



GOOD PRACTICES OF VIBRANT ORTHODOX PARISHES

A FRAMEWORK FOR RENEWAL

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Parish Ministries Conference 2010

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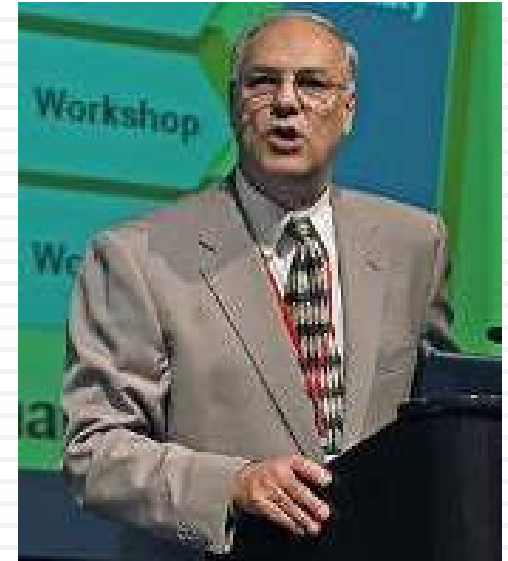
Session Outline

- Speaker Intro
- What do you need to learn to make this conference successful for you?
- The Imperative – Vibrant Parishes
- Parish Video – make list of important qualities you see
- A Tool --Inventory Model
- What goes wrong with this tool
- Some antidotes – countering actions

Your Presenter

Joe Kormos

- Parish Development Ministry, Diocese of Midwest
- Consultant, Coach, Facilitator
- Visited 40 parishes in last five years
- Familiar: “OCA era” & “Metropolia era” parish mentality
- Past Parish Council member/ leader



What Do You Need to Learn/Accomplish to Make This Conference Valuable to YOU?

- ☐ Tell me...
- ☐ ??????

What do You Need to Learn/Accomplish to Make This Conference Valuable to YOU?

- ☐ Good ideas we can use in our parish
- ☐ How to grow
- ☐ ??
- ☐ ???
- ☐ ????

Past Attendee Expectations

- Share ideas
- How to grow?
- Ideas for enriching parish life
- How can our parish become known
- How to evangelize; neighborhood
- Keys – how to know when we're in trouble
- How to enable laity to take ownership of efforts
- How to assess: "Where are we?"

The Imperative

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“Houston, we have a problem”

