

Parish Pulse Articles 2022

Parish Pulse is the e-newsletter of the Archdiocese of Western Pennsylvania’s Parish Development Ministry.

The 2022 editions of Parish Pulse featured over 20 articles... some brief... some longer... dealing with stewardship, evangelization, parish communication, parish administration, ministry planning and the Parish Development Forum.

There is a good chance you missed a few. We’ve compiled eleven of the best articles. Most were new in 2022. A few were updates from previous articles.



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Your Parish Gift Acceptance Policy

Some Gifts Are Not Worth Accepting

We were recently contacted by a Parish Pulse reader whose parish had received a donation in memory of a parishioner's now deceased loved one. The donor's desired use for the funds did not align with priorities of the parish/parish council. Fortunately the parish has a gift acceptance policy. Nonetheless this episode caused some uncomfortable moments -- and probably wasted time that would have been better spent on other matters.

The key message here is that not every use of funds is in the best interest of the church and sometimes it's best to say "No, thank you." It helps then to have a written gift acceptance policy in place.

Some key points:

- **There is risk** with accepting some cash gifts. Following through on the designated use could cost more than the value of the donation. Or, the designation could not fit with the parish mission or, be unrelated to the tax exempt purposes of the church. Also, the effort to *track* the donation may be excessive relative to the amount of the donation.
- **Defining the use** of restricted funds lies with the donor. If those restrictions seem impractical for the parish, the parish council has the right to not accept (or negotiate) the terms of the donation.
- **Clarify who** (presumably the Parish Council or a sub-committee or a specific officer) has authority to accept a restricted gift on the behalf of the parish.
- **The terms** "restricted" gift or "designated" gift are often used interchangeably. However, some sources differentiate the term "designated" as those non-restricted (general) funds that are earmarked for a specific use *by* the parish council. Modifying such "designations" then lies solely with the Parish Council. Restricted use funds, once accepted, should have their purpose changed only with the permission of the donor.
- **In general**, it is advisable to avoid accepting "pass through" donations designated to benefit or be channeled to an individual.
- **To help guide donors** to restricted donations likely to be acceptable to the parish, maintaining a list of current restricted use funds and/or a wish list of future desirable projects may be helpful.
- **Solicitation implies acceptance.** When the parish solicits donations for say a building fund or a major renovation, the donations received in response should be considered restricted for that purpose.
- **If a restricted donation is accepted** it is imperative to track that donation. This doesn't require a separate physical bank account but rather a fund accounting on the parish financial statements.
- **If you have a policy it's important to use it.** (Was it necessary to say this?) But with turnover on parish councils it's important to include a summary of "policies" in PC orientation sessions and handbooks.
- **Some readers may say**, *"This is too bureaucratic for us. We're just a small church"*. Perhaps. However we always counsel parishes to "organize for the size they want to be in the future".
- **The OCA Gift acceptance Policy** can be found [here](#). A sample church/parish gift acceptance policy can be seen [here](#).

Review Your Website for the New Year

As parishes work to return to a normal stride after almost two years of COVID related disruption it's a good time to take inventory' of a wide array of parish good practices. One of them is to tend to your parish website.

While Facebook and other social media are of course an important -perhaps primary- method of communicating your parish to the world - the website still remains your communication front door. Many parishes are experiencing a flurry of new people and inquirers. So it's clear that people are looking for churches -- Orthodox Churches.

This check list will help you be prepared:

1. **Does the home page** of your website prominently display services times, church address, parish phone number?

2. **Have you asked someone** *not* affiliated with your parish to offer a bare knuckled review of your website?

Ask them to find items that are unclear -- perhaps "insider only info" that may be off-putting to inquirers.

3. **Do you have photos** of *smiling* people liberally displayed on your site?

If you have a page describing a class show people in the class --not just words. Do you invite people to join your choir? Show a photo of singing during liturgy. Coffee hour? Same thing. (If you can't find anyone smiling that can lead to other areas of focus!)

4. **Have you removed** images of people no longer affiliated with the parish?

5. **Have recent baptisms** or adult Chrismations been added to your photos?

Project an image of growth and renewal. Surely someone is smiling then!

6. **Is access to online donations** - a button etc. - easy to find?

(If you haven't noticed most people do not carry cash. Some say checks will be virtually extinct by 2026.)

7. **Is your calendar** up to date for upcoming services and events?

(FYI: "Merry Christmas/Christ is Born 2017" is now out of date.)

8. **Have you added info** about important events for the next 4-5 months?

Particularly those that would be of interest to inquirers? Do these events indicate a serious Christ centered church --or do they sound more like the Rotary club?

9. **Do you have a Live Streaming link** to easily access broadcasts or archives of Services?

Many parishes experiencing new faces find the visitors first checked things out via live stream.

10. **Has your site gotten cluttered** over the years?

Do some winter clean-up.

What Do You Want Visitors to "Feel"

"My Visit to an Orthodox Church"

In a recent workshop we discussed welcoming and setting expectations for guests at your parish. We asked participants to describe the environment they hope that a guest/ inquirer would "feel" in their parish when they entered the church for the first time.

Here are some answers we liked:

- "A sense of Holiness and the presence of God."
- "An active commitment, connection and engagement with worship by those present."
- "I can grow here."
- "I am welcome --- but I need to learn."

