

Building Vibrant Parishes Track: *Sessions & Speaker Bio's*

OCA Parish Ministries Conference



The ***Building Vibrant Parishes*** track will tackle practical issues associated with helping parishes to be communities where:

- Christ's presence is noticeable to all who enter.
- Each person's spiritual gifts can blossom.
- The light of Christ is carried into the world.

Target Audience – Parish Leaders –Clergy and Laity

The sessions in this track will be of interest to:

- Any Orthodox Christian desiring to help energize their parish.
- Clergy seeking to bring a new sense of ministry to their parish.
- Youth leaders, parish council members, ministry coordinators, parents, lay catechists, church school teachers looking to discover new ideas and to learn from the good practices of others.

Presented by the *Parish Development Ministry*, Diocese of the Midwest, Orthodox Church in America. As an attendee you are free to participate in each of the conference. You do not need to register for one track only.

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Session Descriptions

Some sessions may be repeated multiple times.

Title and Speaker	Description	What You Will Learn	Who Should Attend
<p>Good Practices of Vibrant Orthodox Parishes: <i>A Framework for Parish Renewal</i></p> <p>Joseph Kormos, <i>Leader, Parish Development Ministry, Diocese of the Midwest</i></p> <p>Bio and photo</p> <p>Session One Monday 9:30 AM</p>	<p>Many Orthodox parishes are stuck -- in the past -- or "on" themselves. They live in an imagined reconstruction of yesteryear, lacking a sense of vision and identity.</p> <p>How can parishes become healthy, hopeful, vibrant Orthodox communities? Communities that grow in Christ, share the Gospel with all in their own locale and do the work of Christ in the world?</p> <p>This session will blend experiences from the Midwest Diocese' 2008 Parish Health Summit and insights from four years of coaching Orthodox parishes to explore the qualities of vibrant Orthodox parishes in America -- and what parishes can do to build those qualities.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The Imperatives</i> -- The critical importance of parish renewal. 2. <i>Where to focus</i> -- eight essential dimensions of healthy hopeful 21st century American Orthodox parishes 3. <i>A Model</i> -- what <u>are</u> and <u>are not</u> critical characteristics & practices of healthy American Orthodox parishes. 4. <i>A Method</i> -- an overall approach to parish revitalization. 5. <i>Inspiration to drive change</i> -- There is hope. Orthodox parishes are focusing on strengthening their commitment to the Gospel. 6. <i>Clear next steps</i> -- to begin your journey. 	<p>Anyone hoping to inspire and drive change toward a gospel-centered, growth vision in their parish.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clergy • Parish Council members, • Ministry leaders • Concerned parishioners
<p>Taking Back Our Teens! Fresh Ideas for Lessons and Assemblies</p> <p>Alexa Geeza, <i>St Joseph Orthodox Church, Wheaton IL</i></p> <p>Bio and photo</p> <p>Session Two Monday 11:00 AM</p>	<p>Attend this session to learn how to create and implement meaningful activities that will engage Orthodox teens.</p> <p>Alexa shares her experiences, demonstrating: "The Big Hits", "The Lasting Lessons", "The Situation Box", "Hot Seat Sundays" and a note or two about what didn't work.</p> <p>Attendees will be asked to participate as we explore games, experience innovative lessons and role-play situations experienced by Orthodox teens.</p> <p>Take home fresh ideas for lessons, assemblies and activities for Orthodox teens and you just might find them coming back to church during college breaks.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How to help young people learn to make the right choices in a "politically correct" world. (How to apply Orthodox principles and teachings to their lives.) 2. The 10 Commandments (and more) for creating effective lessons and Sunday school assemblies. 3. Budget-friendly tools and resources that will help you design and implement stand-alone lessons and activities. 4. Five ways to recruit and encourage your entire parish to "get involved" with retaining youth. 5. Take home at least six "Just add water and stir" lessons. 	<p>Anyone who works with teens will be inspired to jump out of the box and try a new approach to religious education and parish participation for teens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clergy • Youth ministers • Sunday school teachers, • Parish youth leaders, • Parents

