

**Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America:
Committee for Agencies and Endorsed Organizations**

"Go and Make Disciples: Evangelization and Outreach in US Orthodox Parishes"

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"People are looking for Orthodoxy, even though they don't know it. They want family, stability, true worship, and spiritual challenge." (a quote from one of the parish priests who participated in this study)

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Executive Summary

An urgent need exists in Orthodox parishes in the United States for a much stronger emphasis on evangelization and outreach. The national studies conducted in 2015-2016 indicated that without paying serious attention to evangelization and missionary outreach, the Orthodox Church in the United States is likely to stagnate, lose its vibrancy and vitality, and decline in members.

The *"Go and Make Disciples: Evangelization and Outreach in US Orthodox Parishes"* is the first ever national study on evangelization and outreach practices in US Orthodox Christian Churches. It examined the strategies and practices developed by some Orthodox parishes that can be viewed as "exemplary" (as defined by their jurisdictions) in their evangelization and outreach efforts. The study summarizes the experiences of these "exemplary" parishes, so that they can be adopted by other - "normal" - parish communities. The selection of both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes was done by seven jurisdictions participating in this study. The examples of what is discussed in this report include:

- ❖ How do "exemplary" parishes achieve a high degree of involvement of their members in the life of a parish;
- ❖ Four distinct features of religious education in the "exemplary" parishes;
- ❖ The "secrets" of being a parish that attracts and welcomes new members;
- ❖ Eight good practices of welcoming first-time visitors and inquirers about the Faith;
- ❖ Six "lessons" that Church leadership can learn from the "exemplary" parishes.

The study found that few clergy in both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes place a strong emphasis on an active "search for and bringing in" new members. Instead, a majority of clergy define evangelism in the Orthodox Church as "passive" (i.e. "Come and see") evangelism. In short, most Orthodox clergy - both in "normal" and "exemplary" parishes - believe that the people will be drawn into the Orthodox Church merely by discovering the power and truth of the Church's teachings and practices and the beauty of Orthodox Liturgy. This finding suggests that - when it comes to the question of "evangelism" - Orthodox priests rely heavily on their perceived natural attractiveness of the Orthodox Church for many religious seekers.

However, while most priests adhere to similar definitions and general approaches to evangelization, the clergy in "exemplary" and "normal" parishes differ significantly in how they practice these approaches and embody them in reality. That is, all clergy believe in the power of witnessing the Orthodox Faith through the genuine Christian lives of the individuals and their entire parish communities, but "exemplary" parishes provide a much better example of such life than the "normal" parishes.

Similarly, all clergy believe that the richness of Orthodox liturgical life lived out in a parish can attract new disciples to the Orthodox Church, but the "exemplary" parishes offer more inclusive, engaging and meaningful experience of the Orthodox worship than the "normal" parishes.

"Go and Make Disciples: Evangelization and Outreach in US Orthodox Parishes" describes in detail the distinct features of the "exemplary" parishes that make them "stronger magnets" for new members and inquirers about the Orthodox Faith than the "normal" parishes. Of a particular interest for the church leadership could be the chapter on **"Six 'Lessons' that Church Leadership Could Learn."**

This study thus far was based exclusively on experiences, information, and perceptions on the part of the parish clergy. While the priests' approaches towards Orthodox evangelization and outreach are very important since they help "shape" their parish communities, the voices of the laity - both parish leaders and ordinary "people in the pews" - must be carefully heard as well. Accordingly, the next stage of study on Orthodox evangelism and outreach in the United States will approach our lay church members: old and young, cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, those who are very involved in their parishes and those who participate "once in a while."

The following table offers an abridged overview of the most salient features of the "exemplary" parishes that distinguish them from the "normal" parishes. The table also indicates the pages of the full study report where each of these features are discussed in greater detail.

Major Distinct Features of the Parishes that Are "Exemplary" in their Evangelization and Outreach Efforts in Comparison with "Normal" Parishes

Area of church life	"Exemplary" parishes	"Normal" parishes
<p>MEMBERSHIP Demography of membership <i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 32-35 of the full study report</i></p> <hr/> <p>Other distinct features of membership <i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 36-39 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Much stronger presence of converts to Orthodoxy among parishioners; ❖ Significantly higher percentage of persons with college degrees among parishioners; ❖ Significantly higher percentage of persons who are new to the parish in the past 3 years among parishioners; ❖ Significantly smaller percentage of senior citizens (age 65+) among parishioners; ❖ Significantly higher percentage of households with children at home <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ High ethnic and cultural diversity among parishioners ❖ Steady growth in number of parishioners which is typically accompanied by increasing diversity among members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Much lower percentage of converts to Orthodoxy; ❖ Significantly lower percentage of persons with college degrees among parishioners; ❖ Significantly lower percentage of persons who are new to the parish in the past 3 years; ❖ Significantly higher percentage of senior citizens (age 65+); ❖ Significantly lower percentage of households with children at home <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ More homogenous social and ethnic-cultural composition of parishioners ❖ No significant changes in membership over period of time
<p>PRIESTHOOD Demography of priesthood <i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 41-44 of the full study report</i></p> <hr/> <p>Changes in priest's understanding of his role of a pastor and leader of a parish over period of time <i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 48-51 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ More converts to Orthodoxy ❖ Clergy have typically much longer "tenure:" i.e. they stay longer time with their churches <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The original focus on "running programs and administration" shifted towards being a good teacher, preacher and a "role model" for parishioners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Fewer converts to Orthodoxy ❖ Clergy have typically much shorter "tenure:" i.e. they stay shorter time with their churches <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ As the years go by, clergy are becoming increasingly involved in administration, management and fundraising tasks
<p>INVOLVEMENT of parishioners in the life of a parish and in evangelization and outreach <i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 52-54 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Typically, half or dominant majority of parishioners are actively involved in all aspects of a parish life ❖ Outreach efforts and evangelization are often perceived as the way the entire parish community lives and sees itself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Relatively small "core" group of parishioners does everything in a parish ❖ "Program approach" to evangelization: outreach efforts are typically carried out by the designated groups of parishioners
<p>RELIGIOUS EDUCATION</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Along with religious education for children strong emphasis is given on continuing faith formation of the adult church members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Religious education focuses primarily on children and is typically limited to Sunday school

<p>RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (continued from previous page)</p> <p><i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 58-61 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Religious educators are "experimental." They design parish's own religious education programs, employ a variety of forms of learning about faith, and "tailor" their religious education programs to the needs of particular groups within the parish community ❖ "Total Parish Education" approach with the double goal: a) involve everyone in a parish in continuing religious education and b) encourage as many as possible parishioners to become religious educators and teachers themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Religious educators prefer to use the standard religious education curriculum and formats developed and recommended by their respective dioceses and jurisdictions ❖ A limited group of parishioners is involved in parish's religious education programs
<p>PARISH GOVERNANCE</p> <p><i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 62-67 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ "Conciliar model" is typical. The entire parish community is involved in the process of decision-making. Decisions are often made by "consensus." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The parishes are typically "run" and decisions made by a limited group of people - the members of parish councils/boards.
<p>SYSTEM OF FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS BY PARISHIONERS</p> <p><i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 67-69 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Along with "pledging/stewardship" and "tithing" models, many parishes successfully employ a "free will offering" model. In this model, parishioners are encouraged constantly to give to the best of their ability, but are not required to commit in advance any specified amount of money or percentage of their income. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Along with "pledging/stewardship" and "tithing" models, many parishes remain with "membership dues" model: a fixed amount of contributions is required to be considered a member.
<p>PROGRAMS AND MINISTRIES Changes in programs and ministries over period of time</p> <p><i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 71-75 of the full study report</i></p> <hr/> <p>Top two areas of ministries that are seen as the most important by the parishes</p> <p><i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 76-79 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Parishes typically embrace changes in ministries and keep trying new programs and activities even if they "don't work out" ❖ Understanding that "nothing is carved in stone," that programs and activities come and go depending on the parish's life-cycle and changing circumstances ❖ Parishes are more likely to expand intentionally and significantly the diversity of new ministries <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Parishes pay primary attention to religious education and faith formation of church members. Parishes offer variety of religious education and faith formation programs that address different subjects and issues and are geared to the needs and interests of the various categories of church members. ❖ The second in importance are outward oriented "social outreach and charitable work in the local community" ministries and programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Parishes are more indifferent with regard to developing new programs and ministries ❖ Parishes tend to "hold" to existing programs and activities ❖ Parishes typically add new or improve existing programs in only limited number of areas of a parish life <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Parishes pay primary attention to religious education and faith formation of church members. Parishes prefer to use standard and uniform formats of religious education: e.g. Sunday school for children, Bible study for adults, etc. ❖ The second in importance are ministries and programs that focus on "social life and fellowship" within a parish

