

Sources for understanding the characteristics of... Vibrant 21st Century Orthodox Parishes in America

Archdiocese of Western Pennsylvania OCA,
Parish Development Ministry
Joseph Kormos ioekormos1@gmail.com

CREED
One – Oneness of vision & identity. A clear purpose to serve God
Holy: Everything we do in the church needs to be rooted in Holiness. Weed out the clutter that is not from and about God.
Catholic (“fullness”, “of the whole”) Parish needs to be an icon of the fullness of the Church. Every necessary ministry must be present. No independent parishes –connected to “the whole”
Apostolic: Instilled with a sense of mission& apostolic zeal -- to share the Gospel .We invite all to come and see the beauty and truth of the Orthodox faith

CHURCH FATHERS
“One Christian is no Christian.” St Cyprian of Carthage +243 AD

LITURGY
 “...let us commend ourselves and each other and all our lives unto Christ our God.”
 “Let us love one another that with one accord we may confess...”

THE EARLY CHURCH
Proper Motivation for communicating with the world. Not to “grow”, “save the parish”, or “pay the bills, but rather by:
Gratitude -- Overwhelming appreciation of the love of God experienced through Jesus Christ.
Responsibility -- To share the message of God’s love
Concern -- For the well being of the unevangelized – an active awareness of the peril of those without Christ.


They knew that their lives would come under close scrutiny by others so unless the Christian ethic marked their communities as *a new race* it would have been no good proclaiming the Christian story.
Uniqueness
 The unique elements of early Christian communities that made such an Impression on the world:

- **Fellowship:** Rich & poor ♦ Slaves & aristocrats ♦ Special consideration for lowly, sick needy ♦ Contributions: voluntary & proportionate.
- **Joy:** This new faith did not make them miserable. ♦ Jesus promised His joy as a permanent possession of the church. Can’t be taken away.
- **Transformed Character:** Chastity ♦ Hatred of cruelty ♦ Holy living – Christ likeness of life
- **Power:** Shear power of the name of Jesus healed ♦ No special training needed.

COMMON SENSE

Characteristics: Vibrant	Not Vibrant
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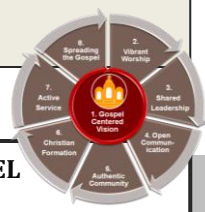
THE CROSS
 A healthy parish needs...
 • **Vertical dimension:** reaching toward heaven
 • **Horizontal dimension:** reaching toward others



SCRIPTURE Acts 2:42-47
⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.
⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

INSIGHTS FROM SURVEYS

OCA 2002	Orthodox Institute 2008
Growing Parish Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Worship” • “Welcoming” • “Working well together” • “Including all generations” • “Stewardship” 	“Successful Parish” Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness to diversity in parishioners • Connectedness to local community • Welcome innovations in parish life • Encourage critical thinking • Collective decision making in the parish.
Declining Parish Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Surviving” • “Fundraising” • “Pirogies & Holubki” • “Ladies Altar Society” • Starring in Slavonic 	



ORTHODOX PARISH HEALTH INVENTORY MODEL

- **Gospel Centered Vision:** The purpose of our parish is to serve the Living God & to share our love of God with others.
- **Vibrant Worship:** Joyful, ascendant, worship at center of our life.
- **Shared Leadership:** Parish lay leaders act as co-responsible, under the rector’s guidance, for total mission of the parish.
- **Open Communication** 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.
- **Authentic Community** Christ is recognized in our midst: love, encouragement, forgiveness, kindness, patience, responsibility.
- **Christian Formation** We have a commitment to lifelong learning & personal spiritual growth.
- **Active Service:** Our parish is a place where members are regularly and actively encouraged to discover their gifts and to use them for God’s glory.
- **Spreading the Gospel:** We understand that we have a personal responsibility to share the Good News.