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Once Large Parish in a Declining Area

Fix This Small Parish. What Would You Do?

**Quick Summary**

A heritage parish has been in decline for a long time. It has taken its toll on morale, parish life and a sense of future. Is it time to give up? Or, can we pull ourselves up, renew our understanding of the church and face forward?

But what should we do –short and long term? On what should we focus?

These are characteristics of a mythical small Orthodox parish. Some are clear limitations. Others could be strengths –or at least opportunities. If you were the priest or a lay leader what would you do?

# Founded

1915

# Location

13 miles from center of major rust belt city

20+ Orthodox Churches within 35 miles of city. Many are in similar a “state” - though little interaction with them.

Neighborhood, once totally dilapidated, is beginning to see some stabilization. Still many people in need nearby.

# Membership

Today: Actual 39; Reported 32

25-30 years ago; membership was 150+

75 % of people are older than 70.

# Church Building

Russian style onion domed building. The visage and sign proclaims *“We’re Russian here!”*

Old and expensive to maintain.

Church needs some maintenance >$ 125K.

Limited parking.

Church is highly visible from a major expressway. Not a landmark but a distinctive part of the neighborhood.

Modest parish hall.

# Parish Life Practices

Sunday Liturgy; 38 attendees. Limited vespers & feast day services.

Choir is *wobbly.*

Pirogi and baked goods sales are a staple of parish life. It’s what we do.

Board of trustees focus: bills & bldg.

Adult ed. etc.-- tried once; dropped- poor attendance.

Eight children; minimal church school

No charitable effort

In many ways the church is a *nostalgia thing* that may not always be *about* Jesus Christ.

# Communication Practices

No web site; no clear online story told.

Limited internal use of email or other electronic communication.

# Financial/Admin

35% of parish budget derived from sales/fund raising.

Losing $10-15K/Yr.

Typical donation per household is $550/yr. There has always been a *dues* system. Two donations are ~ $4K/yr.

$190K in bank accounts

# Priest – Part time Acting Rector

Only person receiving remuneration from parish.

Priest has secular employment to make a living.

# The People

Few parishioners live nearby. Most pass other Orthodox churches to drive here - “family ties”

Ethnically ‘consistent’ (at least one person in 95% of families is Slavic)

Most are cradles. Converts arrived via spouse.

Most own/mortgage their own home, multiple TVs, cell phones etc.

Those families who are *not* retired all work and enjoy a median household income higher than the general population in their area. Those who are retired, while on fixed incomes, have reasonable assets. (Land, financial etc.)

# Questions

1. What other info would you like to have?
2. **How long does this parish have to live?**
3. Who is responsible for this state of affairs? (Not to assign blame – to take action to fix it.)
4. What aspects of this case, if any, remind you of your parish?
5. What wildcard asset would you choose?
	* Good choir
	* Full time Priest
	* Additional $100K (What would you do with it?)
	* 3-4 young families with children

# What are The Alternatives?

1. Continue as in past until $ gone.
2. Agree on 1 area of parish life to work on together. Commit as a community & individually – & get started.
3. Commit to full time priest.
4. Spend $ X on Bldg. now. Then take this step \_\_\_
5. Other? Combo??