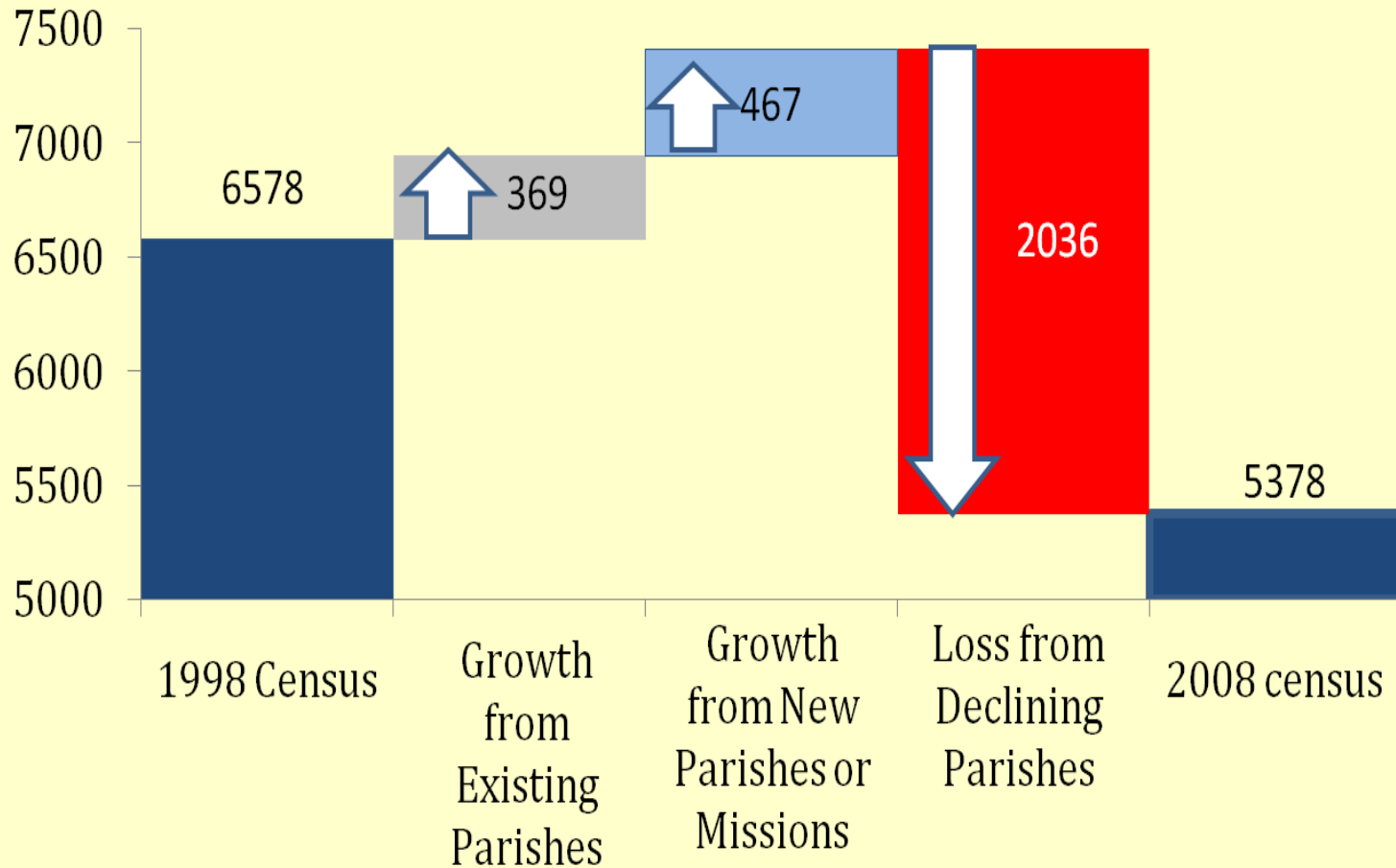
Diocese of Midwest



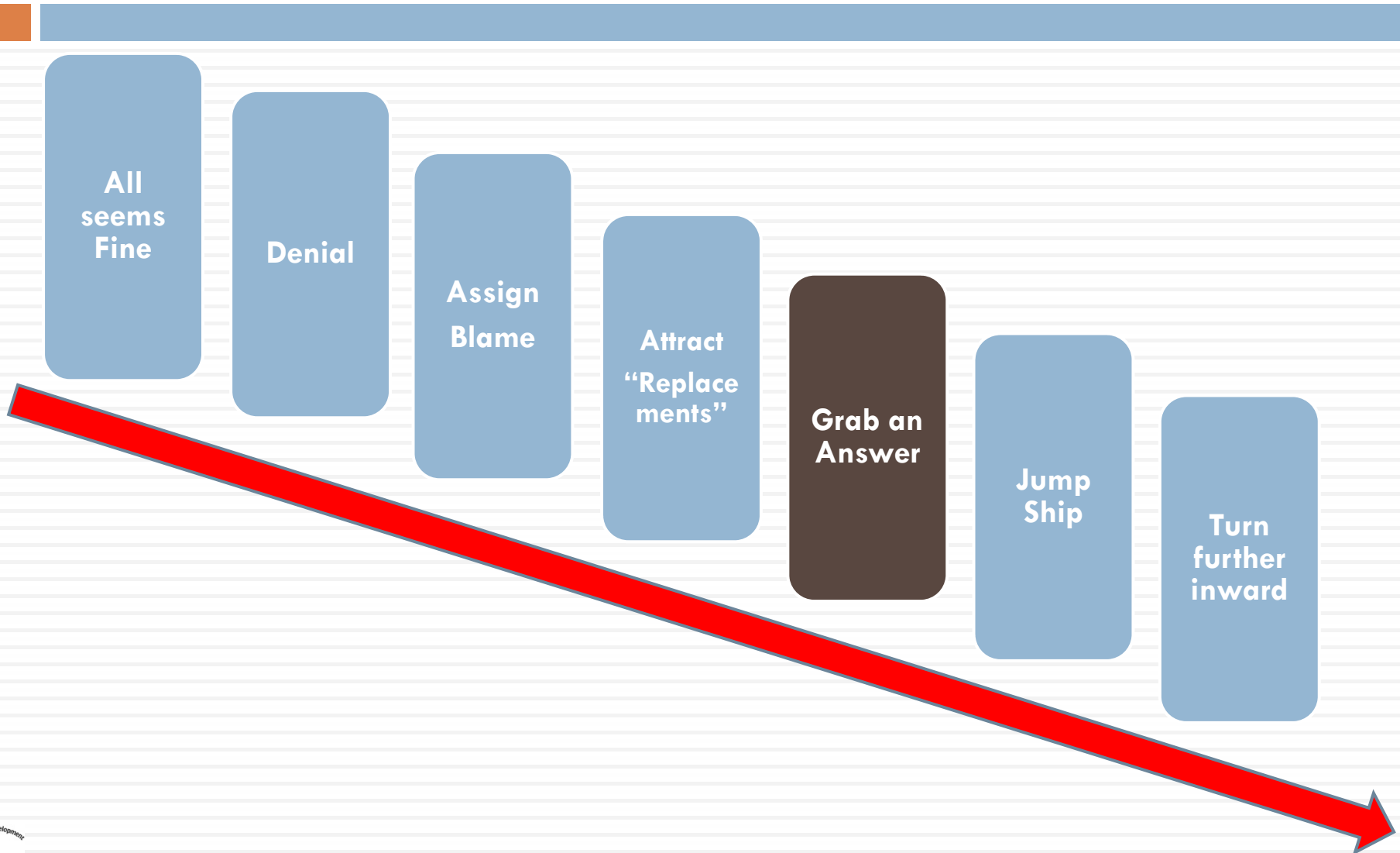
Diocese of Midwest Data

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Sources of Diocesan Census Change 1998 -2008



Typical Decline Pattern



Root Causes



Root Causes

- Unwilling to change/learn
- No competence for “intentionality”
 - ▣ Little experience setting goals/explicit actions
- Isolated & insulated
- Don't know what people are thirsting for.
- Don't know what to do
- **Lack updated models of healthy parishes**



What Does NOT Work

Attacking Decline/Plateau

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

An Exercise

Take out a piece of paper....

