

MISSION GUIDELINES – DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST - OCA

Revised March, 2016

The Bishop of the Diocese of the Midwest has definitive authority over the approval, status, location, facilities, and direction of Diocesan missions and the Mission/Parish Development program.

The Mission/Parish Development Committee assists him in the administration of the Diocese' mission communities and program. The Committee's role is to:

- review and oversee the work of the Mission/Parish Development Department by offering constructive criticism, encouragement and support to its activities;
- decide equitably on grants and awards to missions and parishes;
- assure that these Diocesan funds are used responsibly by recipients;
- assure that such funds are used to accelerate the progression from an incipient mission community to its maturation as a parish;
- offer constructive criticism to missions and parishes to assist them in this development;
- recommend and review the selection of new mission sites, according to a variety of predictive criteria;
- ensure proper spacing of missions and designating of target areas;
- identify unsuccessful missions and recommend corrective action.

The Bishop chooses Mission/Parish Development Committee members from among the Deans, Diocesan Council members, and clergy and laypeople with mission experience.

GENERAL MISSION PLANTING CRITERIA

The Diocese supports mission plantings in areas where positive factors suggest the Lord's will for the building up of the Church in these areas. In establishing missions, the Bishop and Mission/Parish Development Committee consider the following factors:

- A vision of building up of the Body of Christ and bringing the Orthodox Faith to others;
- A committed core group of faithful who are mission-minded and ready to do outreach;
- A location where there is no Orthodox presence, that has substantial growth potential, and which fits the Department's plan;
- An array of talents necessary to start divine services and programs of education, stewardship, and outreach;
- a willingness to commit time, effort, and finances;
- the availability of clergy who can provide services, leadership, and pastoral care (eventually the presence of a trained resident priest).

MISSION DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Communities pass through multiple stages on the way to becoming a parish. The goal of this process is to facilitate controlled, deliberate maturation of new communities, moving them from mission exploration to parish status in ten years or less. A brief description of the process follows:

- A. INQUIRY – 6 months: communities enter the Diocese’ mission program in one of several ways: by a request from a deanery or neighboring parish, as a result of Mission/Parish Development Committee planning and strategic targeting, or by a written inquiry from a local core group. The Dean and local parishes, both OCA and non-OCA, are contacted. A target area is designated and resources assessed. If all seems feasible, the process moves on to the next step. Crucial considerations include: demographics – sufficient population to suggest growth potential; local demand of sufficient strength; deanery support; a local economy robust enough to provide outside employment possibilities for a mission priest; an absence of negative factors influencing mission establishment, such a local intra-parish conflict.
- B. MISSION EXPLORATION – 6 months – engaging 8 – 10 people: activities include:
 - a. Meeting of a core group;
 - b. Agreement on target area and projected location;
 - c. Prayer and fellowship meetings to discern mission potential;
 - d. Occasional services (Reader’s, Typica, etc.);
 - e. Possible sponsorship by “mother” parish;
 - f. Intentional and strategic contacts with Orthodox and non-Orthodox in the target area;
 - g. Close contact with and regular reports to Mission/Parish Development Department;
 - h. Department seeking and training of supply clergy and core leadership;
 - i. Supply clergy developing vision and resources of core group;
 - j. Articulation of proposal for the blessing of a new Mission.
- C. DEVELOPING MISSION – up to 2 years – local group of 20: activities include:
 - a. Temporary location secured with Bishop’s and Mission/Parish Development Committee’s approval;
 - b. Supply priest;
 - c. Weekly or biweekly Sunday Liturgy;
 - d. Children’s and Adult Education programs;
 - e. Development of outreach strategy including training of laypeople;
 - f. Mission/P.D. Department training of prospective priest for assignment;
 - g. Naming of Mission;
 - h. Semi-annual reports to Mission/PD Department, with application for funding as may be appropriate.
- D. FULL MISSION – 5-10 years – should have 15 households – activities include:

