

The Triple Digit Parish Anniversary

Heritage Parishes: Nostalgia or Leaning Forward?

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Many Orthodox parishes will mark 100th anniversaries soon --or did so in the recent past. These are important milestones worthy of celebration. Often, however, we find that anniversaries can engulf a parish in a wave of unproductive nostalgia about *the way things were* and *the good old days*. A reasonable question is, in the midst of celebrating --banquets, program books etc.-- *can the parish somehow baptize the occasion to lean into the future?*

Here are a few suggestions to turn your major parish milestone into an opportunity to explore new possibilities:

Ask Good Questions

Few practices can propel a parish forward more effectively than learning to discuss (this includes listening) some key questions. Some of our favorites:

- *Who owns this parish?*
- *What is God calling us to do --at this time, in this place, with these resources?*
- *Are we satisfied with the status quo in this parish?*
- *What holds us back? What limits our parish from being what we want it to be? What are our constraints and limitations?*
- *Can we begin to conceive of our parish in new better -- even more Orthodox --ways?*
- *What is working well? How can we do more of it?*

We've mixed a few more good questions in below.

Put a Face on It

There is one question we *can* always ask a parish group and expect a consistent answer. "*How long do you want this parish to live?*" is always rapidly answered: "*Forever!*" by every community.

Yet "forever" becomes abstract and often devolves to '*at least until I'm gone*'. Try replacing "forever" with a target time frame - "a second hundred years" - and then *personify* the next century. Realize that in one hundred years the *great grandchildren of the parish's youngest baby* will be heirs of today's efforts to build and strengthen the parish.

Too often we make parish decisions to appease *our* needs. During anniversary periods we think back (often superficially) two, three, perhaps four generations. In addition, think *forward*. *What kind of foundation do parish stewards need to build for*



Can we harness the natural nostalgia of major parish milestones? Can they provide an opportunity to look forward --while remembering past accomplishments?



Building a parish to last a 'second hundred years' asks parishioners to behave as stewards in service of the needs of the descendants of this new servant of God. His great, great grandfather (above) laid a good foundation. What foundation are we putting down?

the parishioners only one generation from now to be well served?

Look Backwards to Look Forward

Parish history narratives are a staple of parish anniversaries. Yet most narratives miss the point --or rather turning points - of parish life. Consider:

- *What can past parish challenges and crises teach us about: Faith? Hard work? Handling crises? Taking risks? God's love and mercy?*
- *How does our personal financial status compare with those who built or founded this parish? Who is more affluent? What sacrifices did they make?*
- *What are the top 3-4 events or trends that shaped the parish in the last 25 years? (Extra credit: Answer this without including building projects.)*



Sometimes themes *can* be helpful. This parish selected "Respecting the Past -Embracing the Future". Instead of burying it in a booklet the timeline fills an active hallway.

Mission and Vision

Many positive things can and should be remembered about early parish pioneers. Yet their sense of purpose and vision was expressed in vastly different times and circumstances-- much of which may not fit today's reality.

It may be time to rethink your vision. A mission/vision discussion of 5-10 years ago is likely due for an update. The naturally reflective nature of a milestone anniversary can create the right mood for this topic. One parish is planning a series of focus groups with various parish segments to collect inputs. For other approaches see the article: [Vision Toolbox - Crafting Your Parish Vision](#).



Anniversaries can be a good time for a parish to learn to look in the mirror!

Shared Values

To truly understand purpose and vision we need to understand what we value --together as a community. Anniversaries are great times to have such discussions.

Consider:

- *What is important and unimportant to us as a parish? What do we value?*
- *Do our behaviors exhibit/reflect these values or do we just think we value these things?*
- *Is giving our best important to us? Or are we satisfied with 'good enough'?*
- Sometimes in this context the best question is a negative. *"What are we against? What practices and behaviors will we not stand for in this parish?"*

[For more info click here.](#)

Idea Wall

Ask parishioners to consider *"What do we want this parish to look and be like in ten years?"* Gather opinions in various ways --perhaps including an *idea wall* where people can gather for coffee hour conversation to add 'post-it notes' describing their dreams about various aspects of parish life. The wall can grow over a period of weeks.



Unlike meetings "idea walls" capture inputs from many people --over a period of weeks.

Future Centric Newspaper Article

Summarize the best vision contributions into a mythical 2018 or 2023 newspaper article (or whatever replaces newspapers!) written about your parish. What would you want it to say? *How do you want people in your neighborhood/town/city to see your parish?*

Dedicate a Service Project

Most parishes need to break out of a life style hallmarked by insularity. Find a local service project -- dedicate your parish effort to celebrating your milestone. Accept publicity --don't seek it.

It has been said that *"Death comes when memories of the past exceed the vision for the future."* With the right blend of activities your parish anniversary can help everyone to feel like parish founders -- building a community for a second hundred years.