

# Creating Vibrant Orthodox Parishes

## *A Framework for Renewal*



Joseph Kormos

*Parish Development Ministry Leader  
Diocese of Midwest*

Fr. Jonathan Ivanoff

*Director, Commission on Missions and Evangelism  
Diocese of New York & New Jersey*

16<sup>th</sup> All-American Council  
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# Who Should Be Here?

*Anyone* desiring to inspire and drive change toward a gospel-centered, growth vision in their parish

Clergy

Parish Council

Ministry leaders

Concerned parishioners

# Presenters

## ***Joseph Kormos***

- Consultant, Coach, Facilitator
- Secular Experience
  - Marketing, innovation, planning, strategy
- Church experience
  - “Cradle” , Parish founding; Parish Council; Diocesan Council; Pre-Conciliar Commission
- Parish Development Ministry
  - Diocese of Midwest
- Visited >45 parishes in last five years

**[parishfacilitator@domoca.org](mailto:parishfacilitator@domoca.org)**

## ***Fr. Jonathan Ivanoff***

- Pastor
  - St. John the Theologian Church; Long Island (19 years)
- Director & Certified Coach,
  - Orthodox Natural Church Development
- Director
  - Commission on Missions & Evangelism, Diocese of NY&NJ
- Presenter,
  - Church Growth Boot Camp,
- Worked with 80+ parishes in two jurisdictions since 1998

**[frjonathan@hotmail.com](mailto:frjonathan@hotmail.com)**

# Outline

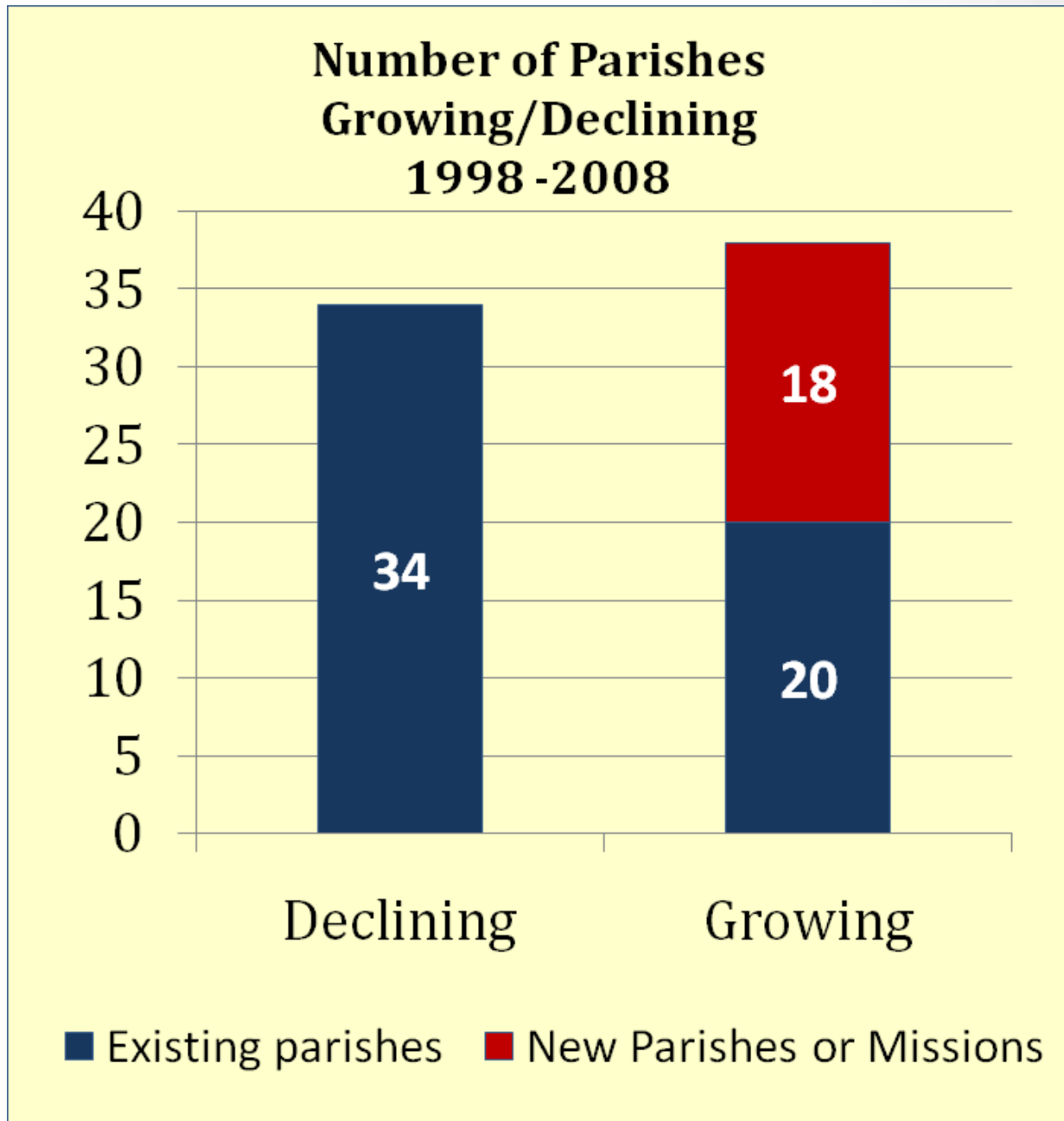
- The Imperative – Parish Revitalization
- Basics of Healthy Parishes
  - Scriptural & Patristic
- Framework for Renewal
- Conclusion & Open Discussion