The words above are similar to the imagery we discovered in a Facebook post from a man who visited an OCA parish a few years ago. The man, a former Catholic and the conductor of a community symphony, had valuable insight about music, history and more.

"One immediately feels as though in the presence of the "Holy" upon entering. There is reverence and awe and an overwhelming sense of peace.

One is also aware that they are witnessing something very ancient and enduring, dating from the earliest days of Christianity, some twenty centuries old. One senses a direct connection to the Apostles in the First Century. History is important.

All aspects of being a fully alive human being are addressed in the worship. Beautiful iconography, architecture, artwork, and aroma. Incense abounds! Throughout the Divine Liturgy of St. Chrysostom, left and right brain are touched equally.

The entire church chants 98% of the time, acapella, along with a trained choir. Four part harmony, and beautifully done.

During the chanting for the reception of Communion, tears began to roll down my cheek. Nothing more than a repeated 4 part mantra. Something touched me, way inside.....

The preaching was solid, but devoid of anything that resembled a "show". Refreshing.

I have often said that worship should avail the uncommon, something only available in church..."

Becoming Fishers of Men? Finding and Attracting Fish

Responding to the 'Orthodox Moment'

More than a few Orthodox Churches are recently experiencing similar serious inquiries from persons curious about Orthodox Christianity.

A small rural parish in eastern Ohio has four catechumens. A once large - now small urban parish in St. Louis - has five catechumens. Ditto parishes in New Jersey. A rural mission in Missouri has grown to 70 persons from under thirty in the past two years. A small parish in Western Pennsylvania has many catechumens. A parish in eastern Pennsylvania has more catechumens than they had in the previous ten years.

In a recent article describing similar experiences in other parishes, St. Vladimir's seminary has referred to this as an "Orthodox Moment".

Why is This Orthodox Moment Happening?

There is of course no single answer for why there seems to be an increased thirst for Orthodox Christianity. Some thoughts:

- Pandemic isolation is no doubt causing some to search for personal community.
- The pandemic itself has reminded people that nothing is assured and has them asking 'ultimate questions'. ('There are no atheists in foxholes.')
- With time on their hands people have reevaluated their past religious affiliations or lack of same.
- Certainly the significant increase in streaming of services by Orthodox parishes has given many inquirers a peek at local Orthodox worship –reducing hesitancy to visit.

Though your parish may not be experiencing an *Orthodox moment* as yet, it seems reasonable that there are similarly curious, thirsty people near your parish.

The Important Question: What Will We Do?

How will we react? Will we retreat? Continue business as usual? Can we build awareness for our parish? Can we become more accessible – literally and figuratively? Will we, as *fishers of men*, hope that people just jump into our fishing boat –or can and will we be **active** fishers of men? *Can we persuade?*

As *fishers of men*, will we hope that interested persons just jump into our fishing boat ? Or, will we be **active** fishers of men?

What can we do to improve fishing conditions?

Though your parish may not be feeling this 'moment' as yet, it seems reasonable that there are similarly curious, thirsty people near your parish.

Invitation and the Public Square

We're told the most potent evangelism tool is personal invitation of friends, relatives, associates and neighbors (FRAN). Yet for good and less good reasons, few Orthodox invite friends to church! (A future topic?)

Furthermore, is there a "broadcast" approach? Fishing with nets vs. individual hooks? Something more effective than walking around with a "sandwich board" at the mall?

In the early church if Paul, Apollos and Aquilla wanted to actively share the Good News (persuade) they went where the people are - the marketplace.

Today social media is *where the people are*. Like it or not for us Facebook *is*, in many ways, the public square.

The Importance of Persuasion

"There is a certain wisdom not of secularism but of what secularism has taught us: if religion is to be a vital part of the culture it must persuade."

Seeds of the Word - Orthodox Thinking on Other Religions by Father John Garvey.



Uh oh... now we've no doubt lost many readers who've sworn off, or intentionally never touched, Facebook. We get it. There are numerous reasons to eschew Facebook. Uncivil discourse. Misinformation. Anti-religious bias. Culture wars. Short attention spans. Addictive/mental health damage.

However, we're *not* talking here about using FB as social media -- the place to argue incessantly or 'look at kitten pictures'. Nor are we talking about using FB to *talk among ourselves* -- to chatter with other Orthodox "followers" about the date of Pascha in 2027 basket or obscure liturgical detail.

Facebook: Outbound Communication Platform

Rather we're talking about *reaching out to those who may be seeking* the authentic, alive, Church of the apostles via a structured, intentional use of an outbound communication platform. A platform which can generate awareness, curiosity and inquiry about your church and what it offers.

When used for the explicit purpose of broadly casting our fishing net, FB offers the unique ability to gracefully "push" persuasive messages to thousands of people within (e.g.) ten miles of your parish for a *very* low cost. You can warmly deliver hopeful, dignified, uniquely Orthodox messages with a clear call to action. "Come and see!" Messages can be in video form which are far more personally persuasive than words or photos. And you can track *who views your video* and *push follow up messages* to only those showing some interest.

An "Inquirer Pathway"

It is wonderful when inquirers show up at our church door. (Hopefully we're prepared -- "*We've been waiting for you!*")

Even better is to create an invitation oriented "inquirer pathway" to help them discover you.

