

Koinonic Evangelism:

The Community as the Evangelist



"Can a Church whose life is centered almost exclusively on the liturgy and the sacraments, whose spirituality is primarily mystical and ascetical, be truly missionary?"

Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann

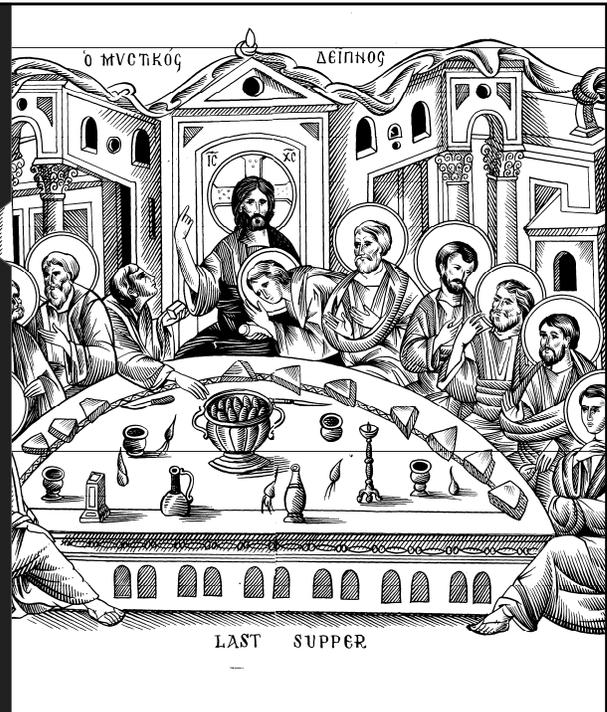


Koinonia

- Evangelism and Mission begin with the central element in the Orthodox Church, the Liturgy, and by extension then to the Eucharistic community.
- The common understanding of evangelism as working with individuals to lead them into the Faith and presenting the teachings of the Faith in a systematic and coherent manner is the common paradigm (the commonly used phrase "teaching and preaching" is brought to mind), is only part of the equation.
- It is not enough to merely lead an individual into an understanding of God, Faith and the Church without integrating that person into the Eucharistic (worshipping) community.

Acts 2:42-47

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the communion (koinonia), to the breaking of bread and to prayer...All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need...They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people."



1 Corinthians 3:6

"I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase."

Matthew 13:1-23

Mark 4:1-20

Luke 8:4-15



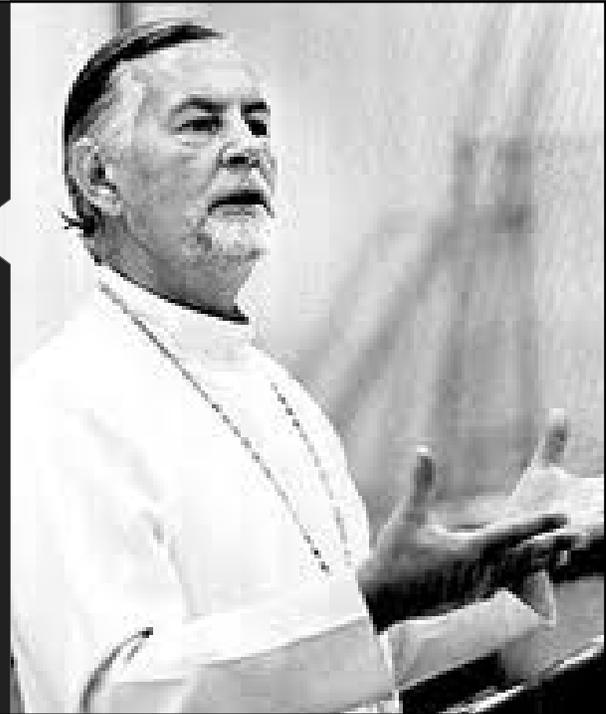
"Our personal Christian experience is made steadfast and strengthened through our incorporation in the mystical Body of Christ."

Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos)



"The Church thus is not a 'self-centered' community but precisely a missionary community, whose purpose is salvation not from, but of, the world. In the Orthodox experience and faith it is the Church-sacrament that makes possible the Church-mission."

Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann



Evangelism is....