<p>PARISH COMMUNITY: Relations among members <i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 86-89 of the full study report</i></p> <hr/> <p>Attitudes towards visitors and inquirers <i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 90-95 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Parishes foster mutual care, support and practical help among parishioners. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Strong emphasis on welcoming inquirers about the Faith and first-time visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Parishes maintain overall atmosphere of welcoming and hospitality, but do not pay much attention to mutual care and support among parishioners <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ No particular emphasis on welcoming inquirers about the Faith and first-time visitors
<p>PARISH AND ITS LOCAL NEIGHBORHOOD</p> <p><i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 103-104 and 106-111 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Most parishes think that they are "well known in the local community and surrounding neighborhoods" ❖ Majority of the parishes have made "considerable effort" to make themselves better known in their local communities ❖ The parishes think that they are well known in their local communities primarily <i>because</i> of their participation in various community's events/initiatives and consistent effort to be a "good neighbor." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Minority of parishes think that they are "well known in the local community and surrounding neighborhoods" ❖ Minority of the parishes have made "considerable effort" to make themselves better known in their local communities ❖ The parishes think that they are known in their local communities primarily <i>because</i> of their "ethnic" culture and parish-based events (food-sales, festivals, fundraising events, etc.).
<p>RELATIONS WITH NON-ORTHODOX RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS</p> <p><i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 116-117 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ More parishes are involved in local inter-Christian relations/cooperation. ❖ The parishes engage in a variety of inter-Christian activities: charitable work, ecumenical worship services, joint social and cultural events (picnics, concerts), work in the area of social justice (addressing issues of immigration, criminal justice reform, urban education, etc.), working together on reducing crime in the neighborhoods, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Fewer parishes are involved in local inter-Christian relations and cooperation. ❖ Ecumenical cooperation is typically limited to either strictly charitable work (running homeless shelters, soup kitchens, food drives, etc.) or to participation of the Orthodox priests in local clergy associations.
<p>APPROACHES TO "HOW TO WITNESS ORTHODOX FAITH IN AMERICA" (continued on the next page)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Pay attention to personal growth in Faith and personal witnessing by everyone in parish community. When Church and Faith become more "meaningful" for parishioners, it makes them both more engaged in the parish and eager to share their Faith. ❖ Pay attention to having a vibrant and full liturgical life (not merely formal worship services) as one of the key-elements in successful Orthodox evangelism ❖ Serve the community you are in - not only your own people. Be present in multiple settings/venues in the local community and offer your own "parish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Orthodox Christians should hold firm to Orthodox Faith and traditions; be proud of them and be willing to explain them to "others," when (and if) they find their way to Orthodox Church; ❖ Witnessing Orthodox Faith to America can simply be done by setting a personal example of being a good Orthodox Christian and living faithful life

<p><i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 136-144 of the full study report</i></p>	<p>space" for community events and initiatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Make Orthodoxy "understandable" for the others. Make a conscious effort to disassociate the image of the Orthodox Church as being "ethnic church" and, instead, try to make it more "approachable" for the others. 	
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Introduction: Background and Need for the Study

Most reference books and glossaries agree on a double meaning for the verb "evangelize," defining it as:

- a) to preach the Christian Gospel and
- b) to convert to Christianity.

Following this simplified definition,¹ for the Orthodox Church, "*evangelization*" would mean making people aware of the Orthodox Christian Faith and, subsequently, bringing them into the bosom of the Orthodox Church. This goal includes:

- ❖ An "external" evangelization. That is, winning for the Church the hearts of people who do not know the fullness of the Gospel and live without Christian Faith;
- ❖ An "internal" evangelization. That is, transforming nominal, non-practicing Orthodox into active members of the Church and re-catechizing and further educating existing members.

In addition, evangelization efforts should also reach out to inquirers about the Orthodox Faith - those persons who have become disillusioned with their current faith communities and who are in search for a new "spiritual home."

Orthodox social and religious *outreach* can be broadly defined as establishing an active Orthodox Church presence in new places and settings. This can be done in a variety of forms: by founding new mission parishes, encouraging existing parishes to become more engaged into their local communities and neighborhoods, expanding use of social media, founding Orthodox educational facilities (schools, colleges, and seminaries, et al.), developing Orthodox mass media, creating new OCF chapters in universities and much more. Orthodox religious and social outreach and Orthodox evangelization are strongly related to one another. Indeed, Orthodox outreach should be seen as a key element and crucial factor in successful Orthodox evangelization.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, He commanded, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."² Accordingly, evangelization, sharing our Faith and bringing

¹ More discussion on the origins and usage of the term "evangelization" will be offered in chapter II "Defining "Orthodox Evangelism:" Not an Easy Task

² Matt. 28:19-20.

new believers to Jesus Christ and into the Church, is what God commands us and it is at the very center of how we are called to live out our Orthodox Faith. However, there is also a "pragmatic" need for this effort. Without paying serious attention to evangelization and missionary outreach, the Orthodox Church in the United States is likely to stagnate, lose its vibrancy and vitality, and decline in members. The data from the 2015 national study of US Orthodox Churches conducted under the auspices of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops³ confirm this alarming prognosis. One of the study's findings revealed that between 2010 and 2015 the median attendance at weekend services dropped from 90 to 75 persons per "typical average" American Orthodox parish (i.e., for all US Orthodox Churches combined). In simple terms, in 2010, half of US Orthodox parishes had more than 90 persons in attendance on a typical weekend and half of them had less than that. In 2015, this figure decreased to 75. Among three major American Orthodox jurisdictions, between 2010 and 2015, the median weekend attendance in GOA parishes declined from 177 to 150 and it dropped from 85 to 75 in the case of Antiochian parishes. Only OCA churches showed a slight increase in the weekend worship attendance. See Tab. 1.

Tab. 1 Median attendance (number of persons) at Saturday and Sunday worship services combined
 ("Median" means that in the half of the parishes the attendance was higher, while the other half of the parishes the attendance was lower)

	Median attendance in 2010	Median attendance in 2015
All US Orthodox parishes	90	75
Antiochian parishes	85	75
GOA parishes	177	150
OCA parishes	65	70

³ The 2015 study "Orthodox Christian Churches in the 21st Century America" was part of a much larger US national inter-Christian and interfaith study of American religious congregations titled "Faith Communities Today" (FACT). The 2015 FACT national survey and study was undertaken by the "Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership" (CCSP) which is an interfaith coalition of religious researchers representing broad spectrum of American faith communities. Originally, the "Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas" (SCOBA) and currently the "Assembly of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in North and Central America" has been and remains one of the partners in CCSP cooperative project. The study "Orthodox Christian Churches in the 21st Century America" was conducted via online survey of the local parishes. In each parish, the questionnaire was completed by one key-informant: typically - a parish priest. 580 parishes (or 30% of all US Orthodox parishes) participated in the "Orthodox Parish Life Study."