We don't have space or time here to discuss the mechanics (its not that difficult) but in outline form *one approach* might be:

1. **Create a brief 60 second video** from the priest welcoming guests and inviting viewers via a clear call to action. This *call to action* is critical. Ask viewers to do something. The call might be either '*come to church next Sunday*' or '*join us in an upcoming study class*'. What to say? See [example](#). And [another](#). And, [an older example](#) shared years ago.
2. **Post the video** on the parish Facebook page and include a link to a specific visitor "landing" (single purpose) page" on your website. Then "**boost**" [the post](#). This means you identify a target audience (characteristics of persons within a specific parish radius) who will receive the post. The parish will pay a few pennies for each Facebook viewer that fits those characteristics and clicks to watch the video. Set a budget limit -- say \$10-20/week.
3. **Follow up via FB** with viewers who were interested enough to watch all or a portion of the video. Create a targeted message for those viewers reinforcing your invitation or simply expressing a willingness to answer questions or talk.
4. **Repeat the above** --perhaps alternating two brief videos --weekly for 6-8 weeks.

Early returns from parishes piloting this approach show promise. One parish received three Sunday visitors and one participant in an 'Intro to Orthodoxy' class with a single simple video post. That person is now a catechumen.

For less cost than your past newspaper or yellow pages ads you will have persuasively presented your parish story to hundreds or thousands of potentially interested persons within a specified radius of your parish and followed up with those interested -- all without printing or mailing costs and envelope stuffing.

There seems little doubt that we're in the midst of a period of unprecedented opportunity to invite people to experience post pandemic community, fellowship, solid doctrine and authentic Christian worship. What is our response? Shall we wait for fish to jump in the boat?

Heating Up a Lukewarm Church

Father John Matusiak

In the mid-70s Father John Matusiak, of blessed memory, was tasked by the Orthodox Church in America to build a workshop titled "Heating Up a Lukewarm Church" and a corresponding workbook on *Church Growth and Evangelization - The Basis and the Basics*. The workshop was repeated scores of times throughout North America.

In the almost 50 years since publication, the workbook, AKA "the purple book", clearly has some anachronistic content --speaking to life in different times. However most of the ideas, practices and principles continue to be highly useful.

THE SOWER OF GOOD SEEDS:



Attitudes that Help the Church Grow	Attitudes that Don't
Church growth involves spiritual as well as numerical growth	God is not concerned with how many members the church has. All He cares about is quality.
"Orthodox Christianity is the faith for all mankind."	Orthodoxy is Just for our people; Not for everyone."
"As a steward I must wisely manage the gifts God has given me and use them for building up of the church."	"Stewardship is just another gimmick to get more money out of the parishioners."
"I am called to work with Christ in reaching others."	"God does not need me to make the Church grow."
"I want my parish to serve as the means by which others are brought to Christ and His Church	My parish exists to meet the needs of our people; and to preserve our heritage and culture.
"I must share God's love with others by sharing my faith with them."	"Religion is a private matter which I never discuss because I might offend someone else."
Evangelization is at the heart of the Church's life and experience.	Evangelization is a non-Orthodox concept
I am committed to Christ and His Church because I am convinced that he is truly the God and Savior of all.	"Sure I'm committed to the Church. After all I pay dues!"
"The church is an organism made up of those who base their lives on Christ."	"The Church is an organization made up of voting members"
I must help to make the Church more visible and invite others to services and activities.	If outsiders are interested in the Orthodox Church they will take the initiative to find one
Church growth begins with me	Church growth is not my concern.

Mechanisms of Parish Change

Healthy parishes are consistently renewing and reshaping parish life to better conform to the Gospel and our calling as Christians. In other words: **change**. Instilling a desire to be “made well.”

Of course leading change is hard. It is context sensitive.

Secular Sources

There are many excellent secular sources for understanding change.

We have always found [Leading Change by John Kotter](#) to be one of the best. (See a brief video by Kotter on *Hearts and Minds of change* [here](#).)

In a church setting, [Choosing Change: Motivating Churches to face the Future by Peter Coutts](#) has many useful ideas and methods.



Church Change Mechanisms

What exactly are the ‘mechanisms’ (inner forces) of change in Orthodox parishes? Here is a partial list of mechanisms we've seen as parishes confronted the possibilities of “a brighter future”.

1) **Exposure to "Something Better"**

Leaders (somehow) get a glimpse of new results – results that fit so powerfully its inward sense of mission as to disturb old comforts and make the status quo untenable. Someone raises a key topic of discussion -- for example: 'What is Our Future Vision?'



2) **People Shuffle**

Somebody quits or leaves. Or, new parishioners arrive bringing new ideas from a previous parish. Likewise the arrival of a new priest brings a fresh set of eyes. Even the planning for retirement or transfer of the current priest often promotes thinking about where things are headed and what's important.

3) **Worship Change**

A change in some aspect of worship-- start times, blending new music styles etc. are things experienced by all. Something feels different. This can then be linked to other changes –new ministry perhaps.

4) **Impending Decline/Take off the Rose Colored Glasses**

Too often we hide bad news. Facing facts can be a great motivator for change. As has been said: “*The view of the gallows clarifies the mind*”.

5) **Somebody Steps Up**

Sure change needs more than one person. But one or two persons –serious about change – can be the leaven that leavens the whole lump. (“I’m not gonna take it anymore”)

6) **External Change -- Neighborhood?**

Sometimes a change in the parish context –perhaps changes to the local neighborhood cause people to think seriously about ‘what our job is here.’

7) **Catalytic Event**

Critical event/catastrophe –followed by exemplary faith demonstrating behavior.