- Write down 2-5 qualities/ characteristics/ practices of a Vibrant 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. _____

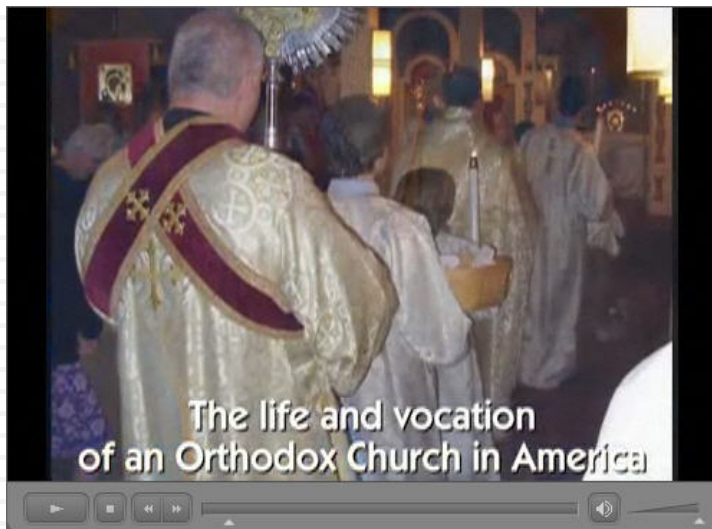
“Not Vibrant”

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Parish Video – Five Minutes

Diocese of
the Midwest -
Orthodox
Church in
America



How many qualities of a vibrant Orthodox parish can you identify from the video ?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Vibrant Qualities Observed in Video

1. Know who you are
2. Worship
3. More than Sunday
4. Reverence
5. Music
6. Diversity
7. Connected to larger church
8. Sat lunch
9. Service to others
10. See Christ in others
11. Use multiple talents –space for everyone
12. Accomplishment –achievement
13. Fellowship
14. Celebrations
15. Blessings
16. Food
17. Annual cycle
18. Bake sales
19. Leaders
20. Teaching
21. Formation children
22. College connection
23. Decoration of temple
24. Preaching ordination
25. Sacraments
26. Tell/share your story with others.
27. Invite to come see
28. A parish is not a building
29. excellence

2008 Parish Health Summit

OCA Diocese of the Midwest

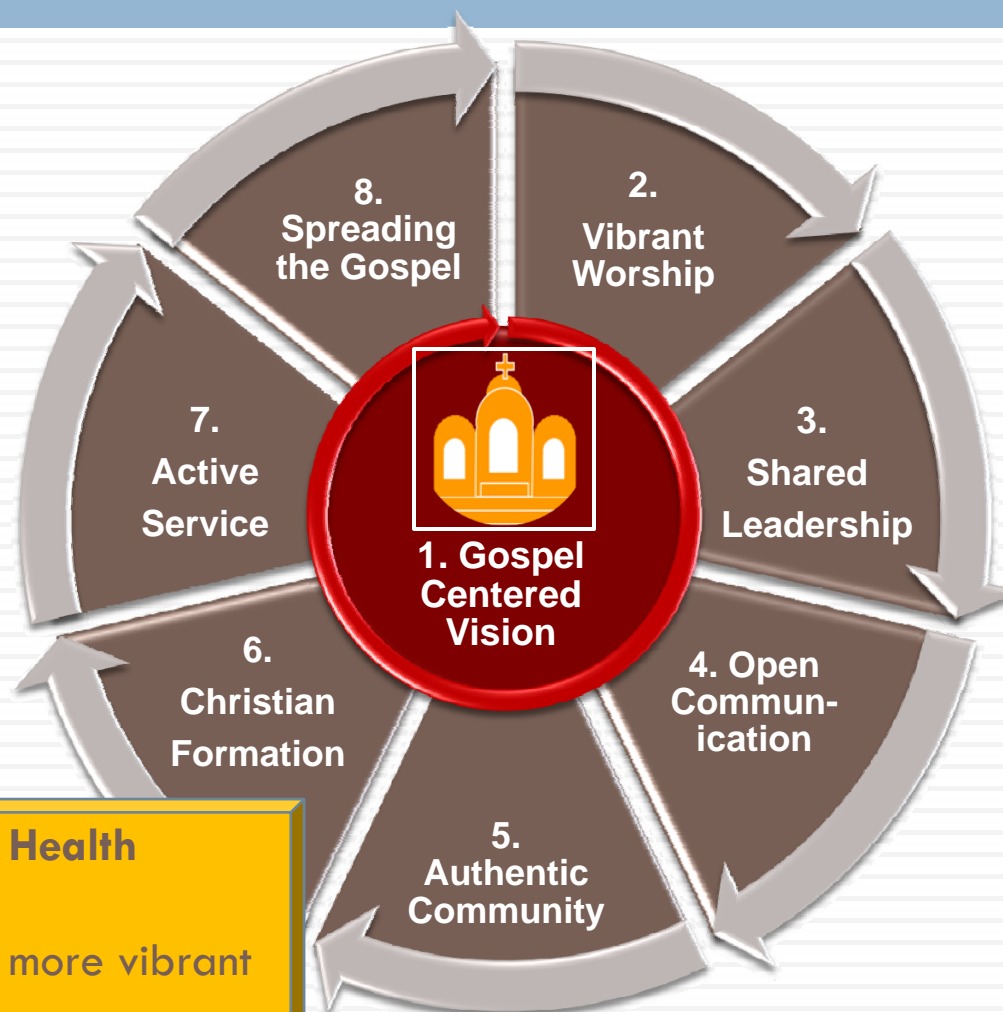
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Conclusion from Parish Health Summit:
“Any parish can become more vibrant – if it wants to do so.”

Attendee

Parish Health Inventory Model



Conclusion from Parish Health Summit:

"Any parish can become more vibrant – if it wants to do so."