This decline in church attendance effectively means that from 2010-2015 a number of Orthodox Christians either abandoned their churches altogether or - at the best - they became more passive and disengaged in the lives of their parishes (i.e. they stopped attending worship services on a regular basis).

The 2015 national study also indicated that nearly one-third of US Orthodox parishes perceive their future as rather grim. Being asked "Which of the following best describes your sense of this parish's future?", 15% of the parishes responded "We are doing Okay now, but the future is very uncertain", 11% of the parishes reported "We are struggling and that is likely to continue for the foreseeable future" and 4% of the parishes have chosen the answer "Not sure that this parish will survive much longer."

See Tab. 2.

Tab. 2 "Which of the following best describes your sense of this parish's future?"

(2015 national survey, based on responses from 580 US Orthodox parishes)

	% of parishes in each category
We are thriving and this should continue	23%
We are doing Okay and this should continue	39%
We are struggling, but the future clearly looks better	8%
We are doing Okay now, but the future is very uncertain	15%
We are struggling and that is likely to continue for the foreseeable future	11%
Not sure this parish will survive much longer	4%

And, yet, the vast majority of our parish communities are rather passive when it comes to reaching out to potential new members. When asked "Overall, to what extent are your parishioners involved in bringing new members into this parish?" less than one-in-five parishes (18%) reported "Quite a bit/A lot," whereas nearly half (47%) admitted "Not at all/A little." See Tab. 3.

Tab. 3 "Overall, to what extent are your parishioners involved in bringing new members into this

parish?" (2015 national survey, based on responses from 580 US Orthodox parishes)

	Not at all/A little	Some	Quite a bit/A lot
All US Orthodox parishes	47%	35%	18%
Antiochian parishes	32%	50%	18%
GOA parishes	51%	33%	16%
OCA parishes	43%	35%	22%

But does this imply that our lay church members do not care about greater Orthodox outreach into the wider community? The answer to this question is: "No, in fact, they care quite a bit." The 2015 study "Exploring Orthodox Generosity: Giving in US Orthodox Parishes⁴" looked at 18 different areas in the life of an Orthodox parish and examined how possible/potential improvements in each of these areas would affect giving among parishioners. The study found that the **top desirable changes** in the life of American Orthodox parishes that would spark generosity and result in greater giving of church members are: a) greater social outreach into local community; and b) **stronger emphasis on mission and evangelism programs**. Less than half of US Orthodox church members are satisfied with the present situation in these two areas of their parish life.

It is our hope that this study and the following report will energize outreach and evangelization ministries in US Orthodox Churches by offering them some ideas and sharing practices and strategies developed by a number of American Orthodox parishes that can be described as "exemplary" in their outreach and evangelization efforts.

I. Approach, Goal and Procedure of the Study

Jesus desires that all people be saved and come to know the truth.⁵ This means that all works of the Church should ideally have an "evangelical dimension." This study uses three basic approaches as to what "evangelization" implies on a parish level.

- I. Evangelization is not about the "one time" projects or events that merely increase the number of people who attend the parish. Rather, evangelization is the entire way of living of an Orthodox parish community. It is a continuing and evolving process that constantly wins new people to Christ and makes current church members more devoted disciples. Further, evangelism should not be seen as simply "one of the various church ministries," but it should be treated as the engine that drives motivation and inspires each aspect in the life of a parish.
- II. Evangelization is not about the work of the parish clergy or parish leadership or designated group of parishioners. Rather evangelization is about efforts of an entire parish community;

⁴ <http://assemblyofbishops.org/assets/files/docs/research/OrthodoxGenerosity.pdf>

⁵ In 1Tim. 2:3-4, it writes "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

III. Evangelization has two aspects:

- "inner" evangelization: continuing faith formation of the current members of a parish and efforts geared towards passive church members and "nominal" Orthodox;
- "outward" evangelization: reaching out to unchurched people and non-Orthodox "inquirers" about the Orthodox Faith.

Regrettably, not many US Orthodox parishes have adopted this vision and are passionate about strong emphasis on outreach and evangelism. There are several possible explanations for this. One is that some parishes have more interest in numbers (i.e. simply having more members) rather than "winning new souls for the Church." Another reason is that many churches are satisfied with "where they are right now" and with those attending presently their services. Yet another very likely reason is that the parish communities simply do not know how to do this: "to reach out and evangelize." It is also feasible to assume that for many parish leaders (both clergy and laity) evangelization and outreach work is not a priority, but something which is put on "back burner" and remains there.

The goal of this study is to make a step towards developing a more effective approach to Orthodox evangelization through both religious and social outreach. The first stage of this study and the following report will examine the strategies and practices of evangelization work that have been developed by some parish communities that can be viewed as "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts. Our hope is that other parishes would be willing to look at, to try and to adopt these strategies and practices.

When the study was designed, the preliminary consultations with key persons responsible for the evangelization and mission work in the Antiochian Archdiocese (Fr. Michael Kaiser), Greek Orthodox Archdiocese (Fr. Jim Kordaris) and Orthodox Church in America (Fr. John Parker) revealed that none of three major US Orthodox jurisdictions ever conducted a nationally representative study on evangelization and missionary work in their parishes.⁶ Therefore, a particular effort was made to engage into the study the parishes that represent various Orthodox jurisdictions and operate in various local settings.

⁶ Further, the consultations with Association of Religion Data Archives (www.thearda.com) indicated that very little has been done in terms of studying evangelization and outreach work on the *national level* by the other - non-Orthodox - American Christian denominations.

That is, "Go and Make Disciples: Evangelization and Outreach Efforts in US Orthodox Parishes" is the first ever national study on evangelization and outreach practices in US Orthodox Christian Churches. Inevitably, because of the novelty and complexity of the study's subject, an element of "trial and error" was present in the process of designing and administering the study (e.g. methodology used, issues to be deeper examined, constituencies to work with, etc.). On the following pages, we report the findings from the first stage of the study which was focused on the parish-level approach to evangelization and outreach. The first stage of the study (that can also be seen as "pilot study") helped us to identify the areas and questions that require deeper examination.

