BUILDING A PARISH IDENTITY AS CHRISTIANS

7/17/2018

Values, Audience Stereotypes, Limiting Behaviors

As a Leader…Whose Shoes Would You Rather Be in?

Which has the most to communicate?
Which is better equipped to stand out from the crowd?

Premise

"Just as individuals benefit from learning listening skills for personal relationships & speaking skills for oral communication, ***parishes benefit from considering implications of how and what they are they are communicating****.*

In age of rapidly proliferating communication technologies, this task of evaluation is more urgent."

Parish Identity

How Do the Neighbors Perceive Your Parish?

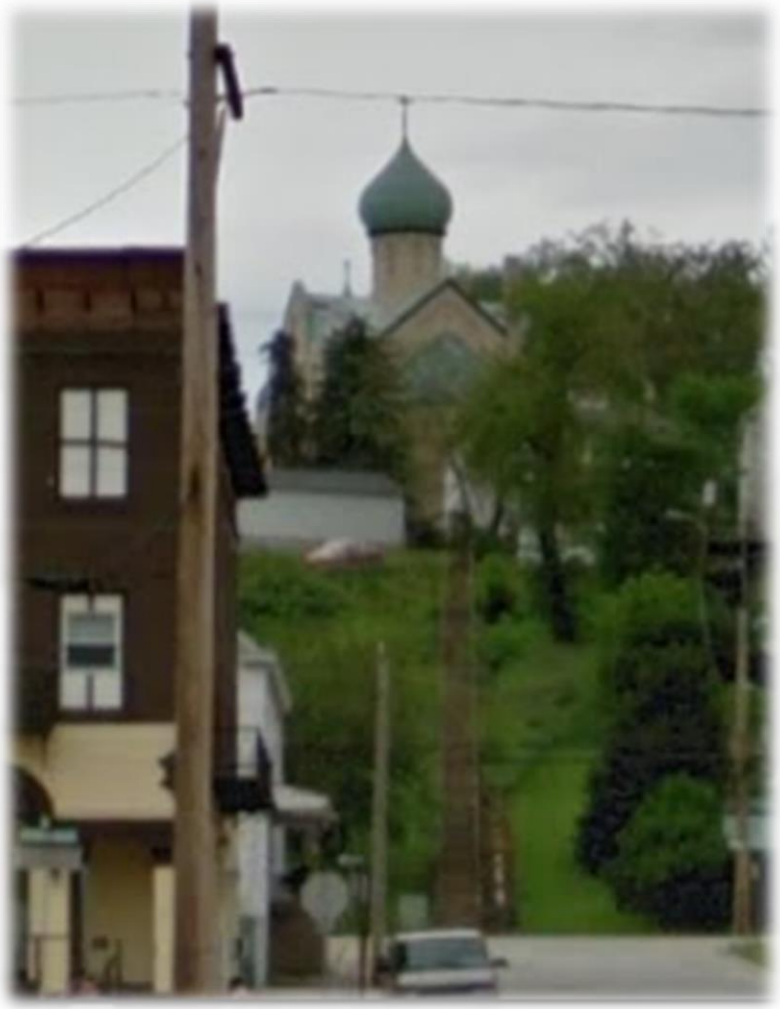
NY Times reporting on Indian Orthodox Procession

- "...neighbors say (its) practically the only time when the people of the congregation venture outside, not counting getting in and out of cars."
- "If you didn't actually see this with your own eyes, you might think I was making it up."

NIKE

“Everyone knows us as… the “Russian Church on the Hill”!

- Hmmm… why would that be?



Parish Identity

Who Are We? Why Are We Here?

- How many people living within two miles of the parish…

  …could say at least something accurate about the parish?

- How many know our parish for our food, rummage sales, craft fair etc. …

  …as opposed to our Gospel centered ministries?

- Is there any part of our vision statement that values welcoming others?

Identity Worksheet

1. Current Identity

What is your identity in your town/ neighborhood? (What do we people know you as/for?)

2. Current Identity Factors

What factors have shaped your parish identity? What causes people to hold these opinions of you?

3. Desired Identity?

How would you like to be known?

4. Potential Identity Change Actions

What actions can be taken to align our actual & desired identities?