# The Imperative

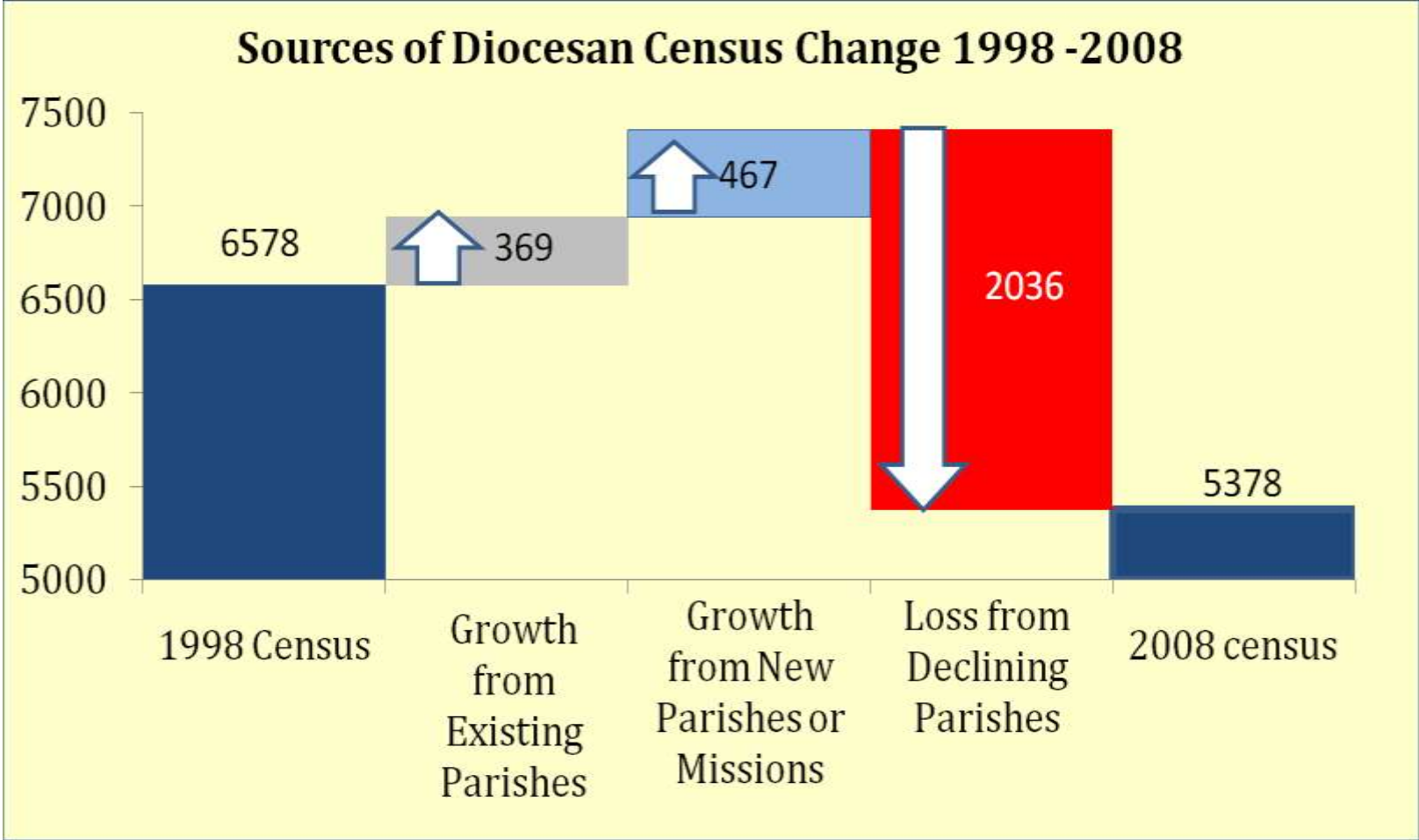


“Houston, we have a problem”

# Diocese of Midwest



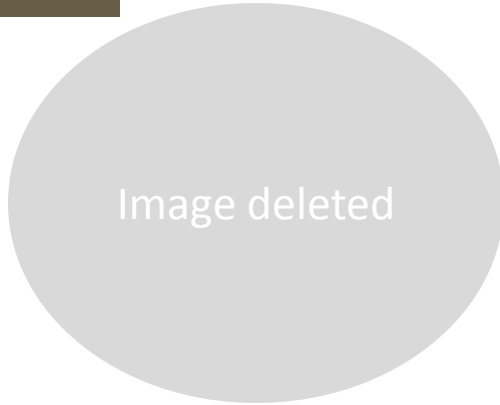
# Diocese of Midwest Data



# Shrinking Parishes -- Examples

*20 Year Census Change*

405 >> 189



301 >> 105

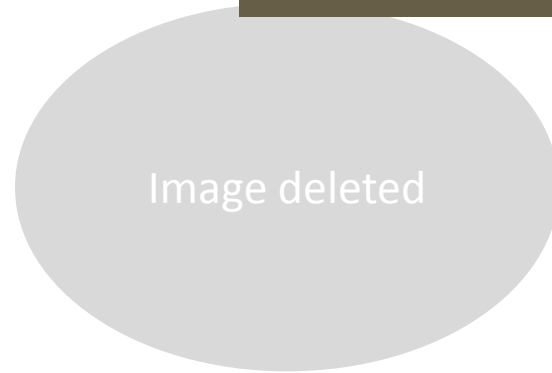


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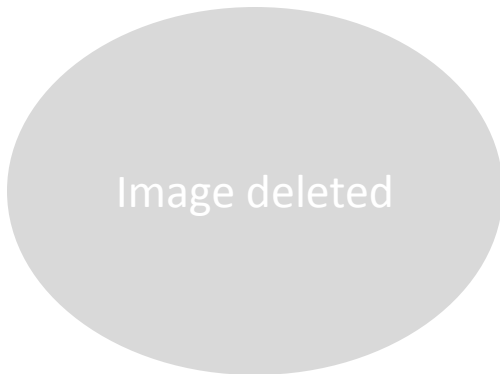


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492 >> 200

200 >> 19

# Orthodox Church in America

The territorial OCA in the continental US has been declining between 6 and 9% for nearly 20 years ('88 on)



**Note1:** Continental U.S. only! (Not including the ethnic dioceses, Canada or Alaska)

**Note2:** Decline is slowing

# Is This Only About Numbers?

- No!
- *But* Numbers are NOT Unimportant
  - Acts 2:47
    - “and the Lord added to their number daily”
  - Early Church
    - Without evangelistic, numerical growth Christianity would have been an insignificant historical footnote.
  - Often a “trailing indicator” of healthy parish qualities.
    - When numbers decline the work should have begun 5-15 years earlier.
  - Nothing buoys parish spirit more than growth.

# The Imperative



# Typical Decline Pattern

All  
seems  
Fine

Denial

Assign  
Blame

Attract  
"Replace  
ments"

Grab an  
Answer

Jump  
Ship

Turn  
further  
inward

# Root Causes



## “Ruttedness”

We’re stuck:

... in the past

... on ourselves

... low expectations

# Root (“Rut”) Causes

- Unwilling to change/learn
- No competence for “intentionality”
  - Setting goals; explicit actions

Isolated & insulated

- Don’t know what people are thirsting for.
- Don’t know what to do
- **Lack updated/relevant models of healthy parishes**

# *The Rut Cycle*

“When you don’t know what to do,  
you do what you know.”

“Insanity = Doing same things  
& expecting different results.”



Fr. Jonathan Ivanoff

# BASICS OF HEALTHY PARISHES

# Are We Asking the Right Questions?

**NOT:**

*“What can I do to make my church grow?”*

**BUT RATHER:**

*“What am I doing that is preventing my church from growing?”*

# How Does a Church Grow?

“I planted...”

“Apollos watered...”



