INSIGHTS INTO PARISH DECLINE & REVITALIZATION

1. “One Christian is No Christian” St. Cyprian + 243AD
   Your parish is necessary to live your life as a Christian.

2. Parishes Can (and Do) Die
   For some it takes decades. Others wither rapidly.

3. Conversely, Any Parish Can Become Healthy & Vibrant...
   …if the parish truly wants to do so.

4. Decline and Denial Go Hand in Hand
   “The greatest danger is the illusion that all is well.” C.S. Lewis

5. Typical Decline Pattern
   All is well >> Denial >> Assign blame >> Seek replacements >>
   Grab an answer >> Continued losses >> Turn further inward

6. Many (most) parishes are in ruts
   Trapped by limiting assumptions, bad habits and nostalgia. See separate box – next page.

7. “The view of the gallows clarifies the mind”
   Get serious about renewal now. Most parishes wait too long.

8. “Do you want to be made well?” John 5:6
   Like the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, not everyone who is ill
   actually desires healing. Some prefer to remain infirm in order to
   have license to complain, avoid responsibility and receive pity of
   others. Who do we blame for our parish limitations?

9. I’ll do anything to lose weight –except diet and exercise.”
   What are we unwilling to do? Sacred cows?

10. “…clothe yourselves with the new self...created according
    to the likeness of God.” Ephesians 4:24
    Parish renewal is not about recreating the ‘good old days’.
    We are establishing a new model for our life in Christ.

11. Unprofitable Parish?
    In the context of MT 25:30 (parable of talents/“unprofitable
    servant”) is there such a thing as an “unprofitable parish”? What
    return is expected by the Master from a community?

12. God grows parishes; we prepare soil for growth.
    (Paul) planted, Apollos watered but God gave the increase.” 1.
    Cor 4:6; “…and the Lord added to their number daily” Acts 2:47

13. “When you don’t know what to do you do what you
    know.”
    It is hard to create fresh ideas from a closed environment.

    Parishes are highly resistant to outside change efforts.
    Yet change can happen quickly from within.

15. But Don’t “Copy”
    You can learn from the practices & behaviors of other vibrant
    parishes. But every parish is different. There are no universal
    solutions.

16. “The man who treats himself has a fool for a patient.”
    Fresh eyes can be valuable to understand our situation. “We
    deal not much in fact when we are contemplating ourselves.”
    Mark Twain

17. “For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound who will
    prepare for battle” 1 Cor. 14:8
    Decide on a path; engage the parish; push forward.

GOOD QUESTIONS

-- for a Robust Parish Conversation

A key to renewal—and avoidance of decline is parish conversation and dialogue.

1. What is the purpose of this parish?
2. How long do we want our parish to live?
3. What do we value in this parish?
   Individually? Collectively?
   Do our behaviors reflect these values?
4. Who owns this parish?
5. Do we want our parish to grow? Why?
6. Do we need to change?
   In what ways?
   Can we change?
   Conceive of our parish in new ways?
7. What changes in practices has our parish made recently?
8. What changes in your personal behavior toward the
    parish are you unwilling to make?
9. Is Mastering the Gospel, knowing God, and bringing
    others to him a priority of our parish?
10. Does our parish outshine the ‘best that unbelief can
    offer?’ (If not people stay home!)
11. Can persons believe that Christians have good news to
    share if we are not keen to pass it on?
12. Are we truly open and welcoming of anyone in our
    parish?
   In what ways “yes”?
   In what ways “no”.

Stewardship related

13. How do you decide how much to give to your church?
14. Is generosity a core value of a Christian?
   “Is it possible to lead miserly lives (or lives of great
   indulgence) while giving little to the church (or other
   charitable organization) yet attending and considering
   oneself to be a person of faith?
15. Do we have a big enough vision to attract large
    donations?
16. How does our personal financial status compare with
    those people who built or founded our parish?
    Who is more affluent?
    What sacrifices did they make?
    What sacrifices do we make?