Identity Workshop Results

1. Current Identity- How *are* we known?

- "Russian church on the hill"
- White. Old.
- Food
- 'For people that aren't me'
- Culture club: Ethnic; immigrants; not English
- Unfriendly; closed" to outsiders; don't talk to anyone; don't participate in town events
- Something like Catholics (collars, robes ; idolatry)
- Ancient >> Not relevant
- "Colorful" >> Infighting
- Crazy calendar dates – holidays wrong time

2. Current Identity Factors - Factors shaping the opinions of our parish?

- The fence around the church.
- Differentness : processions; Architecture: domes/cross; icons
- The impressions created on a 1st or subsequent visit
- Web
- Sign. Domes. Architecture. 3 bar Cross
- Outdoor behaviors: Processions; Contact w/neighbors
- Events. Festival; Fund raising
- Insularity. Conversations or lack of.; What we don't do
- Press/TV coverage; Website/Facebook –or lack of same
- Behavior of other Orthodox Churches!

3. Desired Identity?

- Friendly; Upbeat
- Non-judgmental
- Available to me/you
- Forward moving –a place with a future
- You can feel God's presence here; Christ is focus
- Serious about their faith
- Serve the "least" --A Christian community… open to all. – nice people working to know God.

4. Potential Identity Change Actions

- Speaker series –open to public;
- speakers bureau
- Videos about parish (welcome)
- Signs /flowers/lawn/landscaping
- Open bible study
- Website
- Balance PR
- Service projects
- Buy local
- Engage schools, police, city council

Identity Workshop Results

A place where you'll find…

- Beliefs that reflect the original apostolic "deposit" & that don't shift with the times or prevailing fads.
- An atmosphere of worship which emphasizes the holiness and majesty of God.
- An over-all Christian worldview that is lived out as a way of life.

- Behavior of other Orthodox Churches!

- Buy local
- Engage schools, police, city council

Communicating Your Parish

A Chain of Experiences

Fellowship

Vibrant Worship

Welcome

Front Door

Attractive Sign

Website

Communication Facts

- “Currently 80% to 85% of people are finding their church based on Web sites.”
- 9 of 10 people visit your website before calling you
- “It takes 7 encounters with your “brand” before someone will act on it.”

See webinar “Improving Your Parish Website”.

The Jobs of Your Website

- Communicate information
  - What/when/where/why
- Express your parish's identity

  Tell the world…
    - Who you are, what you do and what you stand for.
    - That you "Proclaim Christ"
- Help to reshape parish identity
  - Help the parish understand who they are – and the importance of talking to others.

Website Calls to Action

1. Learn

- Teach visitors who you are; what you do; how others can get involved.
- About section: mission, beliefs, & ministries. Direct visitors here.(home pg graphic or banner, navigation. People might actually read (not skim), Make sure these words carefully chosen.

2. Visit

- encourage users to physical visit
- Make service times & address easy to find. Write with welcoming tone on your Location page. Include map, directions, and a photo of your church.

3. Contact

- Plaster phone number, address, and e-mail address in many places –Footer, Contact Us, Location. Contact form encourages interaction.
- shows how much you care (or don't care) about visitors.

4. Give

- Giving is a spontaneous, emotionally-driven action, so your website should not hinder someone from satisfying that urgent desire.

Key Background Points

Why Websites Are Important

- Website *more* important for an Orthodox parish
  - Orthodoxy not well known *(Who knew!)*
  - Technology levels playing field
    - "Helps little guys look big"
  - High uniqueness
  - Inaccurate stereotypes
- Switching
  - 44% of Americans have switched religions.
  - Lapsed Catholics are third largest "religious body" in US.

Website Topics -Basic

Basic

- Where are you located? How do I get there?
- Is there parking?
- What times are services? In general.
- Specifically?
- How do I contact the church?
- During what hours can I contact the church?
- How can I contact the priest?
- What kind of church is it?
- What kind of Orthodox Church is it?

Website Topics--Advanced -- Preference Generating

- Give me a feel for the personality of the priest and the parish?
- Are there people in this parish like me? Will I feel at home?
- What can I do here? What is here for me?
- What do they have for my children?
- How seriously do they take their faith?
- What's the music like?
- How do I become a member?
- Why this parish? What's the unique story here – the one that makes this the place right for me?