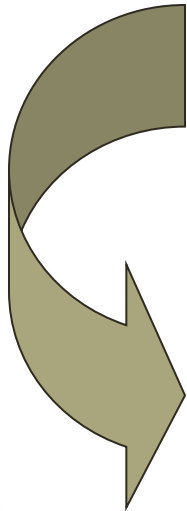
*We have to  
do our part*

“But GOD gave the growth.”

“We are God’s **fellow workers**”

– St. Paul, I Corinthians 3:6-9

*So God can do His*



# The “*All by Itself*” Principle



*“The Kingdom of God is like a farmer who casts seed upon the ground... the seed sprouts up and grows – how, he himself does not know. The earth produces crops, **all by itself**, first the blade, then the head and then the mature grain in the head.”*

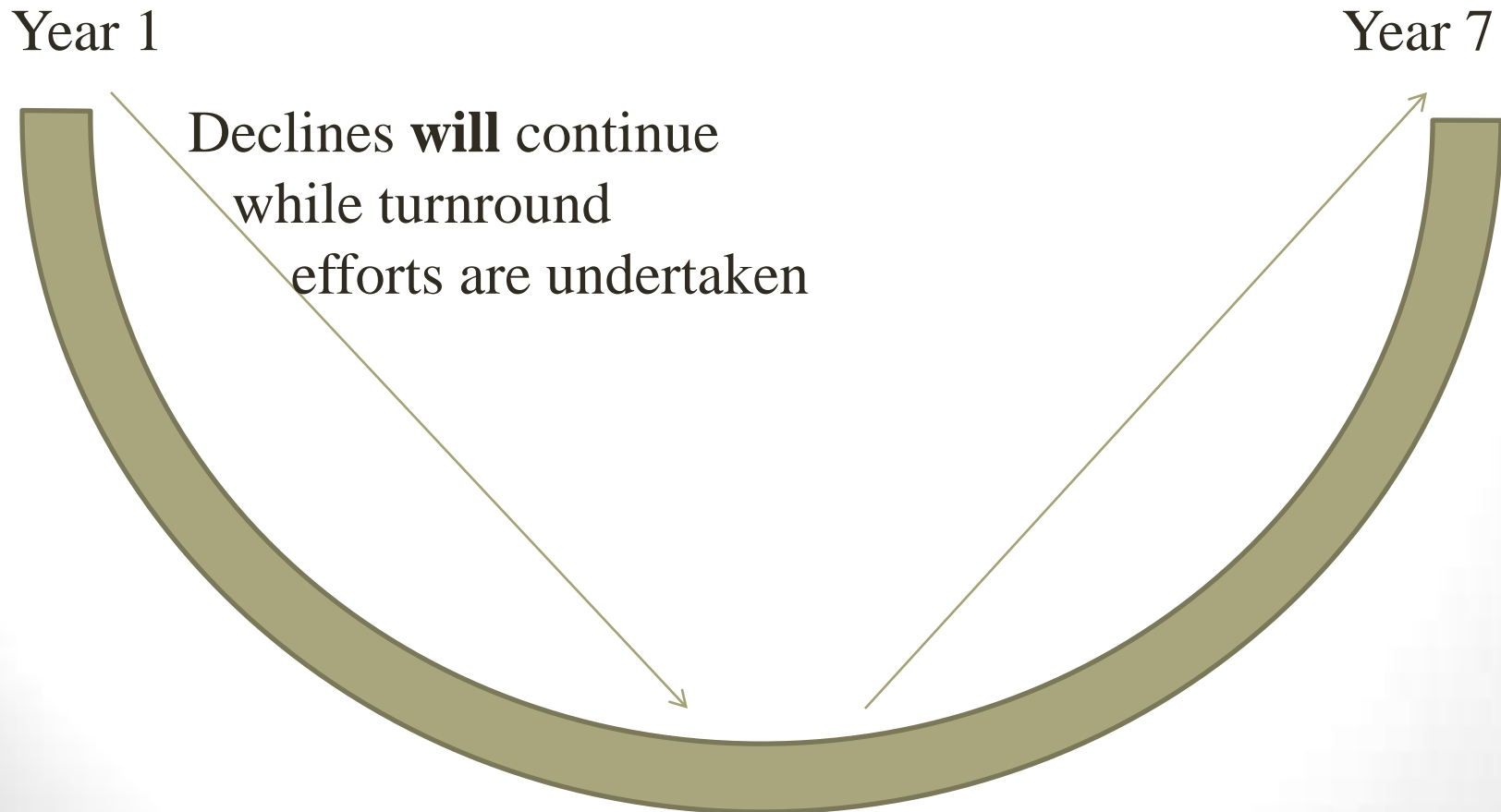
– Mark 4:26-28

# The Parish Life Cycle



# Revitalization is a Process

## The 7-Year Turnaround Cycle:




# The Revitalized PLC





# WHAT IS “CHURCH HEALTH”?



***For far too long, parishes have been focusing so much on producing “fruit” (i.e., members)...***

***...that they fail to consider the “root” that produces the fruit***

# Maybe We're Asking the Wrong Questions?

Is it:

*“How can we get more people to come to church?”*

or...

*“What can we do to make our church grow?”*



# What's the Right Question?



**\*\*OR\*\*** ...Is it:

***“What are we doing  
that’s preventing  
our church from  
growing?”***

# **The Key Question:**

**How can we release the potential that God has placed within EVERY church?**



# The Biblical Concept

*“See/consider  
(καταμάθετε)  
the lilies of the  
field, how they  
grow...”*

- Matthew 6:28

# The Biblical Concept, cont.

*“The Kingdom of God is like a farmer who cast seed upon the ground; and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows, how he does not know. The earth produces crops **all by itself**: first the blade, then the head, and then the mature grain in the head. – Mark 4:26-28*