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A Model for Charitable Outreach: <i>Lazarus on Our Doorstep</i> Charles Robbins, <i>Outreach Ministry Leader, St Gregory of Nyssa Orthodox Church, Columbus OH</i> Bio and photo Session Three Monday 1:30 PM	<p>For many Orthodox Christians, finding a real mission that gives our faith a wholeness is essential to spiritual growth.</p> <p>This session will use small groups to help generate and share ideas from you the participants. Our discussion will focus on how to develop a mission program in your Parish's neighborhood. First we'll pool the collaborated ideas of teams formed from the audience. After hearing solutions to workshop questions, you will receive guidance from key workers with experience in Outreach programs.</p> <p>This will be a dynamic, fresh, participative session.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The key goals, practices and success factors behind the Saturday lunch program at St Gregory of Nyssa parish. 2. How to start or expand a Christian mission that will grow within your parish neighborhood. 3. How to develop the tools that are tangible to those in need. 4. How to harness group diversity to build a strong outreach program. 5. How to apply the ability to understand the gifts of any parish micro group (.e.g. Church school directors, Building committee etc.) to get results from parish teams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clergy • Lay ministry leaders -- particularly those interested in outreach or parish renewal • Anyone leading a team in the parish.
Lay Catechists in the Parish: Who; What; Where; When; Why Anna Strelka, <i>Lay Catechist, Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church Palatine IL.</i> Bio and photo Session Four Tuesday 12:00 Noon	<p>An experienced lay catechist offers her insights into the workings of this ministry. Why are lay catechists important for the future of the Church in America? Who is a good candidate? How should catechists be selected and trained? How do priest and catechist work together to integrate catechumens and inquirers into the parish and the wider Church?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Five potential benefits of implementing lay catechists in your parish 2. Five personal & educational qualities needed for this ministry. What to look for. 3. Six duties, five challenges, five joys of a lay catechist. 	<p>Anyone who has occasion to explain the Orthodox faith to non-Orthodox.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lay people interested in instructing inquirers and catechumens. • Clergy who want to know how this ministry may enhance parish life and growth.
Getting Ready for Inquirers: <i>Who they are, What they ask, and What they need.</i> Edith Marshall Roberts <i>'Sharing the Hope' Team</i>	<p>Orthodox parishioners who seek to add vibrancy to their parish life by the presence of enthusiastic converts are encouraged to be particularly sensitive, and nonjudgmental towards the seeker as he/she undertakes their often arduous journey into Orthodoxy and to be prepared with answers to the kinds of</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A profile of background of most inquirers – based on survey data. 2. Five most likely questions of Inquirers – and some answers. 3. Six difficulties encountered by the seeker -- and practical steps parishes can take towards making that journey 	<p>Anyone who is concerned that their parish community has become ingrown or stagnant, and who wants to work to enliven their parish life will be intrigued by participation in this class.</p>

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<p><i>Leader</i> <i>St. Mark Orthodox Church,</i> <i>Rochester MI</i></p> <p>Bio and photo</p> <p>Session Five Tuesday 1:30 PM</p>	<p>questions seekers present.</p> <p>Based on the successful class <i>“Sharing the Hope”</i> produced at St. Mark Church Rochester MI, this session will introduce characteristics of the average inquirer -- their knowledge and experience base. The obstacles faced by inquirers as they encounter Orthodox worship and practice will be explored.</p>	<p>easier.</p> <p>4. How can the parish provide a welcoming community for the inquirer?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clergy • Evangelization Ministry leaders • Lay catechists <p>Anyone desiring to improve their fluency in handling first and second level questions of inquirers.</p>
<p>Assimilation & Integration: <i>Bringing New Members into Your Parish</i></p> <p>Fr. John Matusiak, <i>Rector, St Joseph’s Church,</i> <i>Wheaton IL</i></p> <p>Bio and photo</p> <p>Session Six Tuesday 3:30 PM</p>	<p>Evangelization and outreach are not things that end “when a new member joins,” but must continue.</p> <p>Fr John will offer experience based ideas on how to help make this happen in your parish. He will lead the group in an interactive presentation on situational issues –and possible solutions.</p>	<p>1. Reasons why new members often leave a parish.</p> <p>2. How to incorporate individuals and families with diverse backgrounds.</p> <p>3. “The laborers are few:” The importance of sharing ministry.</p>	<p>Anyone and everyone, for incorporation of new members and ongoing evangelization – two sides to the same coin – is the responsibility of everyone, not just the clergy or parish leadership.</p>
<p>Proper Parish Governance <i>Shared leadership - not Congregationalism</i></p> <p>Joseph Kormos, <i>Leader, Parish Development Ministry, Diocese of the Midwest</i></p> <p>Bio and photo</p> <p>Session Seven Tuesday 7:30 PM</p>	<p>Based in large part on the book <u><i>American Orthodoxy and Parish Congregationalism</i></u> by Fr. Nicholas Ferencz, this session explores the root causes of congregationalist tendencies in Orthodox parishes in America and contrasts this to fundamental governance principles inherited from the Early Church. A practical comparison between congregational/trustee style parish administration and a eucharistic/ conciliar/ stewardship model will be drawn. . The proper purpose and mission of the parish council will be examined. ****</p> <p><i>This session is a prequel to the subsequent session: <i>Establishing a Spirit of Mission Through a Healthy Parish Council.</i></i></p>	<p>1. Five proper Orthodox governance principles inherited from the early church.</p> <p>2. Understanding “congregationalism” and the factors that led to improper congregational tendencies in many American Orthodox parishes.</p> <p>3. Eight tasks and ministries of parish councils.</p> <p>4. How to overcome past wrong thinking and models to help priests, parish council’s and parish leaders to establish a proper atmosphere of shared leadership and governance within parish communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parish Council members; lay leaders of all types • Clergy • Anyone interested in laying a foundation for improved parish governance. <p><i>Past presentation of this material has resulted in important insights and positive discussion for parish leaders –helping them to recognize bad practice and to understand how “what we’ve always done” is not always correct - or best.</i></p>