8) **Attendance at Conference; Webinar; Speech**

These can sometimes engender a learning/trying environment. We've seen major ministries begin from just such a renewal/rethinking encounter.

9) ***Modified communication patterns***

A decision, usually by the priest, to begin more consistent use of a '*language of excellence*'. A continual change (frequency; time; topics) to the sound of the status quo. Sermons, bulletin, class topics etc.

10) ***Visit to another parish*** –“We can't do that?”” No parish does that.” (vespers attendance; urban ministry; active effort toward...) These attitudes wilt quickly in the face of living examples.

11) ***Grants***

An external stimulus designed to remove the 'we can't afford it' obstacle. Enables beginning (turning the crank) a modest internal forward moving action.

12) ***Budget Conversation***

A fresh, serious discussion that focuses on what we must do...not what we can't do. Paint a picture of what we need to be doing and what it will take to fund it.

Open Letter to Clergy and Laity

Misalignment between Clergy and Laity?

At the 2014 Parish Forum attendees were divided into separate groups of clergy and laity. Laity were asked to respectfully offer suggestions and insights to clergy about 'things' they should "stop", "start" and "continue". Clergy undertook a mirror image of the same assignment.

After about 60 minutes the groups reconvened and, with some trepidation, shared their suggestions with the other "side".

Both groups created a reasonable set of thoughts for consideration. These comments continue to make useful reading.

Laity Letter	Clergy Letter
<p>Start</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping us discern our vision as a parish • Building consensus • Earning the right to change practices in the church by educating us. • Learning management skills • Trusting your parishioners • Taking your vacation • Visiting the sick more often—or teach us to visit them. • Educating us on proper church etiquette. • More prayers for the sick & suffering by name so we know who we are praying for (but discourage us from using this as a gossip opportunity) • Using deacons to help in your ministry • Having an increased focus on your/your family's health & well-being • Increasing engagement at coffee hour • Training as a professional speaker • Delegating (while keeping distant tabs on what you delegate) <p>Stop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trying to run everything by yourself • Micro-managing • Rushing Liturgies • Dragging Liturgies • Thinking that everything from non-ecclesial/secular domains (e.g. business; academia) are bad or ineffective <p>Continue/Thank You</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your devotion to us • Educational programs • Pastoral care • Visiting the sick 	<p>We appreciate the opportunity to write you this letter. First, we want to thank you for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For being merciful and forgiving of us. • For parents who continue bringing their children to services. • For those who step forward to chair special parish projects with courage. • For being here even on days you don't want to be here. • For doing things expecting nothing in return. • For those who sing and lead the worship of the Church. • For all of sacrifices and acts of love done that we don't know about • Advocating for the financial well-being of our families so we do not have to do it. <p>We also want to take this opportunity to ask the following of you. We hope that our faithful would stop the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majoring in minors. It is easy to be distracted by small issues and miss the big picture. Be big picture people. • Playing sports Sunday morning. • Waiting for someone to ask you to do something. • Allowing the Church to be guided by a business paradigm. The business of the Church is to make saints. • Living an unbalanced amount of our "Church life" on the internet <p>In contrast we ask that you start the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase your attendance at services • Realizing that you have a vocation in the Church as well. • Think about old habits that may not be healthy. • Think of the Church as Sacrament and not as a building. The building is a vehicle to realize the Sacramental nature of the Church • Offer constructive criticism and support when the temptation would be to merely complain. <p>Lastly we ask that you continue the following:</p>

- Being open-minded to parish practices (when newly assigned)

- Being a full-time priest on a part-time salary

Laiety Obligations for Helping Our Clergy

- Lay people need to take better care of clergy

- Participate more in the mission of the church

- Be worthy of the tasks that have been delegated to us

- Deepen your spiritual life (daily prayers, Scripture reading, fasting, etc.)

- Allow the faithful of the parish to be a safe place to allow the clergy to submit to (and trust) the faithful. Submission requires vulnerability, and clergy need this.

- Continue to show up to the work (worship, service, etc.) of the Church.

- Continue to care for one another.

- To build one another up in Christ, help the weaker brethren.

To conclude this heartfelt letter, we want to express our thanks to all who make the sacrifice of their time, talent, and treasure for the building up of Christ's Holy Church

Parishes as Vessels of Ministry

The recently held Parish Development Forum had as its theme **“Parishes as Vessels of Ministry: Increasing Our Capacity for Ministry”**. In seeking to enliven the theme planners of the event began to define how to help people better understand “ministry”.

While the term seems obvious a number of parish leaders, clergy included, indicated that many parishioners' understanding of ministry was, at best "fuzzy".

What is Ministry?

We asked a number of priests and laity to offer their thoughts on "What is Ministry?"

Their answers covered a spectrum of views from “teach people to love the church... by teaching them to clean the church” to “connecting to one another and to God” to “making a commitment to learning about the church, serving one another and using all God given resources build up Christ’s church” to “becoming vessels through which the divine meets the human”. Their answers were captured on [this four minute video](#).

From these perspectives a working definition of ministry emerged:

“Using your gifts, talents, interests and experience to discern needs and actively share God’s love with others.”

Misconceptions and Myths of Ministry?

While the above definition is helpful, we soon realized that the “*M word*” carried misconceptions, myths and baggage. To shine a light on these misconceptions this [tongue in cheek four minute video](#) was developed.