# The Biblical Concept...in practice

*“I planted...*

*Apollos watered...*

*But God gave the growth.”*

— St. Paul, I Corinthians 3

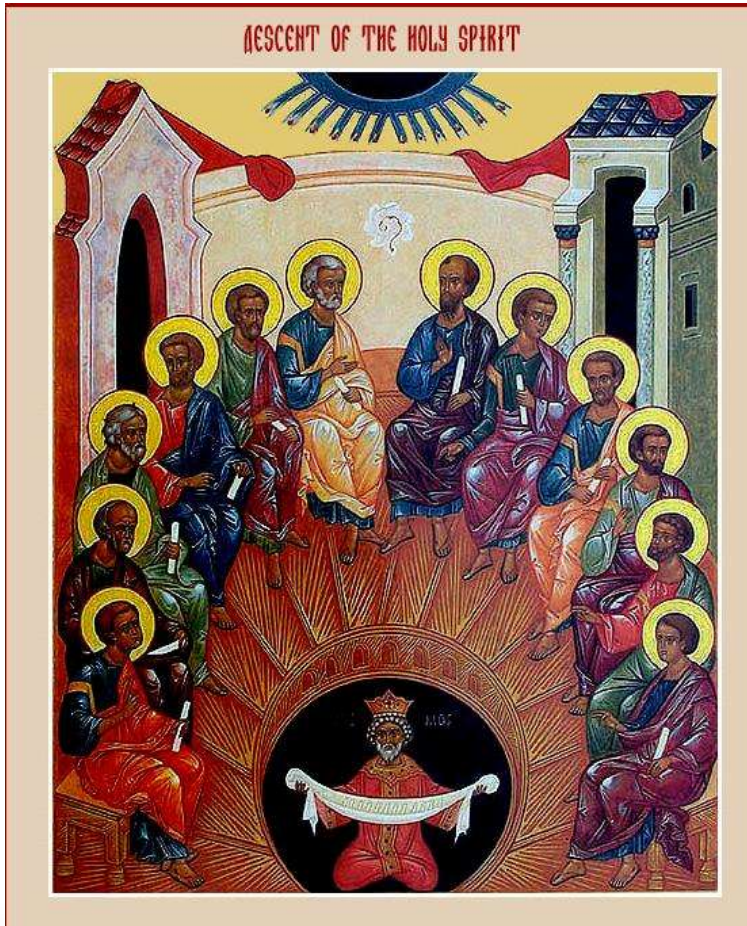
***NCD is all about releasing the “all by itself” growth by which God Himself grows His church***

# Vine and Branches – John 15



With health comes growth: This is how healthy branches grow and bear fruit... *naturally*. This is how we can speak of “*natural*” church development.

# God Wants to Grow His Church... ...and has empowered us for the job:



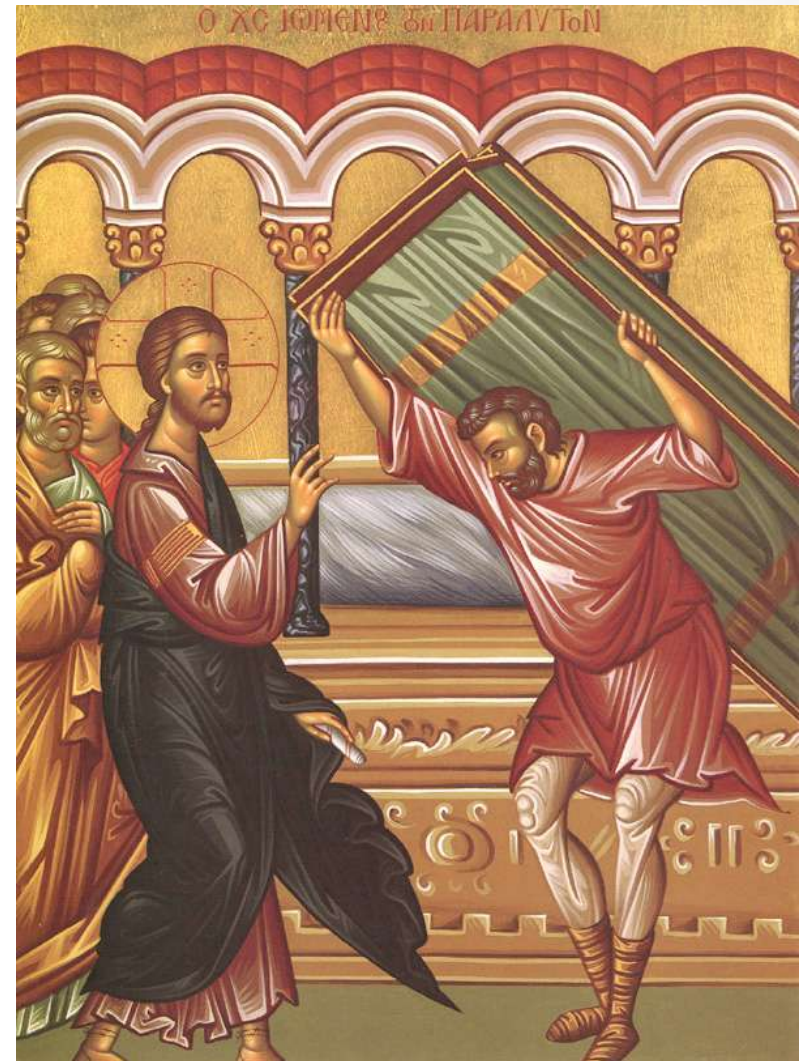
*“All authority has  
been given to me...  
therefore:  
**Go make disciples...  
baptizing them...  
teaching them...**  
– Matt 28:18ff*

# The Biblical Foundation of Parish Health: The Paralytic

Bodily Health & Wholeness:

*“Do you want to be made well?”*

*(notice the answer!)*



# The Body of Man vs. The Body of Christ: The Same Approach



# The Patristic Viewpoint

“Do you not realize that the body (of Christ) is liable to more diseases and attacks than this flesh of ours, and