Communicating Your Parish – Ten Tips

1. Website is front door –not Facebook- act like you expect visitors!
2. 2 audiences –external & internal –different needs and interests
3. Up to date
4. Basics easy to find
5. Limit “parish history”.
6. Avoid insider lingo.
7. Use Photos – people; Young people. Smiling. Don’t show an empty church
8. Deal with stereotypes
9. “For inquirers…” page
10. Locate on map

Personal Narratives

Tell Stories

- ‘You won’t be alone. We have others like you.’

Our Members on Our Faith at Holy Trinity Parish

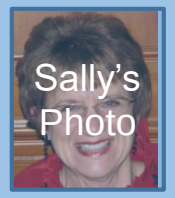
"Becoming Orthodox for me was the natural end of my search for an authentic and true catholicism. I had spe
Anglo-Catholic Anglican. Although I remain close to both communions, and while both reflect positively certair
undivided Church, only Holy Orthodoxy possesses the fullest vision of the Church founded by Christ. It has bee
the Truth of God in His Church. For me, this Truth was found by *coming home* to the true catholic Church whi
sacraments for 2000 years... *Holy Orthodoxy.*" -- *Paul, non-profit fundraiser*

"I remain grateful for the Baptist upbringing and Calvinist education that taught me faith in Christ and salvation
concluded that these traditions fell short of the full expression of the New Testament Church. Instead, I disco
surprise and satisfaction -- in the historic liturgy and organic continuity of the Orthodox Church. Now, nothing
my children become as we look forward to receiving the Body and Blood of Christ each Sunday at Holy Trinity
graduate

"My conversion to Orthodoxy was not based on emotional or social needs but rather a hunger for the Truth. H
the years, I felt disillusioned and discouraged because the faiths that I had been taught were unsustainable ar
This "mo[illegible] found [illegible] the Orthodox Church. I no longer [illegible] my ov[illegible] [illegible] Scripture, f

meet the parish

Sally Smith
Westhaven WI



Sally has been attending St XXX for five years, having been raised in a _(ethnic) Orthodox parish.

Why St XXXX is My Home Parish
St XXX is simply an exciting spiritual home. It provides a link to the church of my youth while offering a sense of mission and community that works for my family. At St. XXXX we’re truly bringing the Orthodox faith to all people.

TIPS FOR GOOD WORSHIP PHOTOS – RECAP

1. Everything done with a blessing will be… blessed!
2. Tell the Story! - *Always photograph the setting.*
3. Include different age groups.
4. Use light & shadows to convey the mystery.
5. A little blur is okay… if the photo captures the spirit of the moment.
6. Notice expressions, share the ***joy*** of Pascha… and the ***intensity*** of Great Lent.
7. Follow the Feasts. (This is where the Six Months comes in.)
8. Watch for those special moments!

Using Photos Well

- Use active/action shots when possible

Repeat yourself visually. It makes you easier to remember.

Using Photos Well

- Use active/action shots when possible

Good

Better

Using Photos Well

- Use with discretion
  - “Big Liturgy”
  - And…
    - 3 bar crosses
    - Onion domes
    - Bishop’s Blessing
    - People too dressed up – or sloppy
    - Too much bake sale or fund raising

Probably a bit “much” for many inquirers

Using Photos Well

- Avoid showing an empty church

Watch what you show –
Consider the visual cues that you send.

Using Photos Well

- Test
  - If part of your audience is non- Orthodox -- use them to test.

"We do not deal much in fact when we are contemplating ourselves."

Mark Twain

Needed Parish Photos

Using Photos Well

- Possible Categories
  - People/Families Children
  - The Temple
  - Worship
  - Sacraments
  - Leadership
  - Ministry
  - Community
  - Parish History(?)

List Ten Important Photos for Your Parish Website

Answers from attendees…

- Priest with family
- Leading bible study
- Icons of Christ or cross (to reduce confusion with Muslims)
- Children's sermon
- Child lighting candle
- Children at camp (together with a larger group)
- Fellowship hour
- Outreach happening/event
- Sacraments: communion, weddings baptisms
- Pascha; Nativity; Other feasts
- People of color
- Men –counter idea 'only women go to church'
- Building /grounds outside of church; make recognizable for new arrival
- Someone greeting others at church door
- Family entering church (on sunny day!)