A few of the common myths are explored below.

Essential -- Not Optional

In the eyes of too many of us, ministry is a nice extra – a good thing to do – if we have time. In the words of [Larry Jenney in a 1989 article on OCA.org](#): “Ministry is a duty. Not a suggestion or even a recommendation but a commandment - a shared responsibility. We serve Christ by serving others.”

Priest’s Job

As Denise Jillions notes in a 1982 article [‘An Orthodox Vision of Lay Ministry’](#), “The job of the priest is to lead, to present Christ, to keep reminding his flock of the Christian vision of life and death and to guide them to see Christ working in their daily lives. Just as it is not (only) the priest’s job to visit the sick or shut-ins, most forms of ministry can and should be done by the laity. This is how we live out the liturgy –the work of the people. At our last judgment it just won’t do to tell Christ that we sent the priest to visit Mrs. Jones when she was sick in bed.”

Far Away

Another misconception is that ministry is something that we need to do *far away*. A foreign land or a rarely visited urban location away from our often safe neighborhoods. While those locations, of course, afford excellent ministry opportunities, there are many more accessible ministry opportunities. Look inside the church to be a ministry of presence to those sick or lonely. One contributor saw ministry as an opportunity to teach others, by your actions, “to love the church.” Think of your workplace as an opportunity to use deeds, hospitality and good cheer to shine forth the light of Christ.

Parish Growth

Often we hear of a parish’s desire to undertake ministry with the motive of attracting new members. A growth program. While growth is often a very real by-product of ministry, we do this, as stated above, not to grow or to make us feel good, but to share God’s love with others.

An Uncomfortable Task

While doing ministry helps to pull us out of our comfort zones – to stretch our lives as Christians, it need not be uncomfortable. Good ministry starts with our own gifts, talents and interests -- the things we like to do and are good at to connect with others. Sharing your faith with others is an important ministry but not all of us are gifted in a way that we can feel comfortable with this. Build toward this but don't let current limitations stand in the way of finding comfortable outlets for your current skills.

Two-Fold Mission

Father Alexander Schmemmann of blessed memory describes the Mission of the Church as being twofold:

“The first mission of the church is to ascend into the heavenly holy of holies, to worship the Almighty God, and to receive the eternal life and light from him,

And the second mission of the Church is to be sent back into this world as witnesses of the light and the life we have received, and to communicate that to the world. Let us go forth in peace; in the Name of the Lord.

This twofold mission of the church constitutes the rhythm of our whole life in which we go up and in, and then out to bear witness.”

Good Practices for Making Ministry Happen

One area of fruitful 2022 Forum discussion concerned motivating parishioners to actively participate in the ministry work of the parish. One *product* of the Forum was the identification of good practices to encourage ministry.

1. Help others to visualize the benefits of ministry with stories and examples.
2. Find only a small part in a ministry for some people at the beginning.
3. Include ministry in the parish mission statement.
4. Everything the church does should be a ministry.
5. Give people autonomy over a ministry as much as possible. Don't micro-manage. Identify "what" not "how". See "[Delegating Better](#)"
6. Find ministries for people with limited funds or abilities.
7. Budget for ministry in the church.
8. Ask people individually. Don't just always put out a call for ministry to the group.
9. Involve families in ministry.
10. Share examples of ministry from the lives of the saints.
11. Recognize ministry with awards, thanks, gifts. **Say thank you often.**
12. Include notes on *how to minister* in the parish bulletin.
13. Consider featuring one parish ministry per week during announcements (max 3 min or brief bulletin summary)
14. Work hard to match ministries with people's gifts and talents.
15. Try to keep a ministry role from becoming a life-long commitment. Provide exit strategies.
16. Priests are busy. Consider adding the role of pastoral assistant or ministry coordinator to help make parish ministries more robust.

17. To create a balanced array of ministries consider which of your ministries are internally or externally focused; local, national and international, are relatively straight forward or more complex or require advanced skills; can be done by 1-2 individuals or require a broader team; involve sending \$ vs. contributing time.

Good Questions to Motivate Ministry?

One additional good practice previous for stimulating ministry is simply asking good questions –from the pulpit, at parish council meetings, at parish 'town hall' meetings, during coffee hour.

Some suggestions:

- What are the ministries offered by and through our parish? Which are focused internally? Which external? Are we comfortable with that balance?
- What was the last *new* ministry – one that involves the active contribution of time and love by parishioners – begun by our parish? When was that?
- Can/should we consider new ministries - perhaps replacing activities and efforts that no longer relevant? Or which seem to be self-serving?
- What factors limit our parish's capacity for ministry? What holds us back? Is it money and funding? Is it motivation? Is it a lack of creativity? Is it the misconceptions about what "ministry" is or why we do it? An unwillingness to try something new? A general lethargy toward parish life? Skills and talents? A willingness to look the other way when confronted with the needs of others.
- How many (what portion of parishioners) are truly involved in a ministry of some sort – whether internally focused or external? How can we engage those who may be on the fringes? Might some of them be participating in Christ-centered ministry outside the bounds of the parish?

Stewardship Update

In past years we've published a number of [helpful articles](#) for parishes desiring to improve financial stewardship of their parish.

We have lifted a few key points from past articles and summarized them below.

And, we've added a few new thoughts.

People need to be reminded more than they need to be instructed.