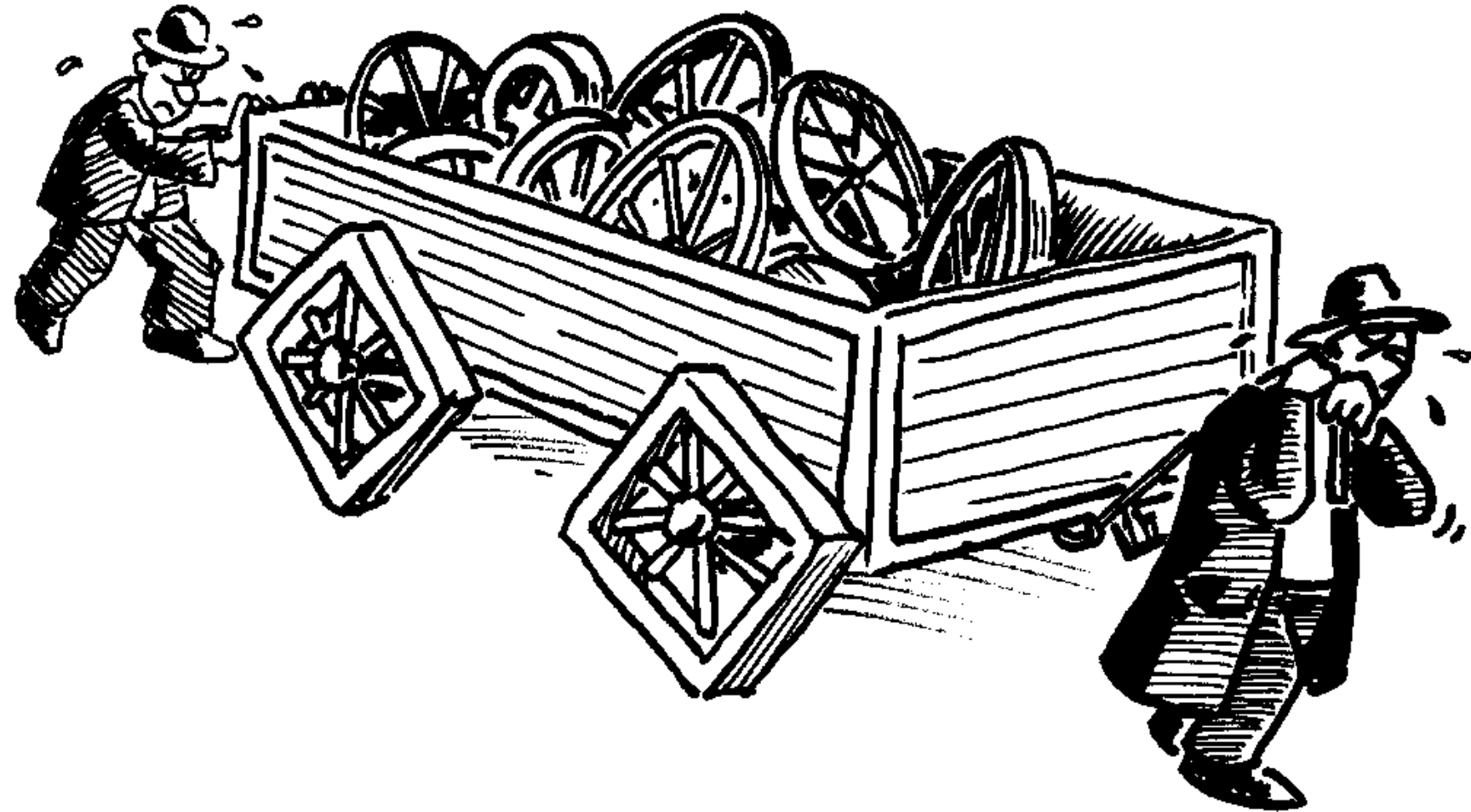
that it is infected more quickly and cured more slowly.” - St. John Chrysostom,  
*On the Priesthood 4.2*

# And We've Said this Before...

**“If you plan carefully...your parish can grow in both quantity and quality. You need to think about quantity and quality together...*Members who assume that their parish can double in size without any significant quality changes are expecting what never was and never can be.***

- Pre-Conciliar Papers, p. 42  
7<sup>th</sup> All-American Council (1983)

# Our Parish Now...





Joe Kormos

# FRAMEWORK FOR RENEWAL

# What Does NOT Work

## *Attacking Decline/Plateau*

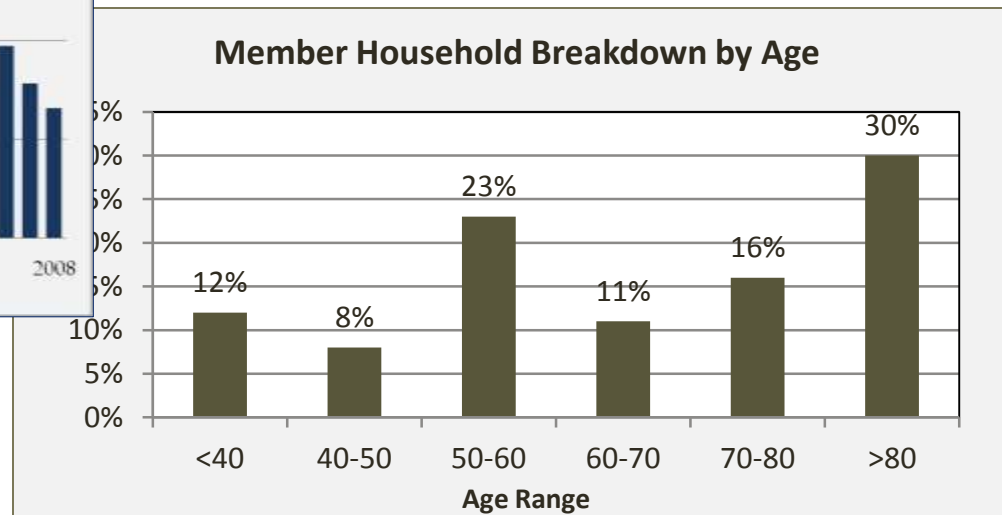
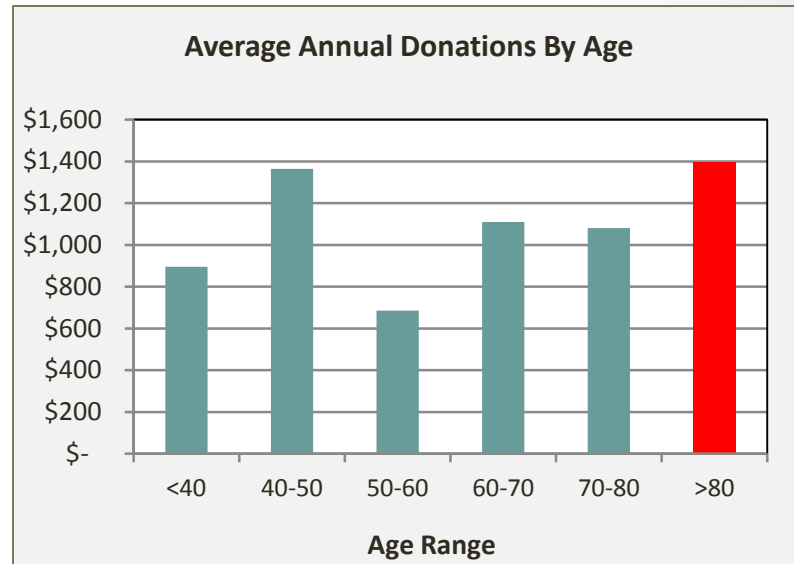
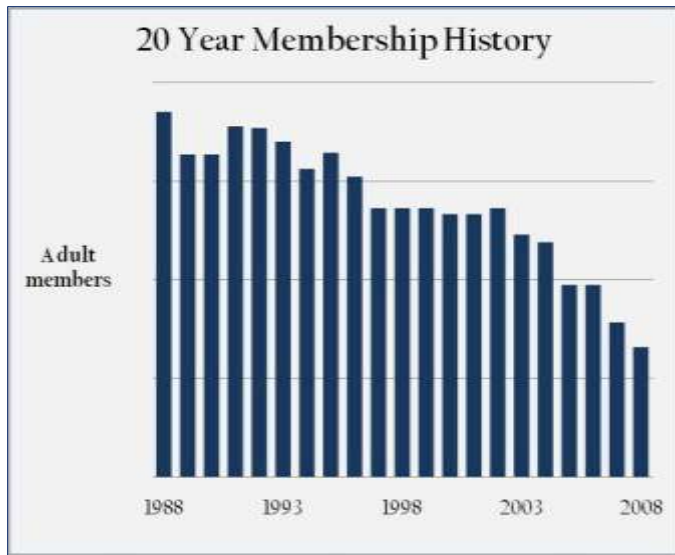
- Hand wringing
- Obsessing over growth – vs. “health”
- Copying
- Silver bullets & formulas
- Trying everything
- Sprinting – this is a long distance race
- “Friendly” is not enough

# Action Elements

1. Build Urgency by “facing facts”
2. Begin to discuss –ask good questions.
3. Adopt a backbone method –a model
4. Focus effort
5. Core group
6. Try new things
7. Ask for help

# 1. Face Facts

## *Build Urgency*



**“Get the facts first. You can change them later.”**  
*Mark Twain.*

# 2. Ask Good Questions

## *Build Urgency*



How long do we want this parish to live?