Understand “Audience”

Stereotypes

What Is It Like? -- *Think Like a Guest*

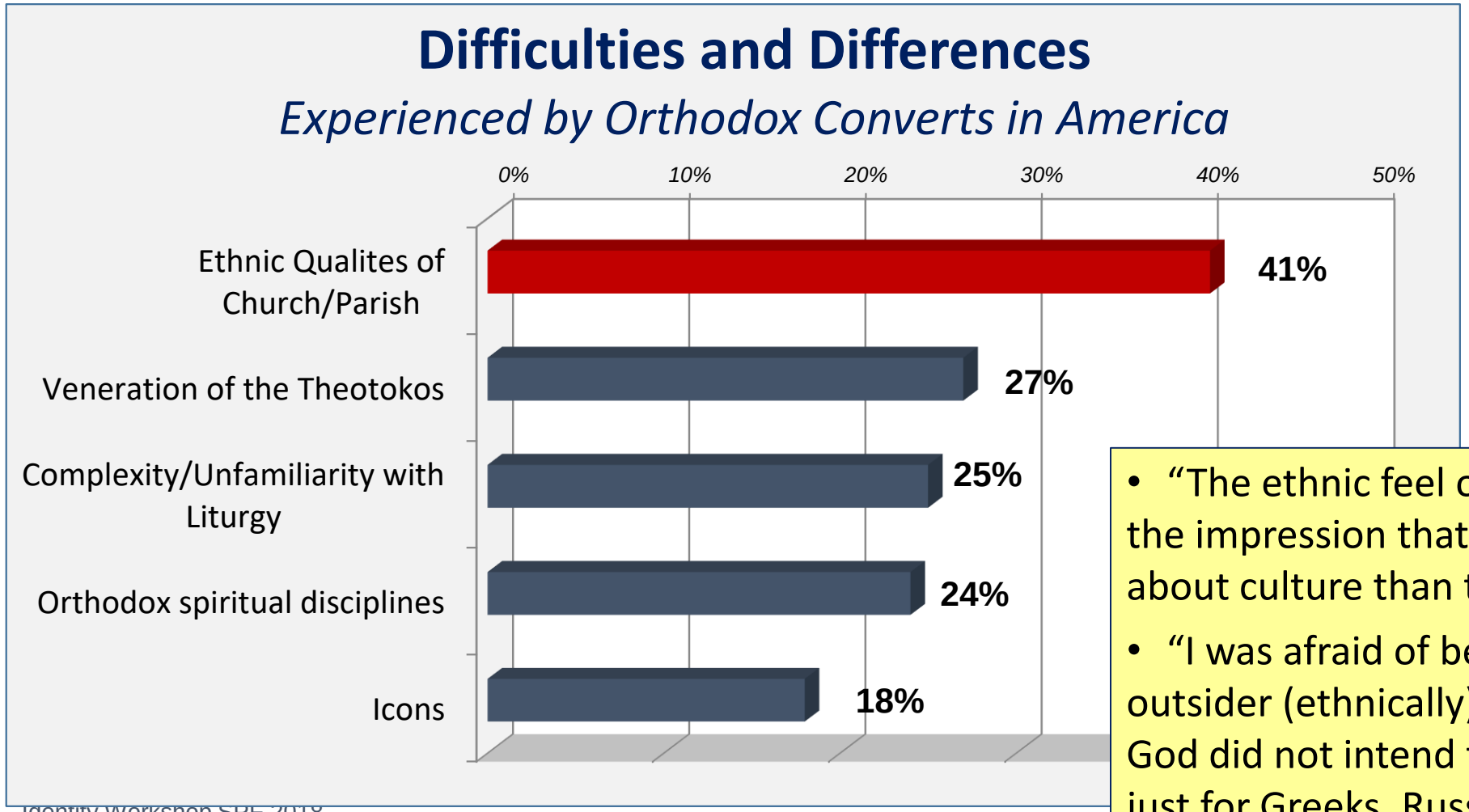
- Many/most people
  - No religious affiliation or experience
  - Never been to an Orthodox Church
- Set expectations

Think of yourself in a Buddhist temple.

Understanding Your Audience(s)

- Realistically what kinds of people are most likely to be attracted to your church?
  - Which will stay & grow in their love for Christ?
  - What are their needs?
- What are the important qualities that should be communicated to this audience?
  - Of Orthodoxy
  - Of your parish
- How can this be communicated?