C.S. Lewis

Basic Practice Reminders

You Need to Ask

Some parish's pride themselves on maintaining a low key approach to parish finances and stewardship. We respectfully disagree.

Your best people will respond well to effective "asks" that give them an opportunity to express generosity for something they love. Your least committed may complain - but that is likely a chronic behavior.

Effective "asks" are professional, to the point, humble, respectful yet confident, direct and trusting. They use the language of the church. Clergy and laity should ask. Ask verbally, in writing, formally and informally, in person and as part of brief post liturgy "talks".

But Don't Beg

Few people are inclined to generously support a parish or institution that appears desperate, apologetic, timid or embarrassed. A sinking ship. Avoid talking about parish needs and financial distress. Don't threaten: "Unless we get this (\$) we won't be able to..."

Communicate What Has Been Done

Tell the positive story of your parish efforts: its ministries, prayers, worship, fellowship. Remind parishioner's that their generous commitment enables the parish to fulfill its Christ centered purpose. It often helps to use photos, charts and graphics to communicate the parish story.



Express What Could Be Done

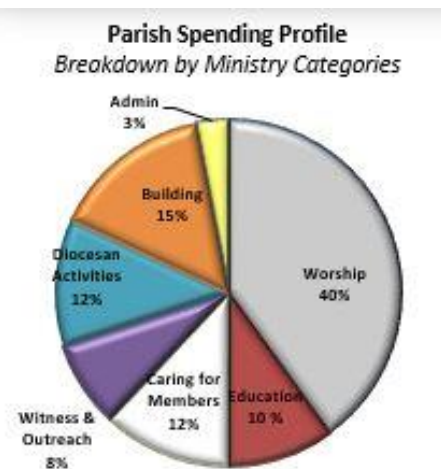
In addition to summarizing what you have done describe what could be done. What are the priorities? Our aspirations? Parish councils and stewardship teams should always be prepared to express a vision of a thriving --not merely surviving parish. What could be done with (e.g.) 20% additional financial support?

Start Earlier Next Year

One consistent parish stewardship error is to pack all conversation concerning money, commitment and generosity into a brief stewardship period. Then once complete everyone breathes a sigh of relief-- puts a lid on the box called stewardship -- and shoves it in a metaphorical corner. Instead plan a number of messages and conversations throughout the year. Occasionally talking about the importance of actively expressing gratitude - without tying it to an appeal - makes the entire topic more organic.

Leaders Lead

The parish council and other parish leaders should lead the way in expressing their generosity and commitment to parish values.



Online Giving

While you may still write checks -- you are now probably in the minority. Many people don't carry --or even have --check books. Likewise the use of cash has dropped precipitously. Explore and offer a variety of forms of online giving -particularly enabling recurring giving. People will give regularly and in greater amounts.

Stewardship Messages Need to Comprehend Differing Priorities

As this communication takes place remember that different constituencies in your parish are motivated by differing needs of the parish. When communicating with parishioners concerning their financial support for the parish for the upcoming year acknowledge these differing priorities.

Operations

The ongoing, regular local church expenses, including its general denominational obligations. Yes, believe it or not - most regular church attendees realize it costs money to keep the church operating and they will reach into their pockets for it.

Local Compassion

This pocket exists to meet the needs of under-resourced people living within a 30-60 minute drive from the church, whether they are part of your church or not.

World Missions

Including Global Compassion needs,

Education

Christian education - which includes helping your pastor pay off his/her seminary debt! Also, education in the broader sense of scholarships for students inside or outside the church so that they can fulfill the vocational assignment God has for them.

Capital Improvements/Major Repairs

Even if you have enough money from operating funds to pay for a major repair, it still makes sense to invite parishioners to contribute to specific, large ones.

Evangelism

Outreach to unchurched persons in your region.

Your Parish Stewardship Team

Too often the job of asking for generous commitments falls to one of three roles:

1) The priest --who is then likely accused of being self-serving; 2) The treasurer or finance committee --who have a large, different and specific job --and *stewardship* may not fit their talents; 3) Nobody --which then often reverts to the aforementioned who deliver impassioned pleas. (Which often are too late and sound like *begging*)

Instead create a team of laypersons to assist with defining and implementing a parish stewardship effort.

We've offered this "laity does the asking" suggestion to numerous parishes. Often the objection is, "*Well I just couldn't ask people for money.*" We, in turn, point out that, like evangelism, not everyone has the requisite gifts for stewardship ministry, however, many people can comfortably offer their personal insights of how God has worked in their life -- and the joys of sharing their blessings to support the work of the parish.

The Team's Tasks?

What are the jobs of this team? In general they configure the parish stewardship approach in a way that fits the culture of the parish AND encourages people to stretch a bit.



We suggest you **start small**. Consider a few of the tasks from this list:

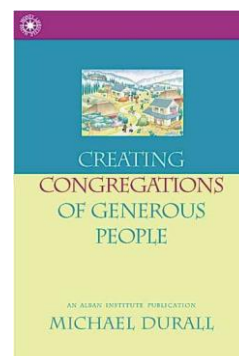
- Competently **communicate good Christian principles of generosity**.
- **Tell** the story of accomplishments. 'Here is how we used the donations parishioner donations this year.'
- **Collect or take photos** to bring the story to life.
- Work with parish council to **understand long term parish priorities** -- particularly those which require solid budget support to bring to fruition. In some cases this may include pushing the parish council to focus on the longer term/bigger picture.
- **Answer the "why"** question? Share the above priorities to answer the question of 'Why should our parishioners return more to the parish? What do we hope to achieve?'
- **Plan** the timeline, print copies, distribute
- **Frame responses to common objections**.
- **Explain** parish stewardship practices to new members or young adults who should now support the parish.
- **Answer** questions.
- **Follow up** with non-participating or late responding parishioners.
- **Ask** in some cases, for generous commitments from parishioners who are in a position to expand support.