- Evangelism may involve individual actions, but it is a communal (*koinonic*) activity.
- Evangelism must integrate the liturgical with the practical and can only be successful if the Church is at the center of parish life
- Only a properly functioning and worshipping liturgical community – the *koinonia*—can actuate the many dimensions and ministries of evangelism.
- Healthy, local, worshipping parishes live evangelism because it is simply what they do as a Christian community.
- People are attracted to that local parish experience precisely because it is the place that they discover and worship Christ, while the parishioners must be open to receive and integrate them into the Body of Christ.
- "Evangelism is only possible when the community that evangelizes - the church - is a radiant manifestation of the Christian faith and exhibits an attractive lifestyle."
David Bosch

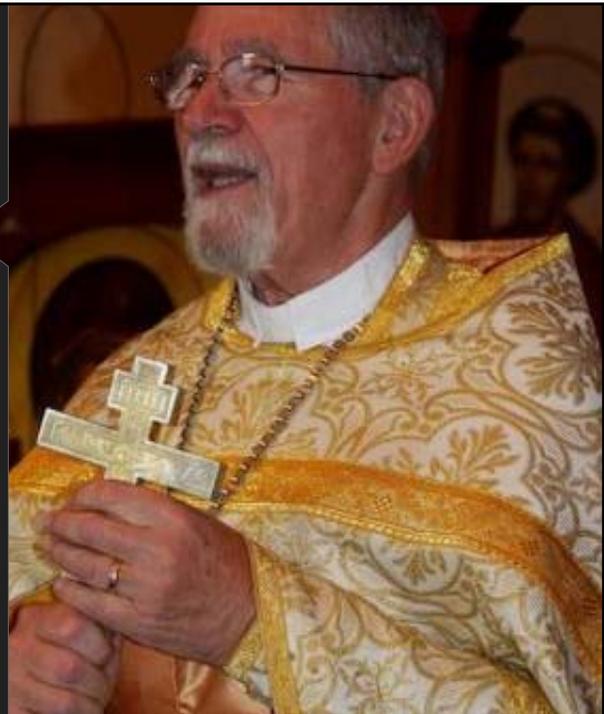


Working Definition of Evangelism

- *The witness in living out of the proclamation of the Good News of the Risen Christ with an invitation to become a part of the local Orthodox Body of Christ through participation in the Sacramental and Liturgical life.*
- The goal of evangelism is not personal conversion to an individual and privatized faith but rather to be a member of a worshipping community.
- The term "*koinonic*" because it is that communal experience which is the goal in evangelism. Fellowship, particularly as *koinonia* as properly understood, is essential.

“An Orthodox parish, that is, a local community of Orthodox Christians with one or more priests, has only one God-given reason for being. It exists to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ. Whatever the original reasons and conditions for its founding, whatever other services and activities it may provide, whatever other desires and needs it may fulfill for its members, the parish must be Christ’s one holy Church. If it is not, then it is neither Christian nor Orthodox whatever else it may be or do.”

Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko

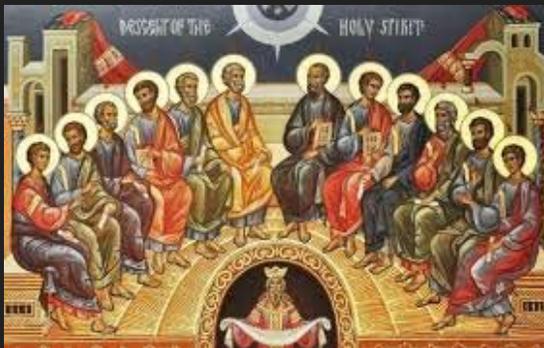


Methods of Evangelism

- Kerygma(to proclaim)
- Martyria(to witness)
- Didache(to teach)
- Apologia(to defend)
- Diaconia(to serve)
- Homologia(to confess)



Kerygma



- Public act of proclaiming or heralding
- Kerygma vs Dogma
- One cannot hear what one is not told
- Lead to a metanoia (change of heart)

Martyria



- Witnessing
- Active (even to death)
- Passive (by a life)
- To incarnate a lifestyle

Didache



- Instruction
- Correct Praise or Teaching
- St. Innocent's Instructions
- The Church teaches