Clergy Attendee

Parish Health Inventory Model

2 VIBRANT WORSHIP

HEALTHY PARISH COMMUNITIES VIEW WORSHIP AS THE HIGHEST ORDER OF HUMAN ACTIVITY. THEY SEE WORSHIP AS A FOUNDATION FOR ALL OTHER PARISH ACTIVITIES. THROUGH ITS WORSHIP WORSHIPERS STRIVE TO PLEASE GOD, NOT THEMSELVES. THEY CONSISTENTLY OFFER THEIR BEST THROUGH WORSHIP THAT IS HOLY, DEEP, PEACEFUL, THANKFUL AND VULNERABLE.

Liturgical preparedness

Congregation participation and atmosphere

Effective preaching

Check those which are performed well and with appropriate regularity.
Circle those practices which are performed inconsistently or ineffectively.

LITURGICAL PREPAREDNESS

1. Worship is conducted in the best possible manner. All involved in worship use appropriate care to consistently deliver their best efforts to offer worship pleasing to God.
2. As a parish we view worship as the foundation for all other parish activities.
3. Objects and decorous items with aesthetic value are maintained.

Lists of Good Practices, Behaviors, & Attitudes

4. Parish members are encouraged to bring gifts, flowers, and energy.
5. Communicants have tested and the importance of confession is cultivated.
6. The parish budget supports appropriate training* for worship leaders. (Tuition/travel for workshops, continuing education etc.) The budget provides funds for maintaining and enhancing the beauty of the worship space.

PARISH DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do we really want/welcome new people in our parish?
- Do we have practices, behaviors or traditions that get in the way of building a loving Christian community?
- How do we incorporate members into the life of the parish? Do we make room for them? How well do we do so?
- Do we think of ourselves as a community?
- In what jurisdictions? What have we done in the last six months to strengthen that connection? Is it important to develop connections among laity – or just clergy?
- In what ways do our parish physical facilities assist or hinder developing a sense of community.
- Can we identify one improvement to our practice in this area?

Discussion Questions

POTENTIAL METRICS

What are some leading or lagging indicators of progress in this area of focus?

- # of parish social/relationship building events per quarter. % of parish evolved in each.
- People who have been baptized in the last six months.
- # of parish members who have been baptized in the last six months.
- Drop-out rate in the last six months.
- # of parish members who have been baptized in the last six months.
- # of parish members who know people in other parishes – Deanery/Diocesan etc. by name.
- Median age of parish.
- Ratio of parishioners above 65/below 30

Potential Metrics

HOW DO WE RATE OUR PARISH ON THIS FOCUS AREA?

For each subcategory place an X in the column that best expresses your view of our parish's maturity level.

	Level 0 INCONSISTENTLY INCOMPETENT As a parish we're	Level 1 CONSCIOUSLY INCOMPETENT We're aware	Level 2 CONSCIOUSLY BASIC- COMPETENT	Level 3 CONSCIOUSLY COMPETENT Good behaviors	Level 4 SPONTANEOUSLY COMPETENT Good behaviors and practices in this area have been "baked in" the life of the parish
Focus Area/ Subarea			improvement	avoid bad habits	
Authentic Community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Atmosphere of love & honest fellowship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Entry & incorporation mechanisms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connectedness to larger church	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Appropriate facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Evaluation Scale

A Model

Gospel Centered Vision

- Mission/ identity
- Parish self awareness
- Excellence based atmosphere
- Multiplication oriented

- Liturgical Preparedness
- Congregational Participation
- Effective preaching

- Parish Evangelization methods
- Personal evangelism
- Sensitivity to spiritual needs of others
- External communication

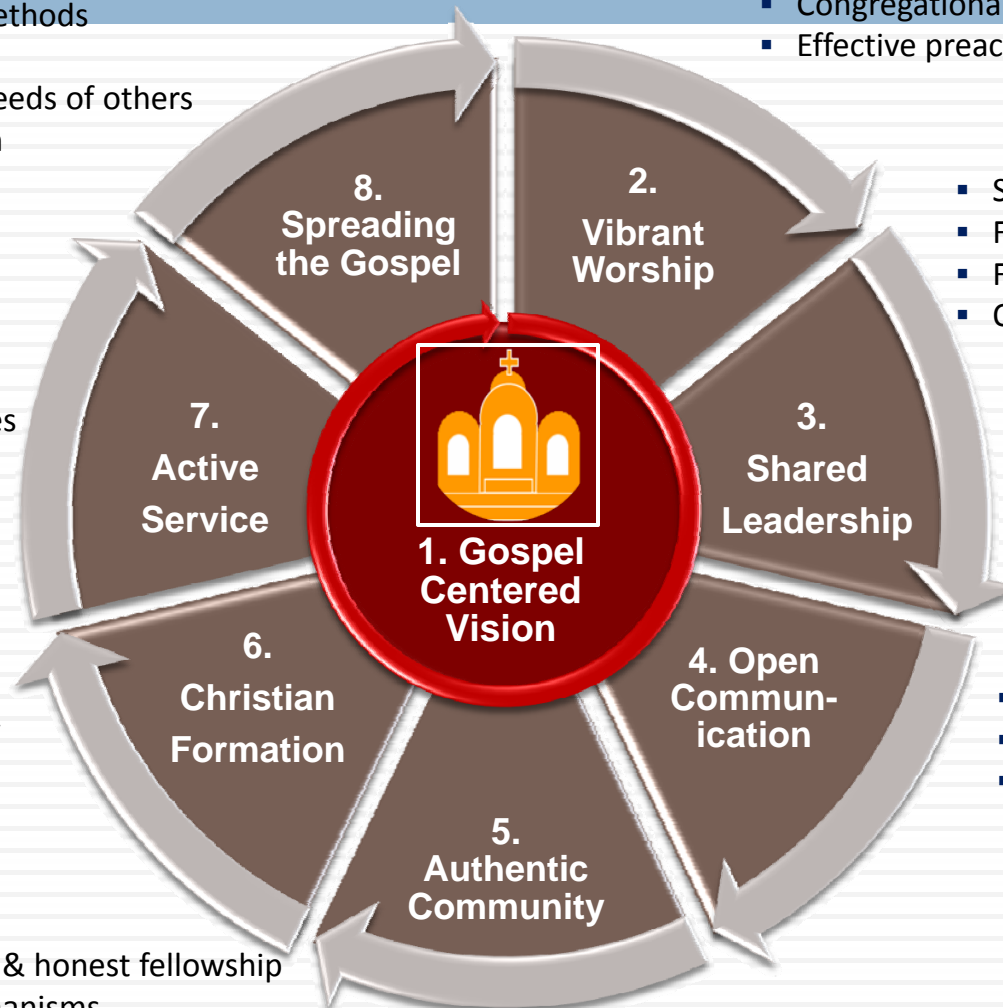
- Discernment of gifts
- Targeted, organic ministries