The Experiences of Orthodox Converts



Verbatim convert feedback

- "The ethnic feel of Orthodoxy can give the impression that Orthodoxy is more about culture than the gospel."
- "I was afraid of being viewed as an outsider (ethnically) until I realized that God did not intend the Orthodox Church just for Greeks, Russians, Serbs, etc. "

"Ethnic Qualities"/Hospitality

"What was Most Difficult?" Verbatim Quotes from Converts

- I felt very much an outsider. Some were kind, but overall I did not feel welcome….ethnic culture seemed too tightly entwined with the Faith… that was something I couldn't accept, given that Orthodoxy was supposed to be universal.
- "I was obviously 'different'"
- "At times I felt feelings of judgment or skepticism. I was only trying to learn and find my way."
- "I was told, it is important to find people who will do things the way they've always been done"
- "Nobody would really talk to me because I was not (*ethnic group*)."
- "I was confused about how cradle Orthodox were tied up in knots about language."
- "was always being asked 'what are you'. I had a very hard time understanding what they meant, and only figured it out after many had walked away from me in disgust. I kept answering – 'I'm a mother, a wife... then, when I finally figured it out, I would answer that I was part Russian Jew and part Scottish.' They'd always say something like, *'Oh, okay you are Russian that's good'.*

A Good Balance

from a parish website

Who We Are

St. Thomas Orthodox Church is a vibrant, God-worshiping community of Christians who proclaim the transforming message of Jesus Christ to all of Siouxland. A fixture of Sioux City religious life, our parish is known to many by its popular twice-yearly Dinners, its participation in local charities, and its active liturgical life.

As Eastern Orthodox Christians, we embrace the truths handed down to us from the Apostles. As Sioux Citians, we are committed to bringing the Light of Christ in Orthodox Christianity to all of our community.

At St. Thomas Orthodox Church, you will find Holy Orthodoxy–ancient and alive.

Our History

St Thomas Orthodox Church was founded in 1916 as a parish to serve the needs of Arab immigrants in Sioux City. From its earliest days, church leaders recognized that in order to be faithful to Christ, the parish needed to find a way to share more of the light of Holy Orthodoxy to the surrounding community. As a result, St. Thomas was one of the earliest parishes in the Antiochian Archdiocese to utilize English in Sunday Worship.

Although still enriched by the Arab Christian patrimony of our founders, the face of St. Thomas has changed. One will hear very little Arabic in our Parish Hall. The welcoming and loving spirit of our forefathers, however, is alive and well. It is now home to people of Russian, Serbian, Romanian, and (more than anything else) just plain American heritage .

St. Thomas continues to grow as converts discover the glorious riches of Orthodox faith, life, and worship. You too are welcome to visit us and see what all the excitement is about.

Who Has Been Attracted to Orthodoxy?

Characteristics of Orthodox Converts

Survey of 194 Orthodox Converts

60% Male

88% - some college
29% -switched more than once
Previous reading about Orthodoxy (web)