Apologia



- Defense
- Dialogue
- Not judgment but in love
- Adopt a web of beliefs

Diakonia



- To serve others
- "See how these Christians love one another" *Tertullian*
- The two altars. *St. John Chrysostom*

Homologia



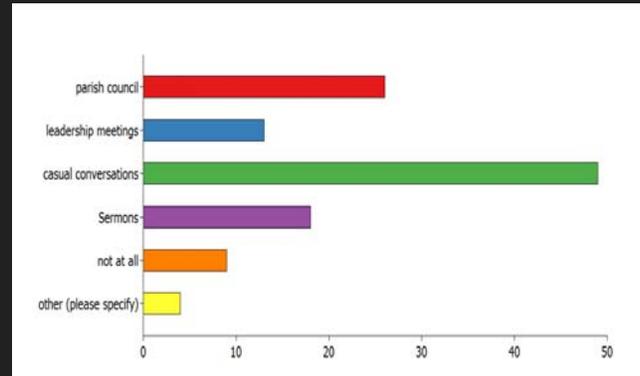
- Profession of faith
- Same words
- 1 Timothy 6:12 *"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of so many witnesses."*
- Sacramental Action

Foundational Questions

- 1. Do parishes have a sufficient understanding of what evangelism, mission, and proselytism are and who is responsible for such work?
- 2. Is there a historical methodology and terminology of evangelism that is still applicable in the Orthodox Church?
- 3. What are the current theories and practices of evangelism as applied in a contemporary Orthodox parish?
- 4. What are the effective (and ineffective) methods that Orthodox parishes have employed? What are the criteria that define effectiveness in evangelism? Why have they succeeded or failed?
- 5. How are Orthodox parishes engaging the current shifting culture and how are the people responding through evangelism?
- 6. What are the cultural realities in which an Orthodox approach to evangelism needs to consider?

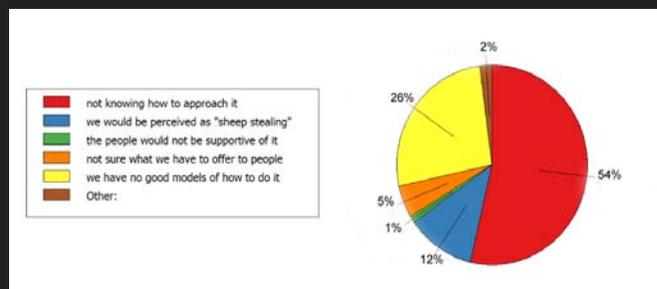
Central Question

- ▶ Is the topic of evangelism discussed in the parish and where discussions occur?
- ▶ Where is evangelism discussed?
- ▶ Results among the parishes were fairly similar
- ▶ Evangelism seems to be a topic in parish life.
- ▶ Evangelism is not necessarily a model, rather a way of life within the parish.



What Challenges are faced in relating to evangelism?

- Not knowing how to approach evangelism is largest response.
- Other responses: "not having models" or "sheep stealing"
- Overwhelming majority feel that they need model to follow or profess to not knowing how
- Evangelism is discussed and all have strong views but profess to not understanding it
- Expect an evangelistic strategy based on marketing and proselytism rather than communal parish activities
- What emerged and continued to be confirmed was an integrity in a healthy parish. Part of this integrity was the community enabling, even discussing, evangelism.



Question 1: Do parishes have a sufficient understanding of what evangelism, mission, and proselytism are and who is responsible for such work?

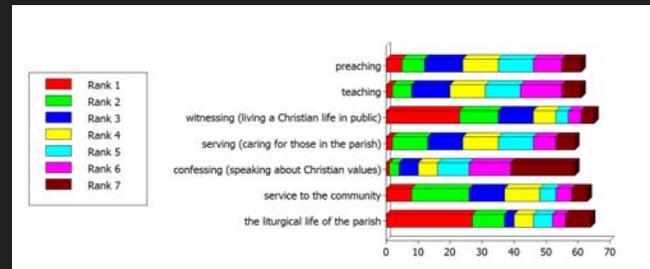
- A number rejected the term evangelism and equated it with proselytism
- Spreading the Gospel
- Living the Faith
- Passive vs active
- Individual vs communal
- Spoke eloquently about the community

Question 2: Is there a historical methodology and terminology of evangelism that is still applicable in the Orthodox Church?