- Orthodox spirituality
- Education
- Financial generosity

- Loving atmosphere & honest fellowship
- Incorporation mechanisms
- Connectedness to larger Church
- Appropriate facilities

- Share & delegate responsibility
- Fluency in leading change
- Functional structures
- Open financial reporting

- Consensus and dialogue
- Dealing with conflict
- Internal communication methods



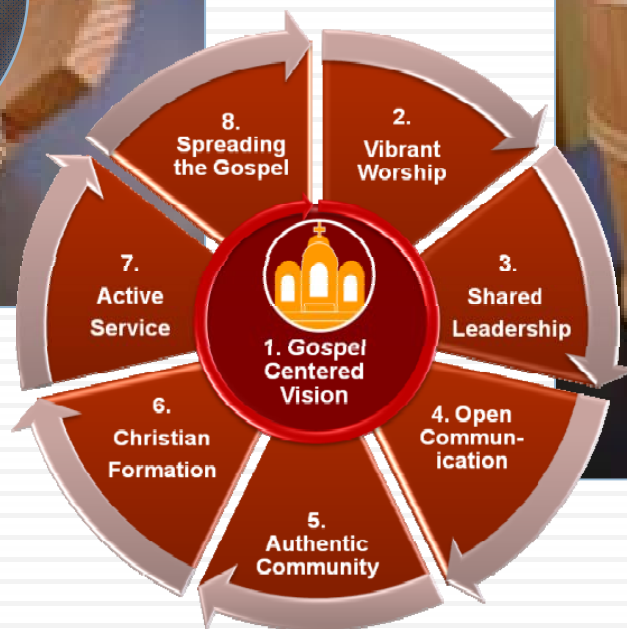
Healthy Parish Focus Areas

Focus Your Efforts

The Minimum Barrel



Staves equate to essential parish health focus areas



What Goes Wrong with Use of This Model

1. Expecting a quick fix
2. Priest not engaged/opposed
 - ▣ Sometimes limited mindset –DKWYDK; “allergic to methods”
3. Poor follow through
 - ▣ Actions too complicated
 - ▣ Cant execute actions – we’re just not capable of doing anything but the simplest effort
 - ▣ No/weak lay leadership
 - ▣ Trying to do too much –select one area.
4. Same old same old -- long standing and new problems often require new, tough solutions.
5. Failure to engage the parish –need to roll it out

Some Antidotes/Tools

- Face facts (see handout) -- build urgency
- A method (diagram on a slide to follow)
- One competently run project
 - ▣ a game changer – “Wow! We’re really capable of accomplishing something we set out to do.
- Outside force – facilitator
- Benchmark
- Grants
- Start with yourself

Facing Facts

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“Face Facts” Summary Sheet

Parish Name/Location _____

Founding Date (year) _____ Fill Out Date _____

	As of Jan 1 this year	3 yr Trend ? (up+, down -, same =)	Satisfied? (Y=Yes / N= No) <i>Identify three items with which you're <u>most</u> dissatisfied</i>
People related			
1. Adult Membership _____			
2. Typical Attendance Sunday Liturgy			
3. Typical Attendance Saturday Vespers			
4. Typical attendance Feast day			
5. Median age of parishioners			
6. Church school enrollment			
7. Baptisms			
8. Receptions (conversions)			

Applying the Model

An Approach

Stimulate

Measure:
*Gather/Face
Facts*

Commit?
Satisfied?

Mesh:
*Clergy/ Lay
Coalition*

Diagnose

Explore Model
*How can we be
healthier?*

Choose
Focus Area

Visit Others
Observe/learn

Prescribe

Define
Select Actions

Communicate
Build urgency

Act
Modest Steps

Measure

Review
Progress?

Recommit
Overall Goal

**Communicate
& Celebrate**

Repeat
Next Area

A Facilitation Approach for Using This Model

- **Prep:** Attendees read full document ahead of time
- **Part 1 – *Select a focus area***
 - ▣ Leader provides brief intro.
 - ▣ Review model – Find key focus area
 - Focus area 1 --Read key items from each area aloud. Ask for comment; pro/con; “What don’t you understand?” Each attendee scores this area.
 - Repeat for 2-8
 - ▣ Collect scores. Identify total points for each area
 - ▣ Group discusses & selects which area to focus on further.
- **Part 2- *Detailed area review – drill down to describe *The Problem****
 - ▣ Discuss each bullet point in selected area(now for second time)
 - ▣ Rate each subarea –determine if one subsection of the focus area is the key issue.
 - ▣ Attempt to identify 3-5 statements that best describe the current state of affairs.