Good Practical Advice

If you're looking for good practical advice about building a stewardship effort we found the book *Creating Congregations of Generous People* by Michael Durall to be useful.

A few tidbits:

- "Despite all the talk about raising money in churches, members are rarely challenged to increased generosity."
- Key question: "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?"
- "Pledge programs are, on balance, the most useful stewardship method. Most are done poorly"



Reflections: Improving Parish Councils

Insights from Six Senior Orthodox Priests.

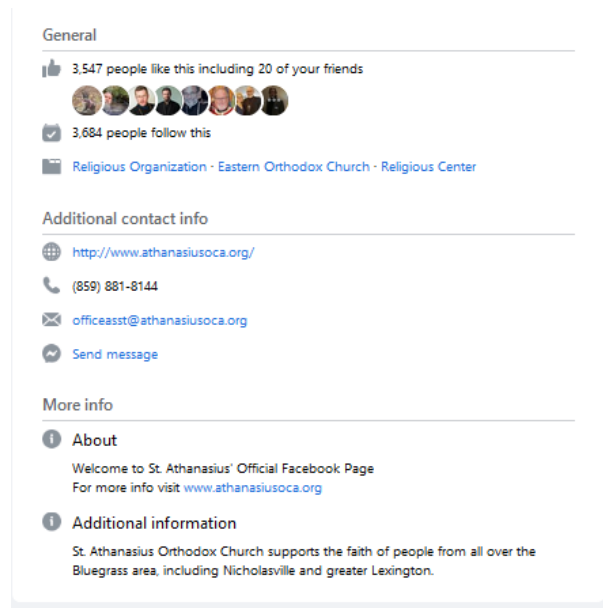
Some years ago now (probably 8-10), as we were 'building' our first Parish Council workshop, we contacted six respected Orthodox priests and asked them what, based on their experience, they thought was important for parish councils to know and understand about the job and role of the parish council. Here are some of their answers:

- "The most important thing I've told parish councils is that we (meaning the Council and the priest) are on the same team. No us vs. him."
- "Parish Councils need to take seriously the fact that they are actually co-ministers of the Gospel with the clergy and everyone who serves the Church. They do not have any role which is in opposition to the clergy, nor that is not the clergy's interest, or which is reserved uniquely to them."
- "Everyone in the parish is there to love God and love neighbor, and the Parish Council is as responsible as the clergy and all the laity to make that happen."
- Councils need to take seriously that they are co-ministers of the gospel with the priest.
- "I treat the council as though their baptism makes them ordained."
- "*We clergy need to fully work with and respect the work of the parish council.* Not every decision as parish or a parish council has to make requires a seminary degree. But every decision is spiritual in every sense of the word. The business of the parish - paying bills, maintaining the building, dealing with mundane issues - is all spiritual because the parish is the Body of Christ."
- *Council's need a new structure.* Persons elected at large without specific job fall into the habit of becoming disinterested critics -as opposed to workers in Christ's vineyard. *I'm convinced that ministry driven Councils are the only way to go.* Every member of the Council needs to have an important job/ministry role.
- "Anyone sitting in on PC meetings should have a sense that the meeting reveals the Kingdom of God -- as the Liturgy is supposed to. The work of the people of God in the liturgy is not separate from the work of the council."
- "*Councils should think and talk about how even their council meetings and the annual parish meetings are to be icons and signs of the Kingdom of God!* Understand it is your responsibility, not just God's or the clergy, to make that happen."
- "We have a permanent line item on the agenda called 'pastoral matters'. It implicitly reminds the council that they have a pastoral role without having to harp on it. It usually takes the form of a review of new members or inquirers who might need more attention from council members, whom I gently encourage to think in terms of *having a duty to these people as council members*;
- "Meetings need a good chair that is willing to be firm about refocusing tangential discussions."
- "All agenda items, including "New Business," need to be added before the meeting (i.e. no, "Just one more thing..."). This helps avoid meetings morphing into free-for-alls."
- "Parish Councils need to know what is *their* responsibility and what is the responsibility of other ministries/people in the parish. A 20 minute discussion about why the youth group kids don't know how to cross themselves properly belongs elsewhere. This relates to good stewardship of

the time and talents of council members and the specific tasks these folks have been elected to fulfill."

- "Parish communities have seen so many clergy come and go over the years, they are hesitant to empower them with any matters not spiritually related. The belief is, '*I was here before you got here and I will be here long after you leave, for another parish. So, this is mine/ours; bug off.*' It's the ownership syndrome, and ultimately about control.

- Seek to convey an identity of joyful, loving, scriptural, serious, active, welcoming Christians.
- Cross pollinate with your webpage; (ref. website on FB and vice versa); same identity; often different content. On FB your content, style and tone will be less formal, more oriented to current events; occasional humor.
- Try your best to show a range of parishioner ages and activities
- Emphasize aspects of your parish that should resonate with seekers (see box “The Inquirer Audience”) and that draw important contrasts with other religious traditions. However, always speak positively – or not at all about others. No put downs.