Do we want to grow? Really? Why?

Are we achieving what we set out to achieve?

What do we do best in our parish? Best assets?

What does excellence look like in area of \_\_\_\_?

Attributes of Healthy/Not Healthy Parish?

# Ask Good Questions

## *An Exercise*

*Take out a piece of paper....*

- Write down 2-5 qualities/ characteristics/ practices of a Vibrant 21<sup>st</sup> century Orthodox parish in America.
- Write 2-3 statements of what a vibrant parish does not look like.

- Characteristics: Vibrant

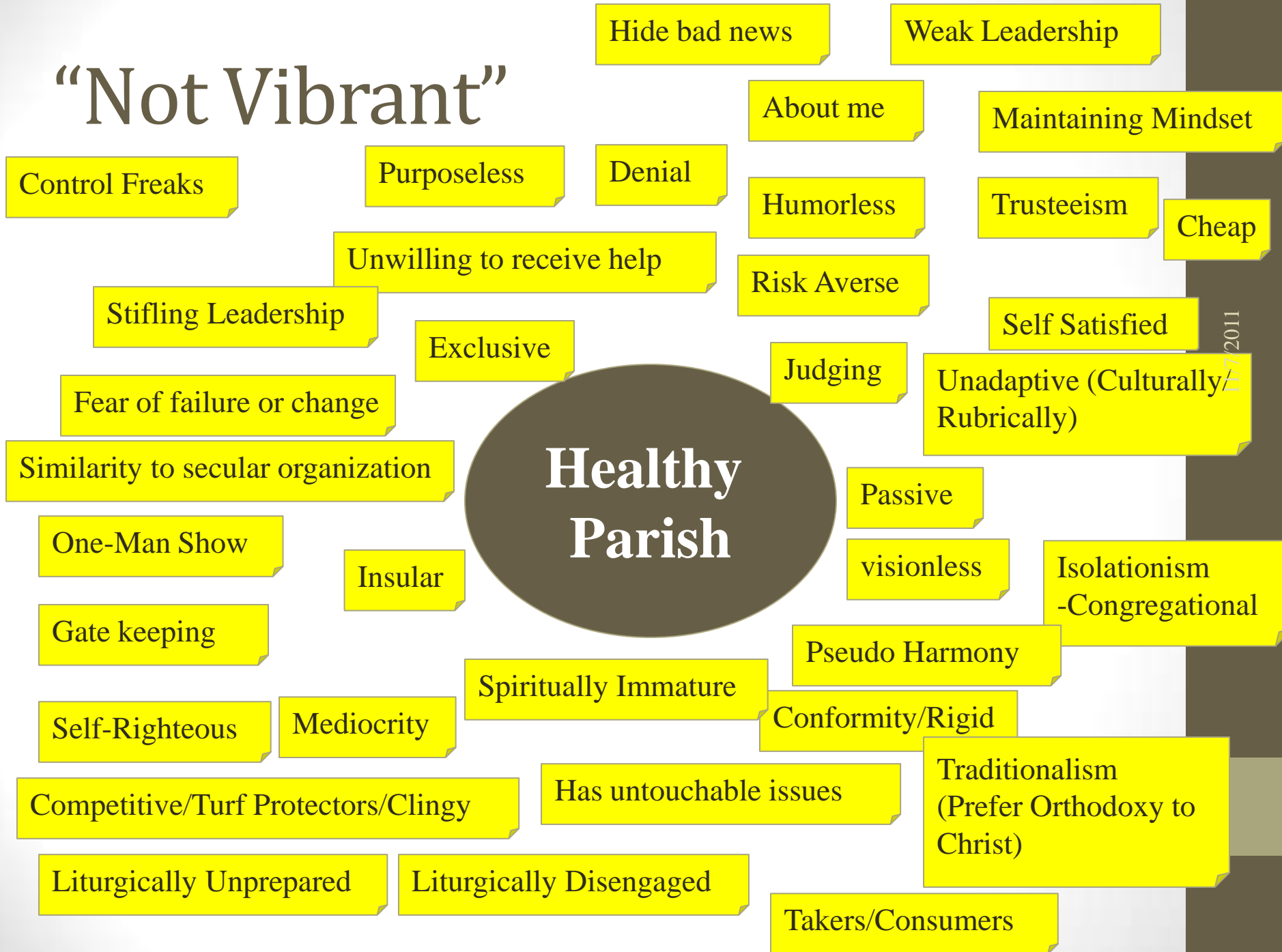
1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

- Characteristics: Not Vibrant

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

*Discuss Possibilities*

# “Not Vibrant”



11/7/2011

# Above All Ask...

- Why?
  - Why?
    - Why?

“A critically important parish skill is the ability to dialogue”



# 3. Adopt a Backbone Model

*Two examples*

*Orthodox Natural Church Development (“ONCD”)*

<http://oncd.us>

*Diocese of the Midwest Parish Health Inventory*

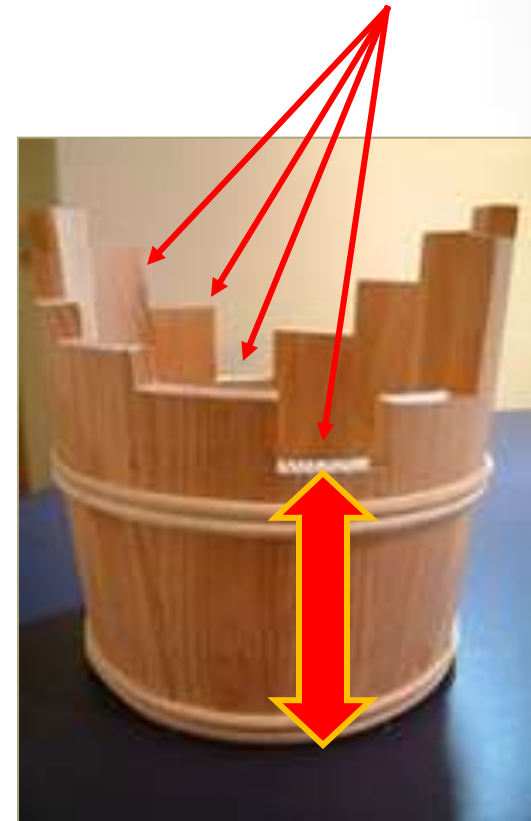
<http://www.domoca.org/phinventory.html>