A Facilitation Approach for Using This Model *(cont'd)*

□ **Part 2** (cont'd)

- Summarize these statements into one problem statement and perhaps a list of behaviors that seem to describe us.
- Examine root causes --Why does this happen?
- Discuss these behaviors/ problem.
- Examine if the problem is related to
 - Activities performed (Wrong? None? Poor?)
 - Ability to perform (poorly done; lack background; developmental assistance?)
 - Commitment to perform (tepid effort)
 - Something else
- Summarize

□ **Part 3** Action

- Describe some target outcomes in specific measurable terms
- Six -18 month max.
- Describe actions
- What actions, by whom; by when
- Costs
- Valuable vs. easy
- Select some actions

Drivers of Growth are Under Your Control

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

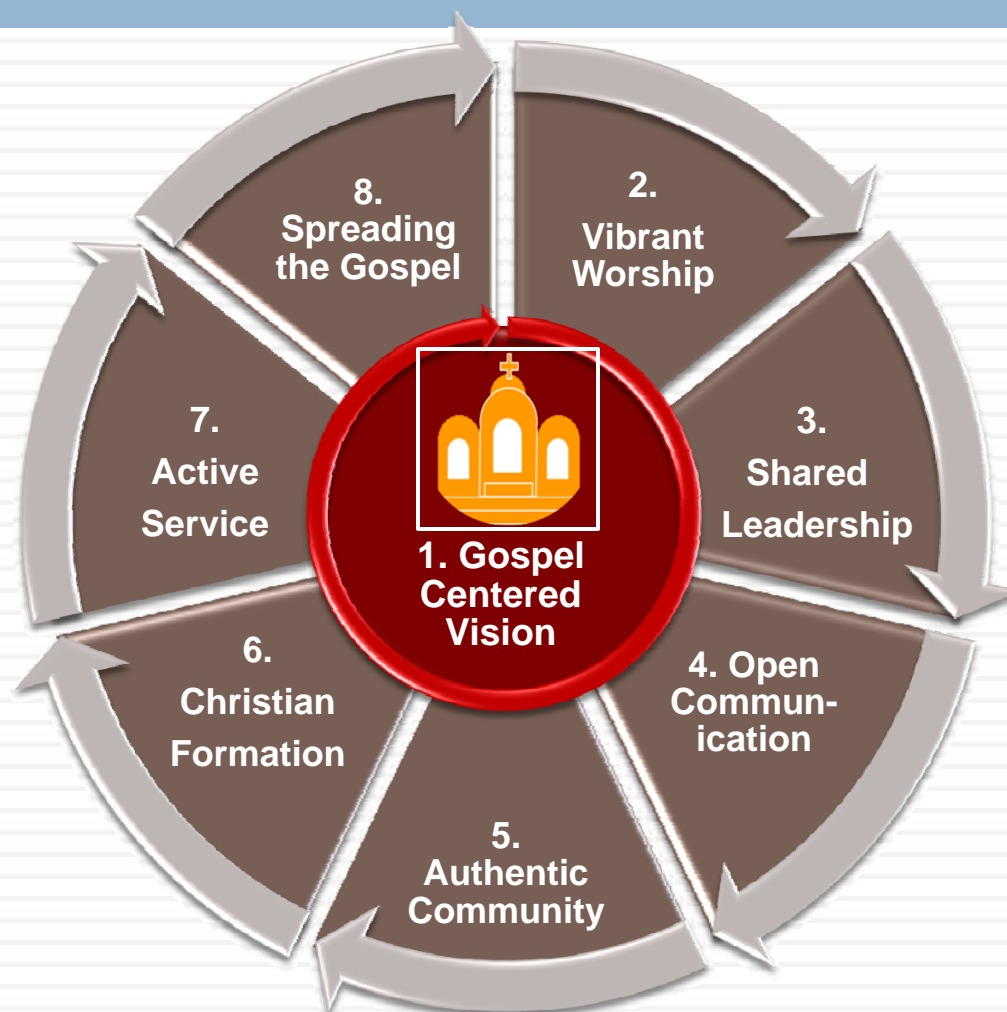


1. **Come to church.**
2. Make people aware of your parish.
3. Engage newcomers/visitors with care & warmth.
4. Give them a reason to return – expressed and experienced.
5. Do something for others.