- No strategy: See Acts of the Apostles, Didache and other early Church Documents
- Communal/Koinonia
- Just what they did
- Love
- Worship was central to all activities
- St Cyril and Methodius model/ Mission to America
- The question of the "True Church"

Question 3: What are the current theories and practices of evangelism as applied in a contemporary Orthodox parish?

- Liturgical life key
- Witnessing and serving the community
- Preaching and teaching not central
- Focus of evangelism in the parishes is clearly based on the community gathering in worship, caring for one another, integrating new people into that community and reaching outward to those around them.



Why This Parish?

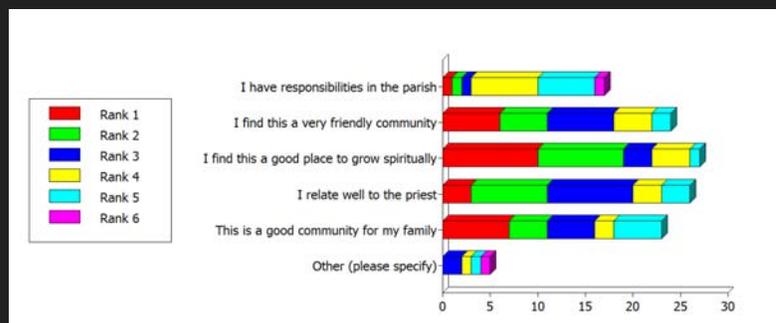
People searched and found a parish they liked

They remained because they found a home

They ranked the following in their decision:

- Clergy Leadership
- Fiscal Awareness
- Quality of Worship
- Ministry in Community
- Relationship with Each Other

Yet they claim they do not know evangelism



And here is why!

"One may, therefore, perceive the church as an ellipse with two foci... In and around the first it acknowledges and enjoys the sources of its life; this is where worship and prayer are emphasized. From and through the second focus the church engages and challenges the world. This is a forth-going and self-spending focus; where service, mission, and evangelism are stressed.... Neither are at the expense of the other; rather they stand in each other's service."

David J. Bosch "Transforming Mission" p. 385

Question 4: What are the effective (and ineffective) methods that Orthodox parishes have employed? What are the criteria that define effectiveness in evangelism? Why have they succeeded or failed?

- ▶ Effectiveness is not numbers and has a host of factors
- ▶ Effectiveness is people finding Christ
- ▶ When a parish demonstrates a commitment to evangelism it permeates all aspects of parish life.
- ▶ The intangibles, such as cohesion and commitment of the congregation, are expressed through tangibles such as attendance at service, tithing, and support of and participation in church-sponsored events.
- ▶ *Koinonic* evangelism must reach outward but remain intimately connected to the inner life of the person and the parish.

Ways to Increase Effectiveness

- ▶ Greater exposure of Orthodoxy to the community
- ▶ Living a Better Christian Life
- ▶ Lose the Ethnic Identifiers
- ▶ Serve the Community Better
- ▶ Being the Church
- ▶ It is communal, liturgical, active, personal, and patient

Why Become Orthodox?

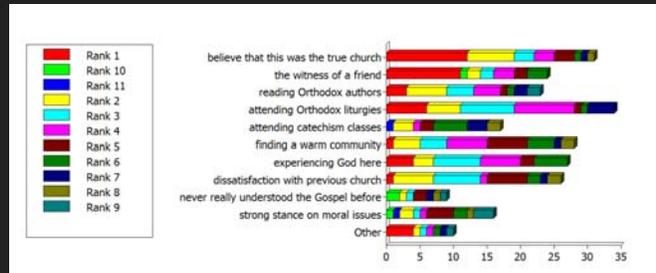
Christian Background

- Found the True Church
- Witness of a Friend, Liturgy and Material

Non Christian Background

- Found the True Church
- Attending services and finding a warm community

So these questions reveal that effectiveness is measured by discovering the Church and participating in the liturgical and community life



Question 5: How are Orthodox parishes engaging the current shifting culture and how are the people responding through evangelism?