The study was initiated by and conducted under the auspices of the Committee for Agencies and Endorsed Organizations of the Assembly of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America (Bishop Gregory of Nyssa, Chairman). Mr. Alexei Krindatch, Assembly's research coordinator, was coordinator of the study and principal author of this study report. Seven US Orthodox jurisdictions participated in the first stage of the study "Living Out Our Faith: Evangelization and Outreach Efforts in US Orthodox Parishes:"

- ❖ Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese (Sbdn. Adam Roberts, liaison for the study)
- ❖ American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese (Fr. Andrew Fetchina, liaison for the study)
- ❖ Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (Fr. James Kordaris, liaison for the study)
- ❖ Orthodox Church in America (Fr. Eric Tosi and Fr. John Parker, liaisons for the study)
- ❖ Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese (Fr. Julian Anitei, liaison for the study)
- ❖ Serbian Orthodox Church (Fr. Gregory Edwards,⁷ liaison for the study)
- ❖ Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Fr. Myron Oryhon, liaison for the study)

Each jurisdiction participating in the study selected five parishes that - from the perspective of the jurisdictional liaisons - can be seen as *exemplary in their evangelization and outreach efforts*. For the purpose of this study, on the following pages we will call this group of the parishes "exemplary parishes." Side-by-side with the "exemplary parishes," each jurisdiction also selected a group of "normal" parishes: i.e. the parishes that could be seen as "typical" for this or that jurisdiction. The comprehensive online survey was completed by the clergy in both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes (the questionnaire

⁷ By the end of the data-gathering from the parishes, Fr. Gregory Edwards was transferred to the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese.

is available in Appendix 3). One of the questions in the survey asked: "Would you say that your parish is truly 'outreach oriented'?" This question was used as a "control question." That is, if a parish community was designated by its jurisdictional liaison as exemplary in its evangelization and outreach efforts, but, at the same time responded "no" or "not sure" to the question "Would you say that your parish is truly 'outreach oriented'?" such parishes were removed from the sample. Similarly, if a parish was designated by its jurisdictional liaison as "normal" (i.e. not placing strong emphasis on evangelization and outreach) but, at the same time responded "yes" to the question "Would you say that your parish is truly 'outreach oriented'?" such parishes were also removed from the sample. The over-sample was done (i.e. more parishes were added by the jurisdictional liaisons to the study) until a situation was achieved when all designations of liaisons of the parishes (as either "exemplary" or "normal") corresponded fully with the parishes' self-perception as being or not being "truly outreach oriented." The final study's data-set included 75 parishes, including:

- 11 parishes of the Antiochian Archdiocese (5 "exemplary" and 6 "normal" parishes)
- 10 parishes of the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese (4 "exemplary" and 6 "normal" parishes)
- 12 parishes of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese (6 "exemplary" and 6 "normal" parishes)
- 12 parishes of the Orthodox Church in America (6 "exemplary" and 6 "normal" parishes)
- 10 parishes of the Romanian Archdiocese (5 "exemplary" and 5 "normal" parishes)
- 10 parishes of the Serbian Orthodox Church (5 "exemplary" and 5 "normal" parishes)
- 10 parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (5 "exemplary" and 5 "normal" parishes)

The goal of analysis of the responses to the survey was to identify the distinct features and characteristics of the "exemplary" parish communities. It should be emphasized that a significant number of questions in the survey were open-ended questions that allowed the priests to write extensive answers and offer their thoughts and reflections on various subjects.

Most importantly, in this survey, the parishes shared with us their unique approaches and practices in the areas of evangelization and outreach. The online survey was followed up by phone interviews with a number of parish clergy participating in the study.

II. Defining "Orthodox Evangelism:" Not an Easy Task

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS:

- ❖ The study asked a question about the parish clergy's definition of evangelism: "Different people (clergy and laity alike) have different understandings of what 'evangelization' means. Can you offer your definition of what "good evangelization' means? Perhaps, you can provide some examples from the life of your parish?"
 - There were no discernable differences in definitions of "evangelization" between the clergy from various jurisdictions;
 - There were no statistically significant differences and no discernable patterns in definitions of "evangelization" between cradle Orthodox priests and the clergy who are converts to Orthodoxy;
 - There was again very little consistent difference between definitions of "evangelization" provided by the clergy from "exemplary" versus "normal" parishes.
- ❖ The parishes participating in the study are different in how they *practice* evangelism and outreach (i.e. "exemplary" versus "normal" parishes), but this does not mean that there is a difference between them in how their parish clergy *understand* evangelism.
- ❖ A majority of Orthodox parish clergy understand evangelism in the Orthodox Church as "passive" (i.e. "Come and see") evangelism:
 - The most common definition of evangelism by the parish clergy was about evangelism being described as living a genuine Christian life. By this definition, *evangelism is about personal growth in Christ that is witnessed by others and, therefore, draws them to Christ*. That is, when one lives a life as an Orthodox Christian, people around see and come to a desire to know Christ through that example.
 - The second common type of definition of evangelism focused on Orthodox worship and the Liturgy. The definitions in this category suggested that one is introduced to the Orthodox Church chiefly through the experiencing the Liturgy. By this definition, *the fullness of liturgical life lived out in a parish is the key element in presenting Orthodoxy to the non-Orthodox and attracting them to the Orthodox Church*.
- ❖ The goal of increasing attendance or church growth via evangelism was NOT the focus of a vast majority of the definitions of evangelism.

DISCUSSION:

“One serious disadvantage in our various missionary efforts is the lack of a general vision of apostolic work.”⁸ Archbishop Anastasios of Albania

In order to understand a problem, you must be able to define it. One cannot understand what one does not identify. Defining evangelism is a perfect example. The most fundamental term for this study is perhaps the most complicated. It appears that evangelism is a sixteenth century term and is limited to Western Christianity. In fact, the first reference to it is in the secular writings of Francis Bacon, an inventor of the scientific method.⁹

The root term is used some fifty-five times in the Bible, but found mostly in Acts and almost not at all in the patristic sources. While the Bible refers to the *euaggelion* or “Good News” as the message of Jesus Christ, the verbal form *euaggelizesthai* is rarely used and usually only in terms of the bringing of the Gospel message, although even that usage is open to debate. Other connotative terms are used in the New Testament such as *martyria*, meaning “witness” and *kerysso* (from where we receive the term 'kerygma') meaning “to proclaim or herald.” These terms are also not used often but do assist in understanding the concept of evangelism as an active proclamation. By most definitions, however, evangelism is the “proclaiming the good news.” Thus, this act of proclaiming is at the heart of understanding of evangelism.¹⁰ This definition is shared by some Western theologians. “At the center of the act of evangelism is the message announced a verbal, out-loud assertion of something decisive not known until the moment of utterance.”¹¹ In the Christian context, this has come to mean the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Risen Lord, a view which is shared by some Orthodox theologians, “This good news is that God has spoken and acted fully, finally, and definitively in His Son Jesus Christ, God’s incarnate Word. The blessed message is that by His crucifixion, resurrection, and glorification

⁸ Archbishop Anastasios, ““They Kingdom Come” Orthodox Witness in the Modern World” in *Mission in Christ’s Way* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Press, 2010), 99.

⁹ John Bowen, *Evangelism for “Normal” People* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 13.

¹⁰ The Greek word [εὐαγγέλιον](#) is translated as εὖ which means “good” and ἀγγέλλω which means to announce so the full definition is one who announce something good.

¹¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspective on Evangelism: Living in a Three-Storeyed Universe* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 14.

Jesus the Messiah has brought God's kingdom to the world."¹² Or in more common parlance "preaching and teaching."

However, despite this common foundational definition of evangelism, its practical application becomes more problematic. In reality, evangelism is interpreted differently and according to the particular theologies that underpin the various Christian communities. Even a cursory reading of anthologies such as *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* highlights the massive number of publications on evangelism from non-Orthodox sources, each filled with its own nuanced definitions and applications across a wide spectrum of theologies.¹³ Such a diversity of opinion runs the gamut from traditional Protestant missional practices through emerging issues of postmodernism, liberation theology, and feminism. This diversity of opinions indicates that there is not a unified theology in the entire field of evangelism.

In addition, as the terms took on their modern connotations, the Orthodox often adopted them outright in order to find common ground in ecumenical discussions, without ensuring identical theological definitions. As seen time and again, while the words may be same, the meanings may be completely different, with each side assuming that the other had in mind the same nuance. This led to some misunderstandings and it is as if the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox are sometimes speaking a different theological language.