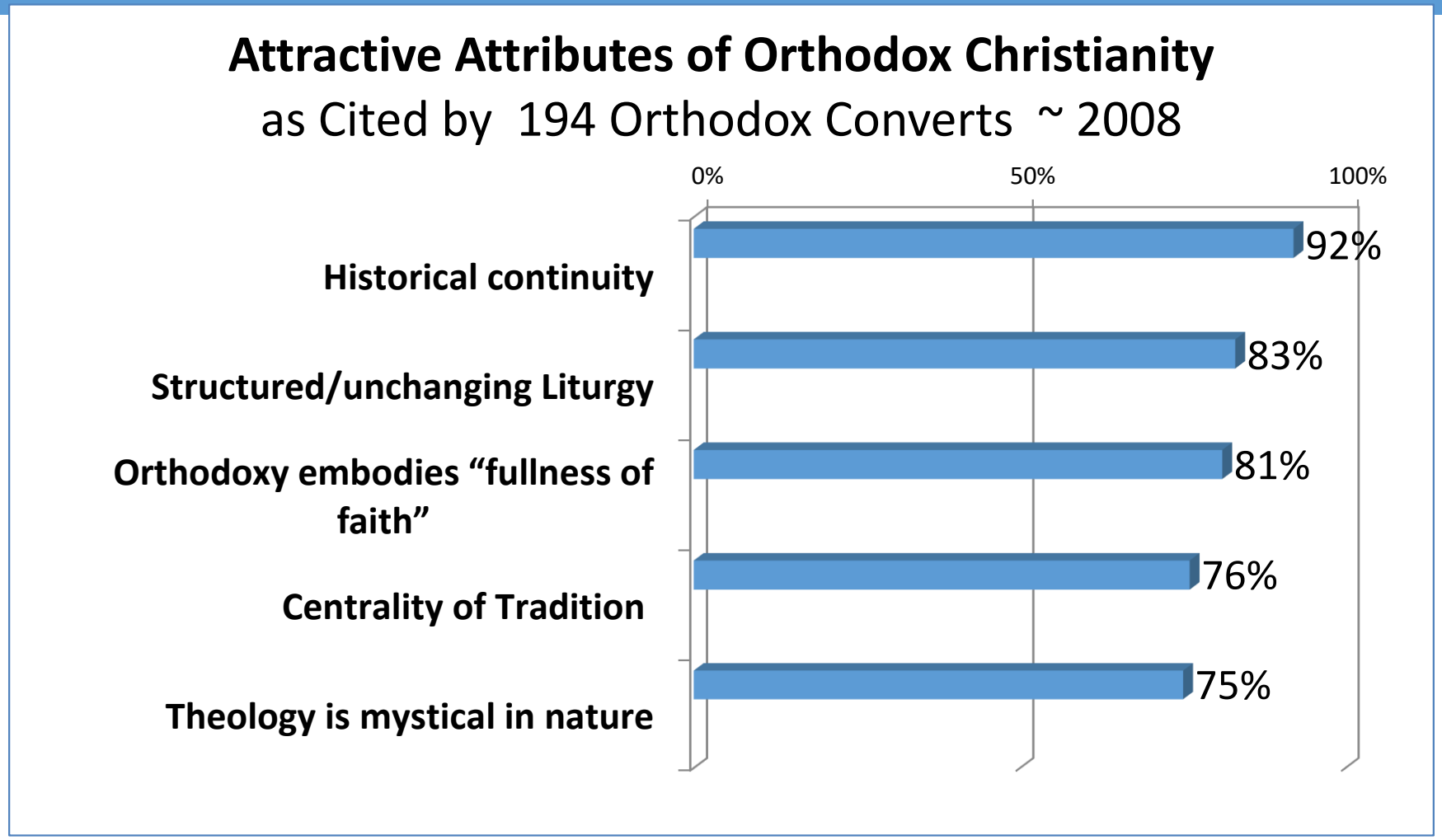
Faith background
29% “multiple”
20% Roman Catholic
9% Episcopal
34% Other Protestant
8% Non Christian

Almost entirely Caucasian

Most found Orthodoxy – not invited.

To What Are They Attracted?

Characteristics of Orthodox Converts



See more at: http://www.midwestdiocese.org/evangelization.html

Words Used By Orthodox Converts to Describe Orthodoxy

These words have attracted others. Use them!

Key Words to Emphasize

- About Orthodoxy
- About Your Parish

Consider Stereotypical Reactions

What might web visitors be assuming about your parish?

Orthodoxy?

- List five…

Churches in General

- List five

Often gracefully confronting wrong stereotypes can be important and helpful.
How can a website help do that?

Consider Stereotypical Reactions

What might web visitors be assuming about your parish?

Orthodoxy

- Food festivals
- Culture club: Ethnic; immigrants; not English
- Unfriendly; closed to outsiders
- Strange; severe; old world;
- Not relevant; ancient
- Like “Catholics” >> Celibate clergy
- Don’t know bible
- White & Old
- Complex
- Colorful >> Infighting
- Zealots
- Idolatry
- Role of women”
- Music

Churches in General

- Gossip
- Judgmental
- Empty
- Too big
- Closed
- Old People
- Sunday “entertainment”
- Church service = Sermon

Neutralizing Stereotypes

Pick 3-4…

Stereotype	Neutralizing Photos	Neutralizing Written Content
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Effective Videos

Typical time spent watching a video on the Internet is <30 seconds. Make your point quickly.

Welcome

Taste and See

Values: The Building Blocks of Vision

- Expressed>>Shared>>Holy>> Lived
- Adaptable and changeable (by us).
- Disagreements over vision are often result from differing values.
- When members of a parish have differences in values which are:
  - In conflict AND are important
  - These differences need to be resolved.
- Differences in priority of a particular value they *may* need to be resolved or rectified. Can we make room for both? –If not possible then possible conflict.