- Emphasize parish ministry, neighborhood connections and educational offerings.
- This is a public page. It is not the place to review key parish issues or concerns.
- Cross post with other Orthodox parishes in your area – help make Orthodoxy NOT look tiny.
- Keep content apolitical –neither conservative nor liberal.
- Fill out the "About" and other info portions of the page. When someone lands on your FB page it should be clear you’re an Orthodox Christian Church; address; general service schedule; contact info.
- Check stats of those visiting your page: who; where from? It’s fun to see visitors from Thailand. But, you are particularly interested *in communicating with people in your parish vicinity*.
- Build a team of FB page admins to do your posts; establish a few ground rules with the priest’s oversight. In general this ministry is an excellent opportunity for delegation.
- If a reader of your FB posts has practical insights/opinions about Orthodox churches, they may reflect common stereotypes. While some of these have grains (or more) of truth your communication can shape their impressions by addressing the stereotype head on. Among these labels: "Foreign", "insular", "not open to outsiders", "unfriendly", "food", "not English worship", "not scriptural", "out of touch"; "strange", "zealots", "same as Catholics" and more.

What to Post?

So with multiple audiences and a recommended emphasis on non-parishioner/inquirers and a few good practices, what did our advisors suggest to actually *post* on a parish FB page?

First remember --beauty is our secret weapon -- so we've emphasized graphics and photos. They connect with inquirers AND active/dormant parishioners. When using photos follow OCA internet guidelines. Ask permission. Recruit one or two parishioners as parish photographers (cell phone is usually fine); never show a church that looks empty during a service.

Also, remember posts can be scheduled well ahead of time; use both pre-planned and spontaneous posts.

Overwhelming list? Pick a few that seem easiest and most impactful:

- **“Thank you** for worshipping with us today.” Easy. Regular. Warm.
- **Actual Worship Photos** – Link to your worship live stream or archive. If no live stream use photos. Let people get a feel before they commit to come and see.
- **Class series** –Intro new series; post before each class; study questions – please “join us tonight for...”.
- **Books Reviews** -- Or links to solid books about the Orthodox faith.
- **Converts with Brief Story** (< 2 paragraphs) – Nothing communicates “welcome” to potential inquirers like hearing a brief story about people like them who were welcomed, have embraced the Orthodox faith and joined the parish. (“You won’t be alone –we have others like you.”)
- **Lives of Saints**-- Not every day but rather three or four select days per month.
- **“Our Nativity worship schedule.** Join us as we celebrate the Nativity of Jesus Christ”. Nothing invites like an invitation.
- **Photo of Priest** – Not posed; greeting worshipers; welcoming; not severe; perhaps shown with family.
- **Video invitations** – While more effort these have probably 4-5x greater impact.
- **Photo of outside of church/ picture of sign.** GPS gets them there –here is how to recognize building.
- **St. Nicholas Day** - Invite; article; photos of parish celebration. (*OK, too late for this year.*)
- **Charitable Connection** -If you’re posting about a fund raising project emphasize ‘money raised for xyz local charity’; make sure this (continual fundraising) isn’t the predominant message.
- **Active Parish Ministries** -- Bring these to life --more than a list. Singing for shut ins? Get snapshots. Training altar boys? Photo op.
- **Baptisms** -- Newborns; smiling parents etc.
- **Sacraments; Rites of Passage** - Photos of Communion, a Chrismation, welcoming new families; goodbye to those leaving.
- **Neighborhood social events/interaction** -- I.e. we’re connected to the fabric of our place.
- **Festal Decorations** - “Thanks to those who helped...” Share your beautifully adorned church.
- **Patristic Memes**- Wise advice from Church Fathers, Saints. Special prayers or prayer insights.
- **Reference to Church School.** Schedule. Key class themes or projects. Small number of children? Work hard for well framed close ups; smiling teacher; 1-2 families walking into church with kids.

The Inquirer Audience

One important audience for your parish social media effort is potential inquirers to Orthodoxy. Guests, inquirers and catechumens of course, come in all shapes, sizes, demographics and backgrounds.

While each is unique, parishes report a few commonalities. Some are obvious, others less so:

- **Some are dissatisfied** with their current church experience. Common comments: ‘watered down’, ‘make it up as we go along’, ‘reacting to prevailing winds’, and a ‘cult of personality’.
- **Limited religious background** – Many have had marginal religious influence in their lives yet sense “something missing-- but not clear what”.
- **“Seeking serious” Christianity.** Many inquirers often seem to express a desire for consistent doctrine, structured liturgy, sacraments, saints as exemplars, an annual worship calendar that acknowledges more than Christmas and Easter, a source of doctrine linked to the apostolic deposit; emphasis on spiritual disciplines –prayer, fasting. Etc.
- **Questionable Orthodox Experience** - Knowledge of Orthodox teaching and practice probably came from, often extensive, internet reading. Parishes often report a need to essentially *unteach* inaccuracies.
- **Podcasts and Blogs** are often early stops on their way to Orthodoxy. Also word of mouth and invitation from relatives –who themselves are converts to Orthodoxy.
- **Political Spectrum** - One priest said it best: “In my parish I’ve seen strong conservatives and ‘Bernie democrats’. They don’t seem to be in the middle.”
- **Demographics** - Recent inquirers seem to skew younger than your parish median. Often 60:40 male; Education varies.