The definitions of "evangelism" that will be discussed on the following pages are as our respondents - the Orthodox clergy - interpret this term: that is, they do not necessarily conform to non-Orthodox definitions. However, this Orthodox self-understanding of "evangelism" is central to this study.

This study asked the question about the parish clergy's definition of evangelism: "Different people (clergy and laity alike) have different understandings of what 'evangelization' means. Can you offer your definition of what "good evangelization' means? Perhaps, you can provide some examples from the life of your parish?"

¹² Thomas Hopko, *Speaking the Truth in Love: Education, Mission and Witness in Contemporary Orthodoxy* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 2004), 80.

¹³ Paul W. Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner, *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

The ultimate goal was to get a mixture of interpretations and understandings of "evangelization" across the spectrum of the Orthodox experience in the United States.

Remarkably, only 4 out of the 75 respondents did not have an answer or stated that they could not define evangelization. This is significant in that very few clergy felt either unqualified to answer the question or simply chose not to answer the question. Almost all of the respondents offered thoughtful and lengthy answers.

As expected, the answers ran the entire spectrum of "formulas." Again, how can we discuss something if we cannot agree on what it means? Yet, once one gets deeper inside these self-generated definitions, one can see the influence of Orthodox theology, suppositions, and even practices. As a result, the definitions offered by our respondents are not as far off from each other as at first glance.

The outcomes of the analysis of responses are interesting in two ways. First there were no discernable patterns in definitions of "evangelization" provided by the clergy from various jurisdictions. Second, most importantly (and somewhat surprisingly), there was very little consistent difference between definitions of "evangelizations" provided by the clergy from "exemplary" versus "normal" parishes. What does this imply from the perspective of the study? This finding supports two very important theses as outlined above. First, there is no one universally accepted definition of evangelism as it relates to the Orthodox Churches in the United States. While these may at first seem slightly disorienting, it is perfectly understandable and acceptable. Different parishes have simply different focuses and approaches to evangelism depending on a particular local parish context. Second, the parishes are different in how they *practice* evangelism and outreach (i.e. "exemplary" versus "normal" parishes), but this does not mean that there is a difference between them in how their parish clergy *understand* evangelism. In other words, where these 75 parishes belong in the American Orthodox experience as well as how they function in practice is not necessarily related to how they understand and define evangelism.

Further examination of the answers of our respondents - their personal definitions of "evangelization" - revealed several common themes that provide good insights into the Orthodox understanding of evangelism.

The first most common type of definition of evangelism (22 answers) was about evangelism being described simply as living a Christian life. By this definition, evangelism is about personal growth in Christ that is witnessed by others and, therefore, draws them to Christ: i.e., something which Veronis refers as “passive evangelism.”¹⁴ That is, when one lives a life as an Orthodox Christian, people around see and come to a desire to know Christ through that example. A few illustrations from the study are helpful. One respondent wrote “Living the faith first, sharing it by living it, loving to live it, and being as dutiful and faithful as we can be.” Another defined evangelism as “Live the Gospel so that those you meet see something unique about you and want what you have. There is no better evangelizing than a life of faith. Preach by your actions, not your words.” Yet another clergyman answered the survey by asking, “We must live in the Gospel to be able to share the Gospel. If we do not live the Gospel and have the Gospel in our heart, what do we have to share?” By responses in this category, one is reminded of the great examples of the saints such as the early desert fathers, St. Nino of Georgia, St. Seraphim of Sarov, St. Herman of Alaska and so on. Their Christian witness was through their lives and, accordingly, many clergy believe that their parishes can demonstrate their Christian witness through the lives of individual parishioners and entire parish communities.

The second common type of definition of evangelism (21 answers) was intimately connected with Orthodox worship and the Liturgy. The respondents in this category emphasized that the fullness of liturgical life lived out in a parish is the key element in presenting Orthodoxy to the non-Orthodox. That is, by this definition, one is introduced to the Orthodox Church chiefly through the experiencing the Liturgy. It is understandable that Orthodox Christians believe that the Liturgy is in itself an act of evangelism and mission, because the goal of evangelism is to ultimately bring a person into communion with the Orthodox Church. And this is exactly what the Liturgy does. Father Alexander Schmemmann, a prominent 20th Century Orthodox theologian, posed the question, “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?”¹⁵ His own answer to this question: “The Eucharist - transforming 'the Church into what is' - transforms it into mission.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Luke Veronis, *Missionaries, Monks and Martyrs: Making Disciples of All Nations*. (Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life Publications, 1994), 11.

¹⁵ Alexander Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 210.

¹⁶ Schmemmann, *Church*, 255.

The Church, the Liturgy, the Sacraments are the central to the life of an Orthodox Christian. As Fr. Ion Bria, wrote, "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."¹⁷ So as we look at the many commonalities in this second group of answers, it becomes clear how such thinking defines evangelism. One elegant answer was "Evangelization through the way we pray, work and celebrate as ONE PARISH FAMILY." Another equates it as "Making our faith known to the un-churched. Offering them opportunities to come and worship... make known the Orthodox Faith." Both, the first and the second category of definitions of evangelism show that a majority of respondents (43 out of the 75) understand evangelism in the Orthodox Church as being passive. "Come and see" (John 1:39 for example) would best categorize the first two categories of definitions of evangelism.

The remaining set of answers was divided among variety of more traditional understandings of evangelism: preaching, teaching, proclaiming the "Good News", sharing the Faith with others, etc. These definitions are "active" definitions of evangelism. They imply getting out into the community, sharing the Gospel and Good News of Jesus Christ, initiating and running programs that serve the parish and the surrounding community, thus, bringing actively Christ to the people. Fr. Thomas Hopko reflected, "This Christian evangelism is always accompanied by teaching (*didaskalia*), and confession (*homologia*) and defense (*apologia*) and witness (*martyria*). And it is accomplished in *works of love* for human beings performed in concrete acts of mercy and compassion without condition or discrimination."¹⁸ Here are some answers that demonstrate this statement. For example, "Being a good witness of the faith and consciously striving to share your faith in word and deed. Making sure that our parishioners do not feel our faith is a private affair, but it is something that they should take into the world and share with others in a gentle and loving way." Or as another priest puts it, "Good 'evangelism' entails a parish community being active in their greater community while also being active regarding their participation in the sacramental life of the parish and liturgically. Too often parishes (and priests) make it an 'either/or' debate. Parish communities evangelize by serving those who surround their church building and by participating in Confession/Repentance and Communion regularly as well as by attending services

¹⁷ Ion Bria, *The Liturgy After the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996), 9.

¹⁸ Hopko, *Speaking*, 70.

beyond Sunday Divine Liturgy.” Or as another respondent suggested “Evangelization means simply sharing the good news of the Gospel. A particular important tool in evangelization is starting at a shared level, such as a Bible Study, or how Orthodox theology handles particular contemporary issues and events. This is a process of a first step that opens the door more frequently than others do.”

It should also be noted that the goal of increasing attendance or church growth via programs and evangelism was not the focus of a vast majority of the definitions. In fact, such goal was rarely seen. One clergyman insightfully responded: (Evangelism is about) “To be genuinely concerned about the Gospel and not numbers/growth per se as an end in itself.” Or as another wrote. “Evangelization is not only seeking new people, not only welcoming new people, but actively making them followers of the Lord Jesus i.e. discipling them.” Or as another wrote, “But most of all, ‘live your Orthodox faith’ - it is a way of life. Evangelization begins with prayer, not programs. Evangelization programs always fail, because programs by definition have an ending. Welcome all and know that you cannot die if you enjoy God's mercy.”