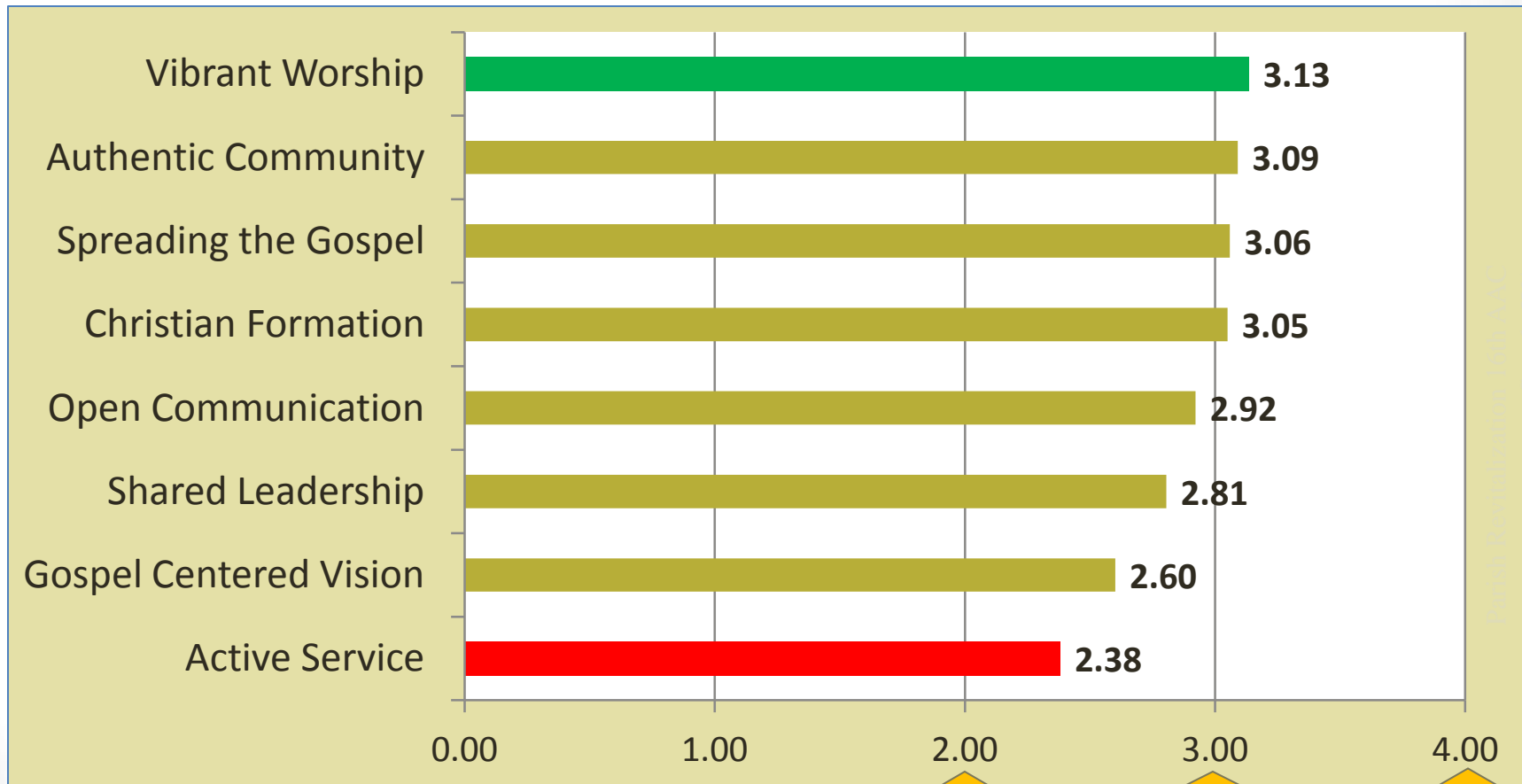
# 4. Focus Your Efforts

## The Minimum Barrel

*Staves equate to essential parish health focus areas*



# Relative Responses by Parish Health Inventory Model Areas



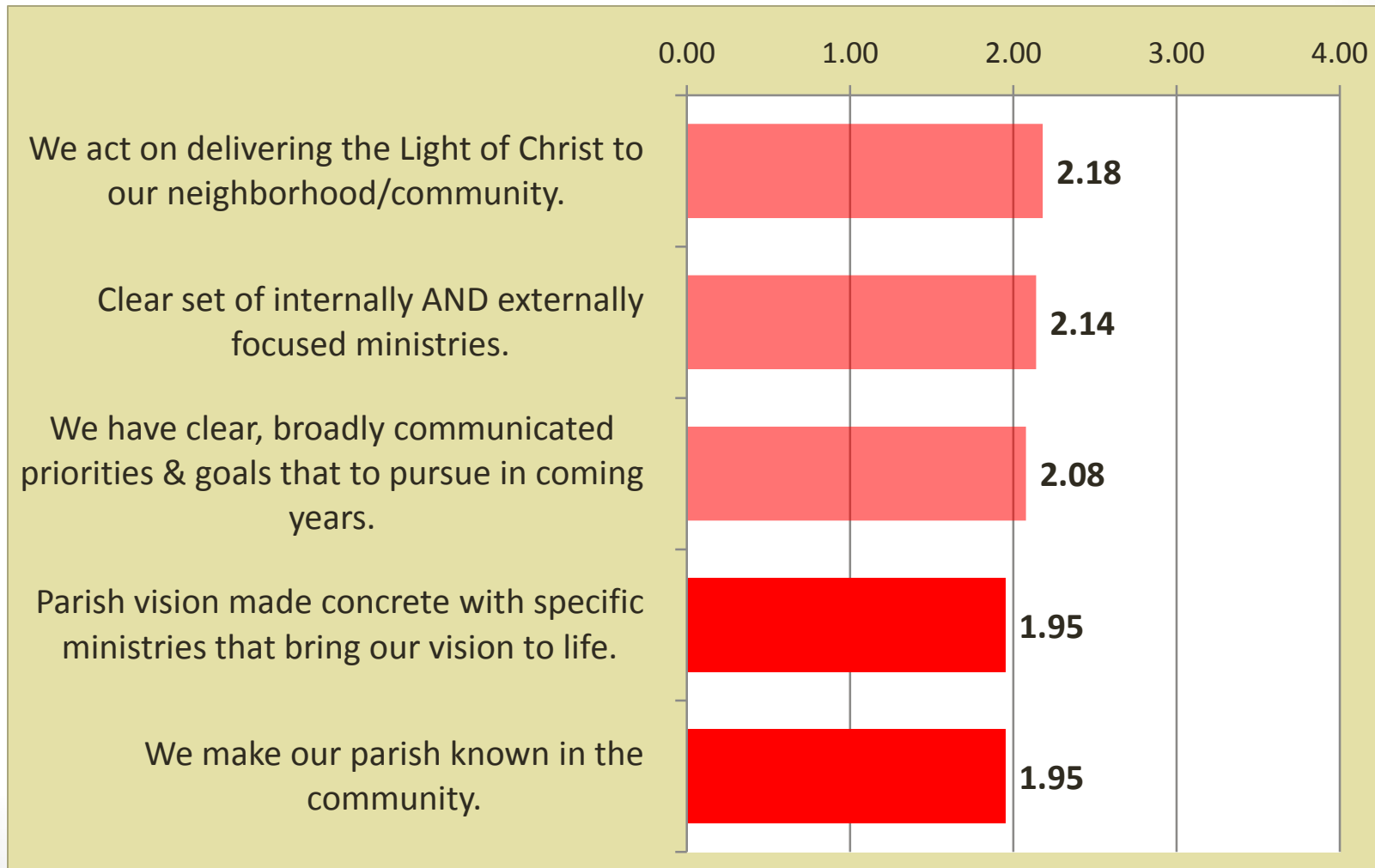
Seattle WA



(11/7/2011)

# Bottom Five Detail Items

*Focus Your Efforts*

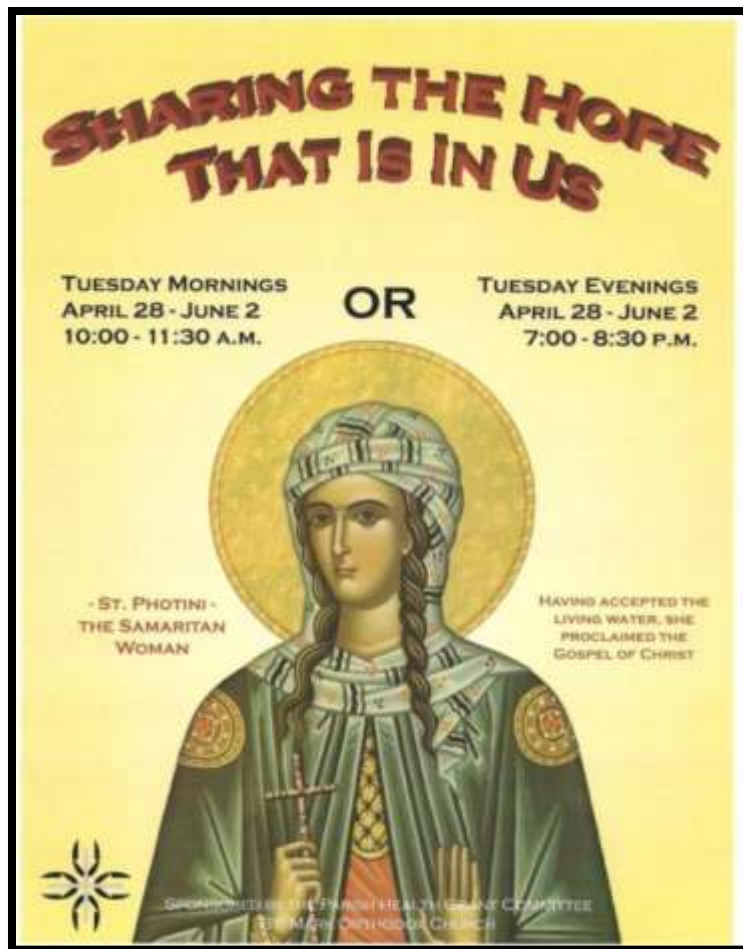


# 5. Find a Core Group to Help Drive Change



Parish Renewal Team?

# 6. Imagine (& Try) New Things



# 7. Ask for Help!

- The doctor who treats himself has a fool for a patient.
- We do not deal much in fact when we are contemplating ourselves. -- *Mark Twain*



Fr. Jonathan Ivanoff

# CONCLUSION

# Summary – Action Steps

## Step 1 – Prepare

1. Begin a discussion on parish health and revitalization
  1. Ask good questions
  2. Face facts
2. Use an assessment tool to factually define where the parish is
3. Consider outside help – Trained, experienced and certified coaches are available

## Step 2 – Diagnose

1. Identify the 3 – 5 “minimum factors.” (don’t rush this)
2. Avoid premature jumps to conclusions; focus on root causes
3. Foundational question here: **Why**? Do NOT focus on actions and answers – yet
4. Communicate with the parish: what is the parish willing/unwilling to work on/change? (this gives you an idea if you’re actually serious)

# Summary – Action Steps

## **Step 3 – Plan**

1. Prioritize issues, develop strategies
2. Undertake efforts that are *achievable, do-able, winnable!*
