

Fix This Urban Parish – Case 2

A Heritage Parish – in Deep Decline

Location Info

- Anyplace- a major Midwestern industrial city. City (region) population is 2.5 million
- Urban location - 8 minutes from city center.
- *Limited* Orthodox alternatives. One other OCA parish of 70 adults (located in an unattractive suburb). Two Greek and a Serbian parishes tread water. An Antiochian mission in a suburb is growing and visible.
- Neighborhood, once totally dilapidated, is beginning to see some stabilization. Eclectic coffee shops, and quirky boutiques coexist with past decay and clutter. Early gentrification.
- Drug dealers and poverty are still easily found nearby. Not a safe feeling at night. Mostly African American or Hispanic. (Note: *As you discuss this which would you prefer? Do you have an opinion?*)
- A major urban University exists in the city.

Building

- Byzantine style domed building vintage 1925. This is not a typical “American church”.
- Not a “landmark” in the city but nonetheless a distinctive element of the *neighborhood*. The church is highly visible from a major expressway.
- Limited parking is. Perpetual basement rummage sale. Shares space with social area in basement. Limited kitchen.
- Old and expensive to maintain.

Parish Membership

- A parish of 300 adults sixty years ago, today there are *19 adults and three children*.
- Median parishioner age is above 70.
- Few converts in this parish.
- Few actually live in the neighborhood.
- Bad/cool relationship exists with the OCA parish in burbs.
- This is at best a nostalgia thing that may not always be *about* Jesus Christ.
- 2 new households have been added to the parish in ten years. Obviously scores have left due to death, job or parish transfer and fading away.

Parish Atmosphere and Ministry

- Attendance: Divine Liturgy -14 Vespers 2. The “choir” is one or two people dutifully contributing what they can.
- The highly visible building and the orthodox faith attracts a few potentially legitimate Orthodox inquirers or new arrivals per month on Sunday AM or Sat PM. Few return. Dingy sign.
- The nave interior, while not gorgeous, has been recently painted and there are no leaks.

- Parish veterans would have trouble identifying any useful, intentional changes to parish life or behavior in past 30 years.
- Stewardship is a challenge. Most are well past high earning years. Generosity is not a core competency. The annual parish budget, though very limited, is *almost* breakeven. Rummage sales and pirogis have been a staple.
- The parish recently sold a rectory and has the net \$140K in a bank account.
- Small coffee hour is slow yet pleasant. A few people show up that *just couldn't make it* to liturgy.
- Church school is almost non-existent.
- The parish has no neighborhood ministry. It has many parishioners (or extended parish family) in need of care.
- Parish “board of trustees” is living in the past. The parish lacks energy, vision and is clearly hanging on.
- The past three priests have had short unproductive stays. Most tried. One successfully accelerated the decline.

Your Assignment

You have been assigned as the new priest in this parish. Your predecessors have been a long unusual array of clergymen –seemingly each with a story and a relatively short unproductive stay.

Your wife has some musical competency. Your three children, ages 7-12, are in tow. You have a job as a school teacher. This is not your first parish. You left each in better shape than you found it. You’ve been sent here because there is a belief you have something to offer.

From your initial visit you determine, perhaps inaccurately, that the parish, sensing imminent “Communal death”, seems to be more open to new viewpoints.

1. What would you do? Where would you put your efforts? Create at least 20 post it notes of things to try. Consider (if necessary) the dimensions of: (in no particular order)
 - a. Vision
 - b. Leadership
 - c. Open Communication
 - d. Worship
 - e. Community
 - f. Christian Formation
 - g. Active service to others
 - h. Evangelization & Growth
2. What would you do with the \$140K? What ground rules would you set for its use? What will happen if you save it?
3. What does this parish need to become “good at” to make it?
4. The Hierarch has told you to let him know what you need. Take him up on the offer. *Let him know what you need.*