Finally, a note should be made on the religious background of the clergy as a possible factor influencing their understanding of “evangelism.” Forty-three of the clergy identified themselves as “cradle” Orthodox or someone who was raised in the Orthodox Church. Thirty priests identified themselves as “convert” or someone who entered the Orthodox Church from another background (the remaining two priests did not answer the question about their religious upbringing). Statistically, the responses of these two groups of priests to the question were not that different. In other words, the “cradle Orthodox” and the convert clergy were nearly equally likely to provide the answers that fit into one of the categories listed above. However, those brought up in the Orthodox Church have a very slight tendency to concentrate on “passive” evangelism while those who came into the Church in the later stages of their lives are slightly more likely to concentrate on more “active” modes. Paradigmatic of this finding would be these two responses. From a clergyman who was raised in the Church, “Living the faith first, sharing it by living it, loving to live it, and being as dutiful and faithful as we can be.” From a clergyman who came into the Church, “It is to preach the actual Gospel, both to members and to non-members. Once a real conversion of the heart happens, then the rest can be taught.” However, it should again be noted that these differences between the cradle Orthodox and convert clergy in their definitions of evangelism were not statistically significant: the responses from both “cradle” and “convert” clergy were nearly

equally present in all categories of answers.

We conclude the discussion on how the respondents define “good evangelization” with a few critical notes. First, most of the respondents believe that evangelism is a central part of the life in a Church. Whether they are clergy leading the parishes that are “exemplary” in evangelism and outreach efforts” or the priests serving in the “normal” parishes and regardless of the jurisdiction, evangelism is for them a critical part of Church life. Indeed, their personal definitions of evangelism and approaches to such areas as preaching, teaching and programs or even living the life of the Church may differ, but they all believed that evangelism was something that the Church ultimately does.

Second, most respondents place greater emphasis on the “passive” understanding of evangelism. In other words, the majority of clergy believe that the people will be drawn into the life of the Church through their own spiritual search and discovering the power and beauty of the Orthodox Liturgy, prayer life and Church’s teachings and practices. This does not discount the need to actively present the Gospel and the Church to the world, but it demonstrates the strong belief of our clergy in the natural attractiveness of the Orthodox Church for many religious seekers.

Third, almost all of the answers centered around not just the individual activities but rather around communal (i.e. parish community) activities. Evangelism was not something that was done in a vacuum but deeply within the context of the Church. As one respondent phrased it, “Good evangelization begins with the people in the parish. Philip Schaff, the 19th century translator of the Church Fathers, concluded that the Early Church grew because ‘every community understood itself to be a missionary society; and every Christian was a missionary.’” Another respondent simply put it as “Good Evangelization means being a loving and welcoming church family.”

This Christian community and Church-centered aspects in evangelism are not uniquely Orthodox, but they are certainly manifested uniquely in the Orthodox Church through the liturgical life, the sacramental actions and the cycle of feasts and fasts experienced through the life of and in a parish. Fr. Ion Bria perceptively wrote, “The Orthodox understanding of the ecclesial character of evangelism means that the Church is the aim, the fulfillment of the Gospel, rather than an instrument or means of mission. Of course, a church without evangelism and without mission is one that has abandoned its fundamental calling to be the original and authentic witness of Pentecost. The Christian community is

the community of the Gospel, the sacramental synaxis where Christ mediates the communion of man with God through the Holy Spirit."¹⁹

Fourth, the other significant aspect in the responses was their focus on Christ and Bible. Almost every answer included a reference to Jesus Christ or the Bible. In contrast, very often in modern "Western" evangelism definitions such aspects as social justice or even political issues can become the focus for evangelism. None of the answers provided by our respondents focused on this. Rather, the answers emphasized presenting Christ and the Bible to the world in, what the respondents deemed, an authentic manner. Answers such as these are paradigmatic: "Being true to Christ's message, not in a cheesy or processed way, but one that involves interpersonal communication and genuine compassion. We have the true faith. We should want to share it authentically." Or as another respondent stated: "Bearing witness to the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to all the Good that God has done in our lives (individually and corporately) and inviting everyone to become disciples of Jesus with us, through reception into the Orthodox Church." Again, the Christ centered, Bible centered, Church centered notion of evangelism was the key to almost every one of the answers.

In summary, the definitions of evangelism provided by Orthodox clergy from a wide spectrum of local parish contexts resulted in a complex and multi-facet concept of the "good Orthodox evangelization." It appears that each of the study participants focused on certain key elements of evangelism that are or can be employed in his particular parish settings. And yet, despite variety of parish contexts and circumstances, the Orthodox clergy remain focused on the Gospel of Jesus Christ when bringing people into His Church. For almost every respondent, life in the Church was critical in presenting the Church. As Fr. Ion Bria wrote: "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."²⁰

¹⁹ Ion Bria, "The Church's Role in Evangelism: Icon or Platform?" *International Review of Mission* 64, no. 255 (July 1975): 245.

²⁰ Ion Bria, *The Liturgy After the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996), 9.

The implications from this question - on how American Orthodox clergy define evangelism - are critical in not only how one teaches evangelism but also in how it is presented in the local parishes. Foremost the US parish priests are not looking for programs but rather the Church. As noted previously, the goal of increasing attendance or church growth via programs and evangelism was not the focus of a vast majority of the definitions. Instead our respondents referred to the Gospel and a solid life in the Church as the most powerful witness.

In many ways, the essence of what we learned in this chapter are in the words of Fr. Schmemmann: "The liturgy begins then as a real separation from the world. In our attempt to make Christianity appeal to the [person] on the street, we have often minimized, or even completely forgotten, the necessary separation. We always want to make Christianity 'understandable' and 'acceptable' to this mythical 'modern' [person] on the street. And we forget that the Christ of whom we speak is 'not of this world,' and after his resurrection He was not recognized even by His own disciples."²¹

III. The Parishes Participating in the Study: Is There Anything Special about the Membership of the Parishes that are "Exemplary" in their Evangelization and Outreach Efforts?

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS:

- ❖ Geographically, the parishes involved in this study were spread all across United States: they were situated in 28 states. The top two states with the greatest number of parishes participating in the study were California and Pennsylvania: each of these states had 10 parishes involved in the study;
- ❖ Nearly two-thirds of the parishes participating in the study are located in communities with a high level of overall religious involvement and participation. 63% of parishes described their neighborhoods as either "Very religious/A lot of religious activities" or "Rather religious/Quite a bit of religious activities." Only 15% of the parishes are situated in places where religion and religious institutions are not important: i.e. in neighborhoods that are "Rather secular/Little religious activities;"
- ❖ Being asked "Do you have any comments about the general religious situation in the community where your parish is located?" a number of clergy in the "exemplary" parishes replied in a

²¹ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir Seminary Press, 1979), 27.

"positive manner." That is, the clergy serving in the "exemplary" have a tendency and attitude to view their local religious situation as being one way or other advantageous for their parishes. This was not the case, however, among the priests serving in "normal" parishes;

- ❖ The demography of membership in the parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts is different from the demography of parishioners in "normal" parishes in five aspects:
 - "Exemplary" parishes have a much stronger presence of converts to Orthodoxy among their members than the "normal" parishes;
 - "Exemplary" parishes have a significantly higher percentage of persons with college degrees among their members than the "normal" parishes;
 - "Exemplary" parishes have a significantly higher percentage of persons who are new to the parish in the past 3 years than the "normal" parishes;
 - "Exemplary" parishes are less "grey-haired" than the "normal" parishes. That is, "exemplary" parishes have a significantly smaller percentage of senior citizens (age 65+) among their members than the "normal" parishes;
 - "Exemplary" parishes have a significantly higher percentage of families with children at home than the "normal" parishes;
- ❖ When asked "Is there anything special or unique about the membership of your parish?" the clergy serving in "exemplary" parishes emphasized often a) the high diversity among their members and b) the ability of their parishes communities to accommodate everyone and integrate these diverse group into one Christian family;
- ❖ Unlike "normal" parishes, the parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts are: a) much more prone to dynamic changes in the parish membership and b) these changes typically include both a steady growth in the number of parishioners and an increasing diversity among church members.

