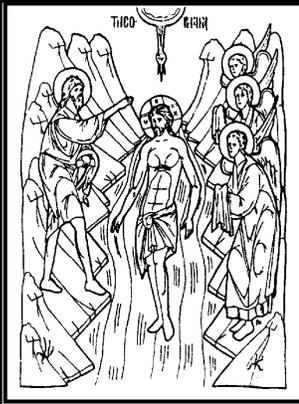
Contact Joe Kormos -513-683-1911 or joekormos@gmail.com

ON HOLY WATER

The water which we sanctify on the day of the Feast of the Theophany by plunging the Cross into it and by invoking the Holy Spirit, becomes once again living water (Jn 4: 10), the fount of regeneration (Tit. 3:5), having acquired a divine power of healing and of purification of souls and bodies. This water is thus made holy and bears the power of the Redemption, of the Grace of Christ and of the blessing of the Jordan. It is a source of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a remission of sins, a protection against disease, and a destruction of demons. Therefore, after being sprinkled with it in the church today, the faithful drink of it and put it into bottles which they take to their homes in order to sprinkle it in their houses and over their fields and things of daily use. Remaining miraculously pure for months and even years, the waters of the Theophany and all water sanctified by the Church can be used in sanctification of the world and to make of the entire Christian life an unceasing Theophany, a revelation of the light of the Glory of God.

Adapted from **THE SYNAXARION, Vol. 3 - January, February.**

Holy Convent of the Annunciation of our Lady,



ON THE BLESSING OF HOMES

The tradition of blessing homes during at Holy Theophany is one of special beauty and significance. It is not simply a sentimental tradition without meaning, nor is it a custom whose meaning has been forgotten, like an old friend whose face we remember, but whose impact on our life has been forgotten.

When an Orthodox Christian believer moves into a new home, he has the priest dedicate his new home as the abode of a follower of Christ. The priest and the family ask that God, the source of all goodness and the Giver of every perfect gift, bless this new house and all that is within it; recalling that Jesus Christ, His Son, came to bring Salvation to all, even as He brought Salvation to the house of Zacchaeus; the priest prays that the Holy Spirit may abide in the house, guiding those who dwell in it in the paths of righteousness.

On the Feast of Holy Theophany we rededicate our home for its original purpose, just as we must periodically rededicate our life to Christ. We do it especially on this Feast because it is on this day that we remember in the Church Year the coming of Christ who began His Earthly Ministry when He descended into Jordan River to be baptized by St. John the Forerunner and Baptist. He enters again into our lives reminding us that we must "repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand."

An Orthodox Christian must dedicate not only himself and his house to the Lord, but even his daily work and all his efforts as well. All things are to be done to the glory of God. That is why in the Orthodox Church, not only religious objects, such as icons, crosses, churches and vestments, are blessed, but also homes, fields, animals and all objects which are used in our daily life for the good of man. In this the Orthodox Church expresses Her faith that the Holy Spirit's sanctifying action extends over the whole of creation for our salvation.

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