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<p>Establishing a Spirit of Mission through a Healthy Parish Council</p> <p><i>Linking Parish Ministries and Parish Council</i></p> <p>Ann Marie Mecera <i>Lay Vice Chair St. Gregory of Nyssa Orthodox Church, Columbus OH</i> Bio and photo</p> <p>Session Eight Wednesday 9:30 AM</p>	<p>This session offers a case study of the Parish Council of St. Gregory of Nyssa Orthodox Campus Church. The focus will be on the structure of the Parish Council: how council members are selected, decisions are made, conflict is resolved, and the life of the church can be represented and operated through this structure. Participants will have time to consider the steps they can take to transform their parish council step-by-step.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The difference between the ministry/consensus model and the election /voting model of parish council structure. 2. How the real pulse of the parish is represented by the ministry/ consensus model and why it leads to a healthy, vibrant parish. 3. How good business practices can be employed in the parish setting for optimal results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parish Council members, • clergy, • laity <p>All who want to learn more about effective parish councils and building effective structures for shared leadership.</p>
<p>Improving Stewardship in Your Parish: Principles and Practices to Assure Necessary Resources for God's Work.</p> <p>Fr. Gregory Jensen, <i>Attached Ss Cyril & Methodius Orthodox Church Milwaukee WI,</i> Bio and photo</p> <p>Session Nine Wednesday 11:00 AM</p>	<p>Stewardship is about the way we live in relationship to God and the world. It includes money but is not limited to it.</p> <p>This session will help you tune up your stewardship efforts for the realities of 2010 & beyond. Content and agenda will be adapted to the specific needs of parishes in the audience. Practical tips and tools will be offered – all on a proper spiritual foundation.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Six key principles underscoring Christian generosity and stewardship. 2. Yes, Orthodox Christians <u>do</u> tithe. How does that happen? 3. Eight good parish stewardship practices. 4. Transitioning to a commitment based stewardship system. Step by step. 5. Six objections and obstacles – and antidotes. 6. Sample forms and tracking reports that can be adapted to your parish. 	<p>All those interested in stewardship education and generating broader, deeper, more generous personal and financial commitment to the parish's ministry.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treasurers • Stewardship Ministry leaders • Stewardship team members, • Parish council members

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Building Vibrant Parishes -- Track Faculty

Alexa Geeza,
Youth Teacher
St. Joseph Orthodox
Church,
Wheaton IL



A former Navy nurse, corporate health manager/trainer, and school nurse, Alexa Geeza has worked with young people in the military, in the workplace, in schools and in her parish for more than three decades.

Her creative, budget-friendly approach to Sunday school for teens, helps them apply Orthodox teachings to everyday life.

She is a member of St. Joseph Orthodox Christian Church in Wheaton, IL. Alexa and her husband, Boris, are the parents of two grown children, both active members of their parish

Fr. Gregory Jensen,
Madison WI
Attached Ss. Cyril &
Methodius Church
Milwaukee WI



A psychologist specializing in personality theory and religion, Fr Gregory Jensen received his doctorate from Duquesne University's Institute of Formative Spirituality -- an ecumenical program in counseling, education and spiritual direction. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1996 he as a mission priest and college chaplain. Currently he lives in Madison WI and is attached to SS Cyril & Methodius Church (OCA) in Milwaukee. He is a member of the American Psychological Association and the Christian Association for Psychology Studies.