DISCUSSION:

As noted in chapter I, seventy-five parishes representing seven Orthodox jurisdictions participated in the study "Living Out Our Faith: Evangelization and Outreach Efforts in US Orthodox Parishes." Out of seventy-five, thirty-six were selected as "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts, while the remaining thirty-nine "normal" parishes were used for the purpose of various comparisons with the "exemplary" parishes.

Geographically, the parishes selected for the study were spread all across United States: they were situated in 28 states. The top two states with the greatest number of parishes participating in the study were California and Pennsylvania: each of these states had 10 parishes involved in the study. Two maps in Appendix 1 show locations of the parishes participating in the study. For each parish, the maps show its affiliation with a particular Orthodox jurisdiction and its designations as either "exemplary" or "normal" parish.

The evangelization and outreach efforts of the Orthodox parishes are aimed primarily at the local communities²² in which the parish is situated. Clearly, the type and distinct features (demography, race, social class, religious and economic context) of these local communities have significant impact on particular forms of evangelization and outreach work that different parishes can develop and employ. The social outreach ministries that are much needed in an impoverished small town with high rates of unemployment and homelessness (soup kitchen, food pantry, homeless shelters) wouldn't be relevant for an affluent upper middle class suburban neighborhood.

Similarly, the religious outreach in a community with significant numbers of newly arrived Orthodox immigrants from Europe or Middle East would be different from the evangelization work in, for instance, a university town with high percentage of US-born, young, well educated and non-Orthodox persons. In order to better understand the local community contexts of the parishes involved in the study, the survey asked several questions.

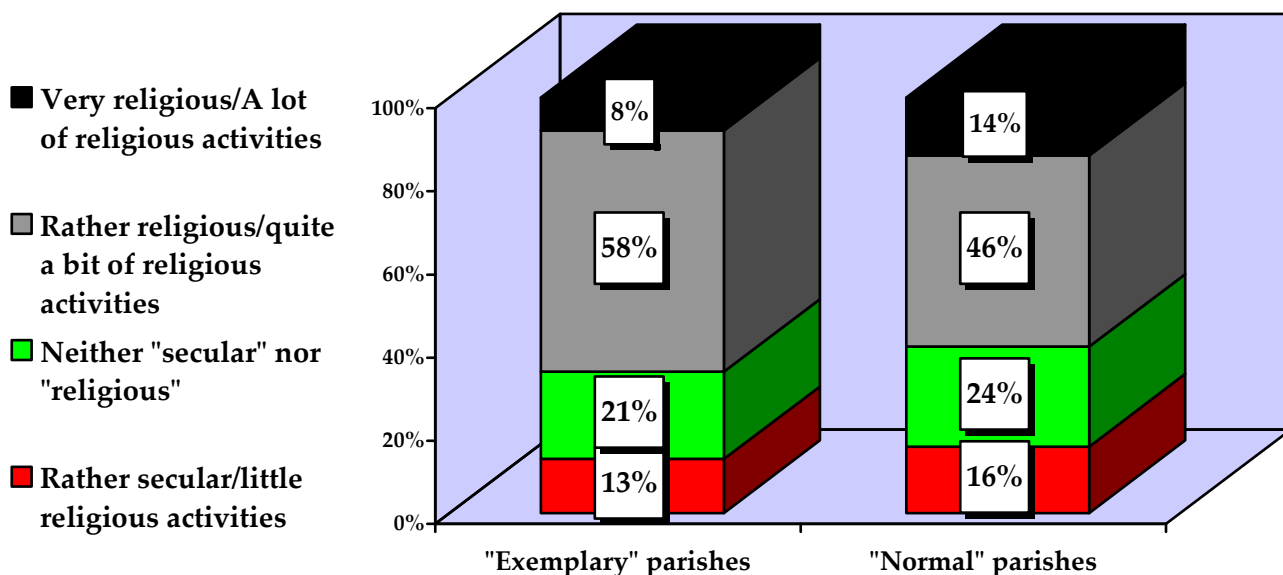
²² Clearly, in addition to work with and in a local community, there are other forms of evangelization and outreach work that a parish can employ: mission trips, participation in disaster relief projects in the other parts of the country, etc.

The first question explored overall religious situation: "Please evaluate the general religious environment in the community where your parish is located. Do this on the five-point scale from being 'very secular/no religion at all' to being 'very religious/a lot of religious activities'."

Fig. 1 presents the answers of the parishes to this question. It allows for two major observations.

Fig. 1 Religious Situation in the Local Communities of the Parishes Participating in the Study

"Please evaluate the general religious environment in the community where your parish is located. Do this on the five-point scale being 'very secular/no religion at all' to being 'very religious/a lot of religious activities'."



First, nearly two-thirds of the parishes participating in the study are located in communities with a high level of overall religious involvement and participation. Indeed, 63% parishes described their neighborhoods as either "Very religious/A lot of religious activities" or "Rather religious/Quite a bit of religious activities." Only 15% of the parishes are situated in places where religion and religious institutions are not important: i.e. in the neighborhoods that are "Rather secular/Little religious activities." The fact that a vast majority of the parishes operate in "rather" or "very religious" places can be seen as both advantage and drawback for Orthodox evangelization and religious outreach. It is an advantage because religion plays an important role in the lives of the people populating these communities, and, therefore, they might be interested to also explore the "Orthodox option:" i.e. to become inquirers about and, possibly, the converts to the Orthodox Church. It is a drawback, because Orthodox parishes situated in "rather" or "very religious" places must compete with many other "religious choices."

Second, Fig. 1 shows that there is virtually NO difference between "exemplary" and "normal" parishes in how they describe overall religious situation in their local communities. The fact that both groups of the parishes operate in similar religious contexts is important, because this study will compare various aspects in the lives of "exemplary" and "normal" parishes. Therefore, in order to make unbiased comparisons both groups should be located in similar settings.

The survey also offered the respondents the possibility to further describe and comment on religious situation in their local communities. It asked: "Do you have any additional comments about general religious situation in the community where your parish is located?" A significant number of clergy replied to this question and provided more detailed description of the religious communities operating in their neighborhoods. The analysis of answers to this question revealed one remarkable difference between the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes.

Unlike the priests in "normal" parishes, a number of clergy in the "exemplary" parishes answered this question in a "positive manner:" i.e. describing local religious situation as being one way or other advantageous for their parishes.