THANK YOU

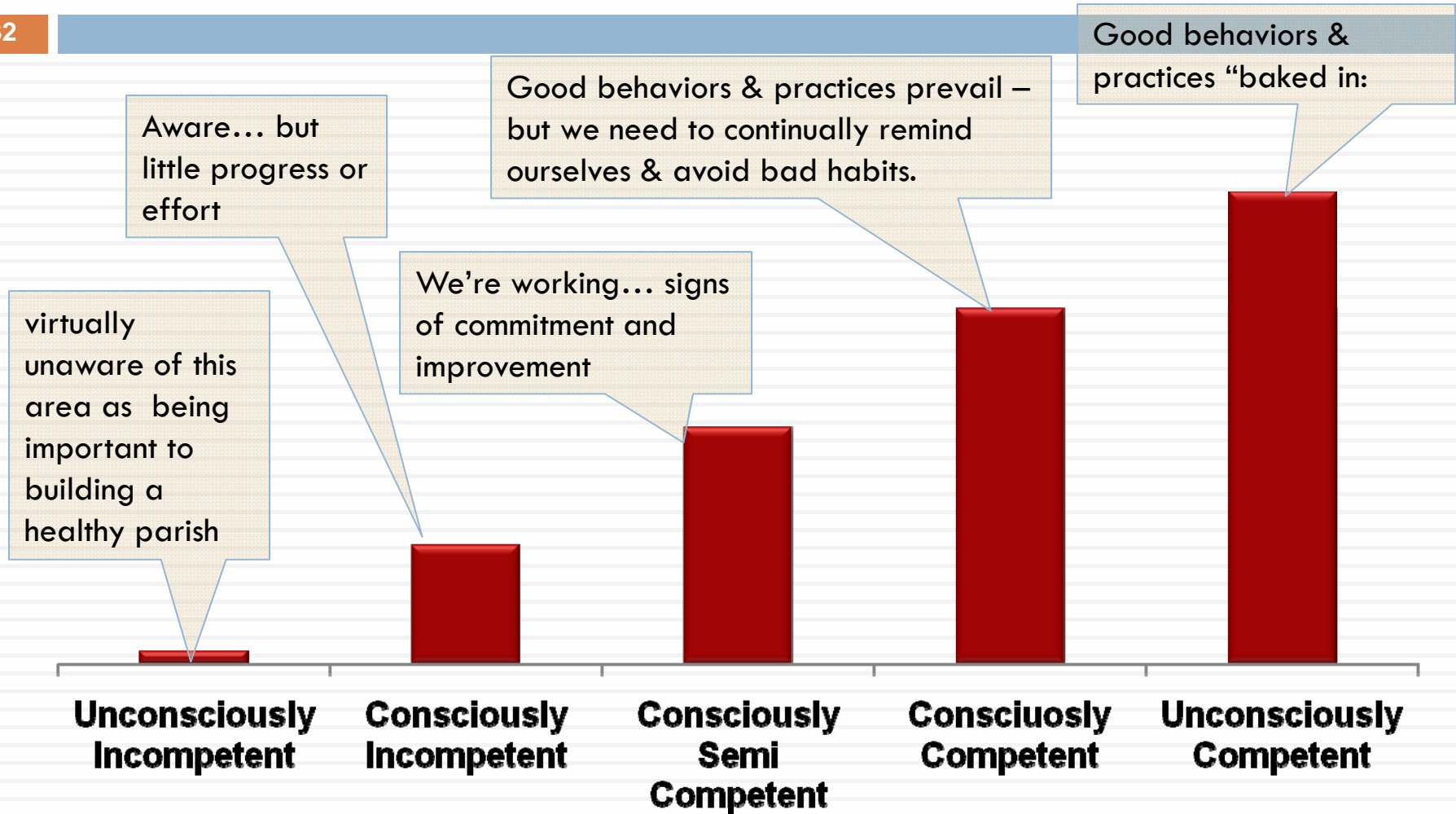
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Parish Health Inventory Model



Evaluation Scale

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Evaluation Sheet

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Quality Area	Evaluation Sheet				
	Level 0 Unconsciously Incompetent <i>As a parish we're virtually unaware of this area as important to building a healthy parish</i>	Level 1 Consciously Incompetent <i>We're aware of this area -- but haven't made much progress on improving.</i>	Level 2 Consciously Semi-competent <i>We've worked at this & are showing signs of clear commitment & improvement.</i>	Level 3 Consciously Competent <i>Good behaviors & practices prevail – but we need to continually remind ourselves & avoid bad habits.</i>	Level 4 Unconsciously Competent <i>Good behaviors and practices in this area have been 'baked in' to the practices of the parish</i>
Gospel Centered Vision					
Vibrant Worship					
Shared Leadership					
Open Communication					
Authentic Community					
Christian Formation					
Active Service					
Spreading the Gospel					
Total # of marks in this column					
Multiply the total marks in this column by this number and place it below	0	X 1	X 2	3	4
=					

Sum: Level 1+2+3+4 =

Parish Priorities --Based on your review of the model and your own views of our parish, please list up to three priorities for our parish to embrace (focus on) in the next 1-2 years. (There are NO wrong answers!)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Gospel Centered Vision

- *Sense of purpose & identity*
- *Atmosphere of excellence*
- *Parish self awareness*



- **As a parish we clearly understand that our reason for existence is to serve the Living God and to share our love of God with others.**
- Our parish is NOT a club or cultural center, a museum, self absorbed or passive.
- An atmosphere of striving and humbly offering our *best* to God pervades our parish community.
- A sense of effort, energy and journey is apparent in the parish. We're NOT just "surviving".
- Our parish vision is made concrete with a set of specific tailored ministries (formal or informal) that bring our vision to life.
- Our parish budget reflects an orientation of improvement, development and excellence.
- We care about delivering our light to the neighborhood/community.



Parish Health Ministry

Vibrant Worship

- *Liturgical preparedness*
- *Congregational participation & vibrancy*
- *Effective preaching*



- **Joyful, ascendant, worship is at the center of our life.**
- We work hard to enhance the beauty power and zeal of our humble efforts to glorify God. We keep worship fresh, contagious yet dignified, enlivening, holy, joyous, peaceful, and thankful.
- We come to church – *often*. Not just on Sunday morning.
- Worshippers assemble promptly to do the *work* of the people. They are attentive, active participants in liturgy.
- In our parish preaching is edifying, uplifting nourishing and challenging.
- In our parish preaching enlivens the worshipper's understanding of the Gospel and Holy Tradition.
- Worship is better attended than administrative, social, fund raising events.