Joseph Kormos,
Leader,
Parish Development
Ministry,
Diocese of the Midwest
Christ the Savior- Holy
Spirit Orthodox Church,
Cincinnati, OH



As the leader of the Parish Health Ministry for the Diocese of the Midwest, Joe develops and presents workshops, authors a parish leadership newsletter and helps to create parish tools for stewardship evangelization and parish administration. He has served as leader for three Pre-Conciliar Commissions and as a member of the Midwest Diocesan Council.

Experienced in marketing, team building and an ability to conceptualize fresh solutions, Joe has been a product innovation consultant and product development executive. He is the author of two books on R&D performance.

A founding member of Christ the Savior Orthodox Church in Cincinnati OH, he and his wife Joyce are the parents of two grown children -- both of whom serve as members of their respective Orthodox parish councils -- and one fine grandson.

Building Vibrant Parishes -- Track Faculty

Fr. John Matusiak,
Rector,

*St Joseph's Church
Wheaton IL*



A 1972 grad of Iona college, with a BA in Communications and a 1975 grad of St. Vladimir's Seminary, M. Div. Father John is married to the former Barbara Zelina of Campbell, OH They have two grown children and five grandchildren.

Father John is Founding pastor of St. Joseph Church, Wheaton, IL [1989]; previously rector of St. Mary Cathedral, Minneapolis, and first resident pastor of St. Herman Church, Shillington, PA.

He is currently OCA Communications Coordinator and Managing Editor of "The Orthodox Church". Father John is the former Vice-President of Syndesmos, the International Fellowship of Orthodox Youth as well as former member of the OCA departments of Christian Education and Youth

Ann Marie Mecera
Lay Vice Chair

*St Gregory of Nyssa
Orthodox Church,
Columbus OH*



An author of children's religious education materials, Ann Marie has served the OCA on various task forces, as a member of the pre-conciliar commission, and the Midwest Diocesan Council. She has participated in numerous conferences as a speaker or planner.

As a marketing consultant for 25 years, she currently works with non-profits in the EMS field and previously handled the public relations for Project Mexico.

Ann Marie and her husband Gus have two daughters: Juliana, a graduate of both St. Vladimir's Seminary and Union Theological Seminary; and Justina, a student at Savannah College of Art & Design.

She has attended St. Gregory of Nyssa Orthodox Campus Church in Columbus, Ohio for 25 years. She was originally Parish Council President before helping to transition the Parish Council from a voting model to the consensus model. She has served as Lay Vice Chair for the past 10 years."

Charles Robbins,
**Outreach Ministry
Leader,**

*St. Gregory of Nyssa
Orthodox Church,
Columbus OH*



Charles Robbins has directed the operation of the St. Gregory Neighborhood Outreach program for eight years. Under his guidance, the parish operates a food pantry, a Saturday lunch program, a voluntary work program for the neighborhood 'friends', oversees a dozen parishioners who cook for the Saturday lunch program, provides basic education on the Orthodox faith to neighborhood 'friends', handles safety and security, and more.

He retired from the U.S. Army after 21 years of service in which he was both an infantry officer and armor company commander.

He has many years of experience in training professionals. Charles teaches a wide range of college subjects and is an author of many textbooks.

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Building Vibrant Parishes -- Track Faculty

***Edith Marshall
Roberts***

*'Sharing the Hope'
Team Leader
St. Mark Orthodox
Church,
Rochester MI*



A recent convert to Orthodoxy, Edith spent her entire life in the Protestant Church. The daughter of Presbyterian medical missionaries in Guatemala, she was a minister's wife in New England for many years. As a young woman she attended Princeton Seminary, and also has a Master's degree in Social Work from Boston University. Working as a clinician in a private mental health clinic, she now specializes in Marriage and Family Therapy. Her husband, John, is her cohort in all things Orthodox, and as a member of her grant team, worked to develop a statistical analysis of the arenas inquirers find most difficult as they encounter Orthodoxy. A successful training program "Sharing the Hope That is in Us" was then developed for the parish which directly addressed the questions inquirers are likely to ask.

Edith and John are members of St. Mark Orthodox Church in Rochester Hills, Michigan.

Anna Strelka,
*Lay Catechist,
Holy Resurrection
Orthodox Church
Palatine IL.*



Anna Strelka embraced the Orthodox faith 40 years ago, has been a member of Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church for 20 years and has served as lay catechist for 6 years. While practicing her catechetical ministry, she earned a certificate of completion of the Chicago Deanery Higher Education/Diaconal Vocations program. She has grown children and a 9-to-5 job as a legal assistant. In addition to instructing catechumens and inquirers in her parish, she leads adult education sessions, writes church school plays and historical fiction, and assists her husband Mike with directing the choir. Mike and Anna also research and give living history performances as the American Civil War's most famous Orthodox couple.