What Are We “Against”?

What Are We "Against"?

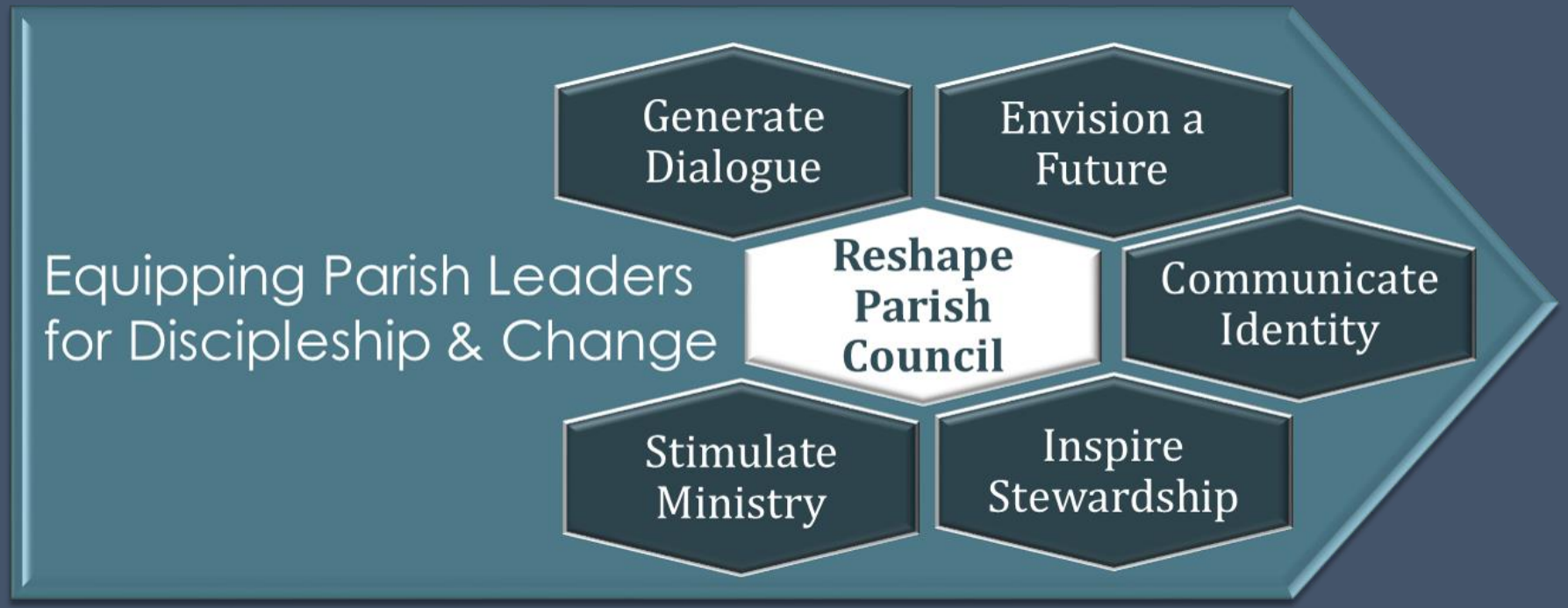
An Example from an actual parish

- Low expectations; Minimalism/mediocrity
- Clericalism/ Congregationalism
- Parishioners as users/consumers of parish services
- Not understanding your faith
- Imagined, archaic, recreation of old world Orthodoxy
- Insularity
- Ad hoc (often chaotic) "communal" structure; "just pitch in".
- Sloppy liturgy
- Striving for perfection.
- Choir lofts
- Wasted talents
- Bad music -- (less than best)
- Making the same mistakes –year after year.

Identifying Parish Values is important in many ways – particularly when communicating outside.
By asking the question what are you against you can isolating things people seriously dislike – often their values are represented by the opposite.

Important Values to Emphasize

ancient
yet timeless
throughout the world
and in willimantic, ct
the Orthodox
Church



SMALL PARISH FORUM
ST. GEORGE ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL
ROSSFORD, OHIO JULY 12-14, 2018

Welcome

One thing to fix…

- In your parish's communication efforts…

Thank You!