3. Seek consensus and buy-in from the entire parish

## **Step 4 – Implement**

1. This will be the hardest step!
2. Start! Review and evaluate progress regularly. Don't get discouraged!
3. Review and evaluate progress along the way
4. Find a result, a “win,” – no matter how small – and celebrate

## **Step 5 – Evaluate**

1. Review entire cycle and determine lessons learned, changes and adjustments needed
2. Repeat entire cycle again

# Drivers of Growth are Under Your Control

If the previous info is just *too complicated...* then just do this:

1. Come to church
2. Do something for others
3. Make people aware of your parish.
4. Engage newcomers/visitors with care & warmth.
5. Give them a reason to return – expressed and experienced.

# God Desires to Bless His People!

***“For I know the plans that I have for you,”*** says the Lord, ***“plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”***

- Jeremiah 29:11

# A Parting Thought

*“Have I not commanded you?  
Be strong and courageous!  
Do not tremble or be  
dismayed, for the Lord your  
God is with you wherever you  
go.” - Joshua 1:9*

QUESTIONS? CONCERNS?

# Past Concerns?

- Programs don't work
- "We've tried "this". "It" doesn't work"
- This is not Orthodox – it's a "Protestant thing"
- This does not fit our ecclesiology
  - This is the priest's job.
- This is about numbers.
  - The Church is more than numbers.*
- "Too expensive"
- "Slick" "Silver bullet"
- "I can't get my parishioners to do this."
- Other? \_\_\_\_\_