- Maintain theological, moral, and liturgical stability amidst chaos.
- Orthodox receiving converts coincided with shift to local language, liturgical revival, and rediscovery of evangelism
- Books and material online lead many to discover the Church but it is the draw of experienced Liturgy and welcoming community They see in action what they have come to believe.
- There is the perception that they have tapped into something ancient, unchanging and genuine.
- The Eastern European experience
- Effective and evangelizing communities embrace parts of the local culture without becoming prey to their negative aspects. They remain connected to the ancient and undivided Church
- People are not willing to become enclaves of ethnicity or isolated communities of exclusivist nature.

Why people stay in the Orthodox Church

- Richness of the Liturgical Life/Theology
- Community Connection
- Family Connection

Why leave the Orthodox Church?

- Poor Leadership
- Ethnic Element
- Married non Orthodox

Question 6: What are the cultural realities in which an Orthodox approach to evangelism needs to consider?

- Desire by people for deep relationships; a relationship with Christ and a relationship with the Church.
- Need to develop real relationships.
- View of the community as the Body of Christ.
- Unvarying theme: the unchangeable nature of the Church
- The Liturgy

Koinonic Evangelism #1: Rooted in the Liturgy

"Prayer, worship and communion have always formed the context for the witness of faith, including evangelism, mission and church life. The missionary structures were built on the liturgy of the word and the sacraments; and since the beginning the great variety of liturgies and rites, creeds and confessions has been due to the diversity of missionary contexts."

Archpriest Ion Briia

A truly liturgical Church MUST be missionary as that is the very purpose of the Liturgy.



Koinonic Evangelism #2: Deeply Relational

"I am the good shepherd; and I know my sheep, and am known by My own." John 10:14

A strong congregation has a deep relationship with the clergy, a communal relationship among the parishioners, and a strong relationship with the surrounding community, all of which is reflective of their relationship with God.



Koinonic Evangelism #3: Witness of the Parish

"The missionary's beginning is significant, however it is not the sum of the matter... The outset might be blessed or become blessed at the end. What's important is that the giving be true and total, without holding back, with a disposition to self-sacrifice and self-denial, and with the aim of leaving our bones among the natives..."

Fr. Cosmas of Gergoriou

The simple witness of being a Christian, living a Christian life, forming and belonging to a Christian community, proves to be one of the critical attractions to the Faith and to the parish.



Koinonic Evangelism #4: Focus on activities within and without the community

"They love Christ, love the Scriptures, love the congregation, love to proclaim the good news, and seek to connect it with every aspect of the parish."

Theodore Stylianopoulos

A *koinonic* evangelistic parish is one that takes care of its own people spiritually, physically, and emotionally, and activates the community when there is someone in need.



Koinonic Evangelism #5: Focus on activities that reach out from the community

"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, or come to You?' And the King will answer them and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'" Matthew 25:31-46

This involvement forces them to look outward and have a different perspective, one that connects them to the place where they are planted. They are known in the community, patronize the community, and are respected in the community.



Koinonic Evangelism #6: Healthy relationship with MONEY

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Matthew 6:21

Many good parishes fail over poor financial decisions or lack of support. There are more arguments and divisions in parishes over financial matters than any other topic. Large donors can often try to dominate the parish by virtue of their largesse and parishes can divide over "us versus them." Poorly managed finances can destroy a parish more quickly than a bad priest.



Koinonic Evangelism #7: The question of ethnicity

"The theologians write beautifully of the witness of the liturgy and the missionary structures of the congregation. But, if this is the case, why, especially in the Diaspora, are some of the churches centers of social activity that exclude outsiders? Can Orthodoxy break out of its cultural mentality so that it can witness?"

James Stamoolis

Parishes are diverse in the best sense of the word and they respect the many diverse traditions while fully understanding that these traditions, as important as they may be to some in the parishes, are subordinate to the Tradition of the Orthodox Church.



In conclusion, evangelism is about groups of people dedicated to the Orthodox Church, consciously choosing to be a part of the Church and living out a life in the Church.

"Leitourgia is an action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals - a whole greater than the sum of its parts."

Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann



Questions and Comments?

"Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Proverbs 29:18

"A vision without the ability to execute is probably an hallucination."

Unknown

Bonus...because I like this drawing!