- a. Assignment of resident priest, with training by Mission/PD Dept.;
 - b. Full liturgical cycle;
 - c. Further implementation of education and outreach programs;
 - d. Lease on building with approval of Bishop and Mission/Parish Development Committee;
 - e. Adoption of standard Diocesan bylaws;
 - f. Incorporation, with Diocesan assistance to facilitate the process;
 - g. Mission Council and organizational structure;
 - h. Semi-annual reports to Mission/PD Department;
 - i. Commencement of stewardship to the Diocese (presently assessments), following a three-year grace period calculated from the time of the establishment and blessing of the Mission (*see Stage B-10).
- E. PARISH STATUS – Criteria for consideration of parish Status for a maturing mission;
- a. It is a vital community of Orthodox Christians;
 - b. God willing, it will be a permanent community;
 - c. It can survive the loss of key families;
 - d. It can survive the loss of its current pastor, and obtain another compatible pastor;
 - e. It has 50 or more adults
 - f. It has the potential to grow, in the next 5 or 10 years, to 100 persons;
 - g. It has a full Resurrectional and festal cycle of services;
 - h. It has its own building;
 - i. It provides clergy compensation according to the Diocesan norms as implemented by Bishop and Dean;
 - j. It pays assessments (or other future forms of stewardship) to the Diocese;
 - k. It has an annual budget and audited financial statements;
 - l. It is implementing the Diocesan sexual misconduct policies;
 - m. Its ongoing stewardship program sets a goal of 5% of median household income for the local county as a target contribution for parish families;
 - n. The Dean has submitted to the Bishop a written recommendation for admission to parish status.

DOCUMENTATION TO THE DIOCESE FOR ADMISSION TO PARISH STATUS:

- 1) Status Change Form (to be developed), reflecting the above criteria;
- 2) Copies of budget and audited financial statements for two years;
- 3) Recommendation letter of the Dean.

The decision to grant or to withhold parish status belongs solely to the Bishop, who will seek counsel with the Dean and the Mission/Parish Development Committee.

CHAPEL STATUS

This designation applies to small communities not well-situated for numerical growth, which are often at a considerable distance from an existing parish. These communities do not have the apparent potential to support a full ministry or offer a full liturgical life. This is most often a factor of demographic weakness or remoteness. These communities are not missions because the term “mission” implies an expectation to practice mission activity, to grow the Church, and eventually to become a fully formed parish. The benefit of the “chapel” designation is that the community is freed from the burden of expected growth, but it still remains an active community under diocesan care.

A chapel may be a mature community that has declined but can still minister to some extent to the faithful of its area. “Chapel” is not the designation of an end-state, but of a continuing, though diminished, capacity for ministry.

A chapel may also be a newer community, established as the outreach of an existing parish, perhaps in an effort to test the vitality and interest in its area, or simply to offer liturgical life and ministry to a small, isolated community. A chapel might also be formed when a parish moves to a different (perhaps exurban) location, maintaining an urban chapel to serve the needs of its former urban neighborhood. This can be a way for the Church to try to “keep the Faith” in the city.

KEY POINTS ABOUT CHAPELS:

- 1) Chapel designation does not imply abandonment by the Diocese or Deanery. The Diocese, Deanery, and perhaps mother Parish will do their best to supply and support the Chapel, providing stability commensurate with the efforts and commitment of the Chapel itself.
- 2) A chapel can receive the name of a patron saint or feast.
- 3) It may or may not have an assigned priest or deacon.
- 4) If it is attached to a neighboring parish, its members are members of that parish, counted in the assessment count of that parish; in this case, the chapel pays its Diocesan stewardship through the mother parish and does not have its own council.
- 5) If the Chapel is a mature community, perhaps a former parish, its members are members of the Chapel itself; in this case, the Chapel has its own council and pays its own Diocesan assessments (or stewardship).
- 6) In all cases, Chapel members are considered supporting members of the Diocese and the OCA.

A change to chapel status would be initiated by the Dean and Mission/Parish Development Committee in consultation with the community, subject to the Bishop’s final decision.

NOTE: There are other areas of concern for which specific policies have been or will be implemented from time to time. Policy statements about these may be appended to these policies. These matters include:

Mission Grants, Training Procedures for Mission Clergy, Parish Development (Parish Health) Grants, the Mission Endowment Fund, the “Mission Kit,” Provisional Status for Faltering Missions, etc.