“To whom much is given much will be required.” LK 12:48
We are accountable for the knowledge, resources, abilities
with which God has blessed us.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors that Cause Us to Remain Frozen</th>
<th>Balancing Factors: Drivers of Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Naturally tend toward stability</td>
<td>• Smelling the coffee -- view of gallows</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Orthodoxy settled; not oriented to new ideas.</td>
<td>• Love of Christ -- sense of mission</td>
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<td>• “Intentionality” not our strength</td>
<td>• Love of parish/inheritance</td>
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<td>• Aging parish; Stuck in past</td>
<td>• Realize past is gone</td>
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<td>• Self interest ; Lack of trust</td>
<td>• Glimpse of something better</td>
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<td>• Gatekeepers</td>
<td>• &quot;Not gonna take it&quot; -motivated leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fear uncertainty</td>
<td>• New questions/conversation “Why can’t we…”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• “Just hang on ‘til I die”</td>
<td>• New arrivals/ new ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Effort focused elsewhere; I’m busy</td>
<td>• An external change (neighborhood etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sympathy – prefer ‘struggling parish’</td>
<td>• Catastrophe (exemplary faith in face of adversity)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• DKWYDK - (Don’t know what you don’t know)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Old assumptions</td>
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### A Model of Decline: Burying Our Talents
- For us and our needs
- Complacent & comfortable
- Stern & sober
- Let’s attract people “like us”
- Social Events & Clubs
- Reproduce “Old World” Orthodoxy
- Ancient; Foreign
- Water it down; Make it easier
- Primarily Sunday Liturgy
- Good enough
- We don’t do it that way! Won’t work
- Orthodox by birth & heritage
- Control & Power Rules & Battles
- No risk; conserving; protecting; maintaining
- “Ownership” Voting; majority; “Robert’s Rules”
- Dues, minimum equal share
- Compulsory, fund raising, “appeals”
- Free agents; autonomy; independence; Optional participation & responsibility

### A Model of Vibrancy & Hope -- Providing a Return to the Master
- Proclaim Christ. Do His work in the world
- Seeking & Reaching
- Cheerful & Hopeful
- Serve all in our locale.
- Social Events and Ministry
- Charitable Outreach: Time & $
- Bring Orthodoxy to America; Local & Indigenous
- Apostolic, Authentic, Alive
- Meaningful, important, understandable challenging
- Active Weekly/Annual Worship Cycle
- Sense of excellence
- Let’s try it
- Orthodox by choice
- Teamwork & collaboration
- Discernment & dialogue
- Hopeful risk taking; “investing”; creating; “building”
- “Stewardship” Consensus; conciliarity
- Proportional, meaningful amounts, Personal generosity; from the heart
- Constitutive element of archdiocese Shared responsibility

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### 20 OBSERVABLE TRAITS: VIBRANT ORTHODOX PARISHES

*In my (JK) observation/opinion many of the following qualities are apparent in most vibrant, growing Orthodox parishes.**

1. Decent music - Careful, well executed participative
2. Good preaching. 
   - nourishing; challenging; timeless yet practical
3. Updated liturgical practice
4. Atmosphere of Lenten discipline/fasting
5. Active adult teaching/education
6. Various delivery methods; library, bookstore
7. Used regularly: communicating; teaching
8. Living wage for priest
9. Diverse -- No single ethnic group
10. No ethnic “label” – Name; sign; web
11. Growth from converts; always catechumens
12. Good Web site
13. Attractive, updated, focus on inquirers, photos
14. Limited/no fund raising
15. No “dues”
16. Some people tithe; high median donation
17. Focus on neighbor/charity
19. Job pruning/updating
20. Attractive outdoor sign

**Note: These traits correlate with growth - but they may not be causes growth. (Do parishes grow because parishioners worship more often? Or, do they attend more often because the parish is vibrant/ growing?)**

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### TEN KEY METRICS TO WATCH

1. Ratio: Vespers : Sunday attendance
2. # Converts/yr. # Catechumens.
3. Median age of parishioners
4. % parish income from fund raising
5. % donation income from parishioners > 70
6. % donors (households) > $2K/yr.
7. % budget for charity; education
8. % parish youth who continue to be Orthodox 10 yrs after HS graduation
9. Ratio: (Priest salary + housing) vs. County MHI
10. Ratio: Ed. or charitable event attendance vs. Social or fund raising event attendance

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### SOME APPROACHES TO LEADING CHANGE

- Get specific – what really changes?
- Clarify downside of not adapting/ changing
- Small steps – focus on one thing
- Communicate regularly / consistently