Shared Leadership

- *Delegating responsibility*
- *Leading and effecting change*
- *Functional structures*
- *Open financial practice*



- **Parish lay leaders see themselves as leaders/elders of a Christian community co-responsible, under the rector's guidance, for the health and vibrancy of the parish.**
- Our parish works to develop a sense of personal accountability of leaders. Those accepting a job/role attempt to execute the job with a sense of duty and excellence.
- Parish leaders do NOT see themselves as the parish business managers, owners, disinterested commentators and/or critics.
- The priest and parishioners trust and learn from one another.
- Leaders lead. Parish leaders model good Christian behavior.
- The level of structure in our parish is appropriate for today and the parish we can't to become. We don't miss opportunities and we don't waste time because of too much or excessively lax structure.
- We have appropriate staff for the size we are/desire to be.
- We equip parish leaders through appropriate training and continuing education.

Open Communication

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- *Consensus & dialogue*
- *Dealing with conflict*
- *Internal communication methods*



- **We work to develop a culture of consensus about matters important to parish life. We find solutions best for the body NOT for us personally.**
- We explore multiple options and seek out marginal views. We are continually striving to see things from the point of view of others.
- Important decisions in the life of the parish are communicated clearly and appropriately.
- Persons who disagree with decisions or methods are encouraged to speak up, they are listened to and their ideas are used to improve decisions.
- Mature criticism is possible and welcomed.
- In our parish people are treated with respect & dignity.
- People are kept well informed about what is going on in our parish.

Authentic Community

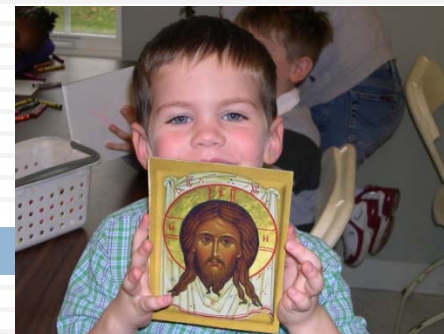
- *Atmosphere of love*
- *Incorporation mechanisms*
- *Connectedness to larger church*
- *Appropriate facilities*



- **Christ is recognized in our midst. Anyone who enters can see the hallmarks of Christian community: love, selfless giving, mutual encouragement, forgiveness, kindness, patience, personal initiative and responsibility and compassion.**
- It is clear that as a parish we are differentiated from a club or a service organization. We live and express our faith.
- We encourage, exhort and nurture one another.
- There is lots of laughter in our parish
- Correction is possible. Parishioners are taught and, when necessary, corrected.
- We welcome newcomers readily. We are NOT a closed community available by birth, kinship or ethnicity.
- Our parish offers a variety of events and entry points where new relationships can happen. We have assimilation paths for people of different ages, genders, marital status and life stages.
- Parish youth are treated as valid important members of our community. We expend serious effort to help them find a role, to be heard, and to be appreciated.
- We do NOT see ourselves as an independent “congregation”. We are interdependent with other parishes in our deanery/Diocese/OCA as well as other Orthodox jurisdictions.
- We consider the larger Church. Our attitude is NOT “our parish first.”

Christian Formation

- *Orthodox spirituality*
- *Whole parish education*
- *Financial generosity*



- **We have a commitment to lifelong learning and personal spiritual growth.**
- This is supported by an appropriately comprehensive parish wide education effort.
- The education activities of our parish are NOT limited to children only but also provide adult, age appropriate opportunities for learning.
- Lenten seasons are kept in a meaningful manner - personally and as a community.
- As a parish and as persons we practice personal charity.
- We teach people that stewardship (financial and otherwise) is a foundational quality of being an Orthodox Christian; that every asset financial, human etc they have is a gift from God to be managed as a steward on the Master's behalf.
- Proportional giving is a basic tenet of our parish stewardship efforts.
- Children are taught clearly and directly about stewardship and generosity in Church school.
- Achieving our annual budget is not dependent on fund raising or alternative sources of income.
- We make it unashamedly clear to new members (and old members) that they are expected to provide generous, proportional and grateful financial support to the parish.

Active Service

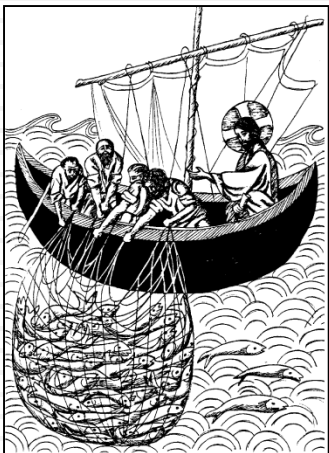
- *Discernment of gifts*
- *Effective ministries*



- **Our parish is a place where members are regularly and actively encouraged to discover their gifts and to use them for God's glory.**
- We encourage members to ask and answer: "What has God called me to do here?"
- Most people have an active role in the parish
- Most people are contributing in their areas of giftedness and are not awkwardly operating in areas in which they don't have useful skills
- We have a clear set of internally AND externally focused ministries.
- Our collection of external ministries demonstrates appropriate balance between local, national and international causes; Orthodox and non Orthodox causes.
- Each of our ministries in our has a clear purpose that befits a Christian community.

Spreading the Gospel

- *Evangelization atmosphere*
- *Evangelization practice*
- *Sensitivity to needs of others*
- *External communication*



- **We do NOT see ourselves as a closed community. We have a personal responsibility to share the Good News.**
- In seeking new members we understand the requirement to accept them fully into the community.
- We try to discern how God has worked in our life and we are able to confidently express that hope to others when useful and appropriate.
- We avoid evangelization approaches that are intrusive or manipulative.
- Our evangelization activities are oriented to seeing and connecting with a human person who has spiritual needs and a personal history.
- We welcome visitors/inquirers warmly, genuinely, sincerely, honestly and with empathy-- and without being intrusive.
- We make our parish known in the community.

A Model