Some of them wrote about cooperation between their parishes and the other faith communities. Here is a good example: "There are many Roman Catholic, especially Latino, parishes, many Lutheran. We work with African-American parishes of both these groups as well as Baptist churches. We work together on social and economic issues that are vital to the health and safety and well being of people in the city. We are respectful of other people's faith, not dismissive or belittling. We do not try to build ourselves by ripping others down, as the Scribes and Pharisees did." Other respondents described various "opportunities" of the local religious situation that they can use. For instance, one clergyman wrote: "Our city still has a 'Faith and Values' section in the newspaper, and 2 or 3 newspapers welcome my writing on a regular basis." The other priest mentioned: "(We have) lots of religious seekers." Similarly, the other priest indicated: "Colorado Springs has an abundance of Evangelical 'non-denominational' Protestant ministries headquartered here. These folks are less tied to mainstream Protestant 'church', thus *open to changing Christian tradition.*"

One more question gathered broader information on the local communities in which the parishes are located: "Say a few words about your parish's surrounding neighborhood from demographic and economic points of view. Are you in a residential suburb, downtown area, small town or rural area? Are you in an expensive and "trendy" place? Are you in an economically growing or rather depressed area? Racially mixed or mostly Caucasian? Are there any demographic groups that dominate among the local residents?"

Predictably, this question produced a great variety of answers. Some of them will be used in the following chapters in order to demonstrate the relations between various ministries of the parishes and their local neighborhoods. At this point we will simply make two remarks. First, the answers to this question indicated that the parishes participating in our study (both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes) are located in very diverse neighborhoods. Second, there was no any discernible difference in responses to this question that came from "exemplary" versus "normal" parishes. In other words, some of the "exemplary" parishes were in depressed and declining neighborhoods and so were some of the "normal" parishes. Some of them were in flourishing and growing communities and so were some "normal" parishes. Some of both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes were situated in predominantly white Caucasian communities, but some of them were in racially mixed neighborhoods.

The parishes involved in the study varied greatly in the size of their membership. The survey asked: *"How many persons (including children) regularly participate in the life of your parish?"* The smallest church community participating in the study had only 10 persons, while the largest parish reported 1,500 persons "regularly participating in the life of a parish."

It should be noted that these variances in the size of the parishes were associated not only with the differences between the parishes of various jurisdictions (i.e. typically GOA or Serbian parishes tend to be significantly larger than OCA, Antiochian or Carpatho-Russian parishes). Rather, there were significant variances in the size of participating parishes within each jurisdiction. Tab. 4 demonstrates this fact.

**Tab. 4 The Smallest and Biggest Parishes of Various Jurisdictions Participating in the Study
(Measured by the Number of Regularly Participating Persons)**

Orthodox Jurisdictions	The smallest parish participating in the study	The biggest parish participating in the study
Parishes of all jurisdictions combined	10	1,500
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese	25	325
American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese	30	200
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America	75	1,500
Orthodox Church in America	14	350
Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese	10	150
Serbian Orthodox Church	50	175
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA	30	200

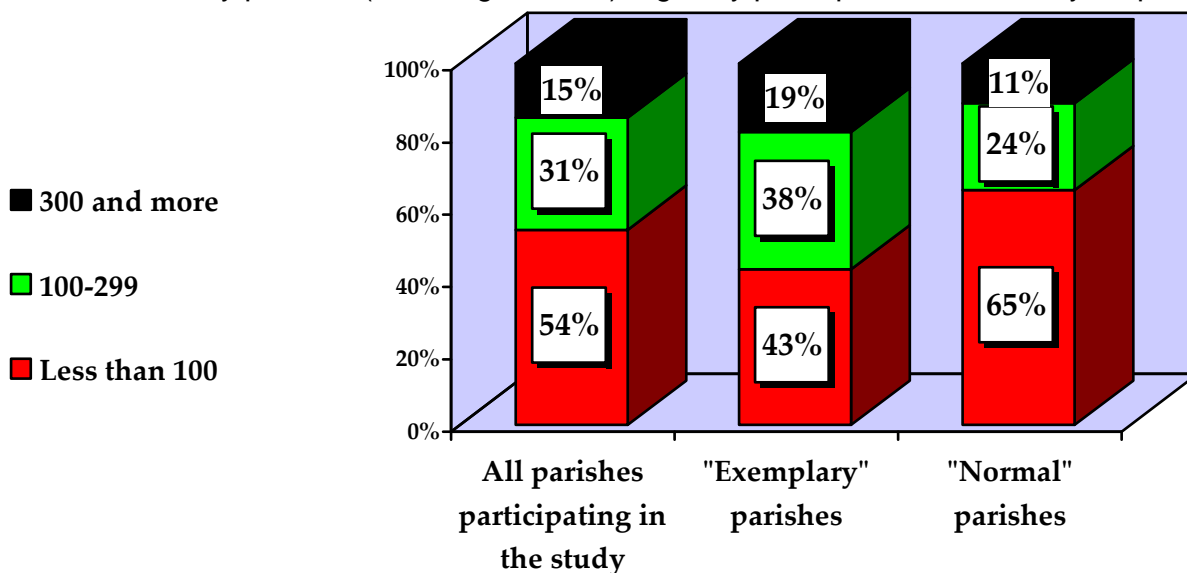
The median size of all parishes participating in the study was 90 persons. That is, half of the parishes had less and half of the parishes had more than 90 persons "regularly participating in the life of a parish."

Fig. 2 on the next page allows for two observations. First, it shows that an absolute majority (54%) of the parishes involved in the study were relatively small communities with less than 100 persons "regularly participating in the life of a parish." Only 15% of the parishes were large churches with at least 300 persons "regularly participating in the life of a parish."

Second, Fig. 2 indicates also that the "exemplary" parishes tend to be larger in size than the "normal" parishes. Indeed, an absolute majority (57%) of the "exemplary" parishes were either medium-sized (100-299 persons) or large churches (300+ persons) compared to only 35% in the case of "normal" parishes. Vice versa, nearly two-thirds (65%) of the "normal" parishes were small communities with less than 100 regular participants compared to only 43% among the "exemplary" parishes. Remarkably, this finding - the fact that the "exemplary" parishes tend to be larger in size than the "normal" parishes - was true not only for the whole sample of parishes, but also for the parishes of each jurisdiction participating in the study.

Fig. 2 Membership of the Parishes Participating in the Study

"How many persons (including children) regularly participate in the life of your parish?"



There are at least two possible explanations for this observation. First, it is probably safe to assume that the parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach effort are much more likely to grow in members than the "normal" parishes. The second explanation is that in order to actually become a parish with a variety of evangelization and outreach oriented activities and ministries a parish should have certain "demographic potential." That is, more people in a parish means more volunteers and talents available, greater financial resources, etc. This does not mean, of course, that a small parish community cannot be "exemplary" in its evangelization and outreach efforts. But the larger churches are better "equipped" with various resources that - combined with the strong desire on the part of parish community - allow them to develop strong evangelization and outreach ministries.

Are there any particular demographic features of parish membership that distinguish "exemplary" from the "normal" parishes? The survey asked each parish to estimate the percentage of the following seven categories among all adult church members:

- ❖ Persons who have college/university degree
- ❖ Converts to Orthodoxy
- ❖ Immigrants (persons born outside of US)
- ❖ Persons who are new to their parishes in the past 3 years
- ❖ Persons living within 30 minutes of their parishes

- ❖ Senior citizens age 65+
- ❖ Families with children at home

The following seven charts show median percentage of these seven categories of church members in "exemplary" and in "normal" parishes. To remind, "median percentage" indicates the value that is in the "middle" of the sample. For instance, Fig. 3a shows that the median percentage of persons with college degrees is 70% in the "exemplary" in comparison with 50% in the "normal" parishes. This means, that half of "exemplary" parishes have more than 70% of college graduates among their parishioners and half of them have less than 70% of parishioners with college degrees. In turn, half of "normal" parishes have more than 50% of college graduates among their parishioners and half of them have less than 50% of parishioners with college degrees.

Fig. 3a Median Percentage (%) of College Graduates Among Regularly Participating Adult Parishioners

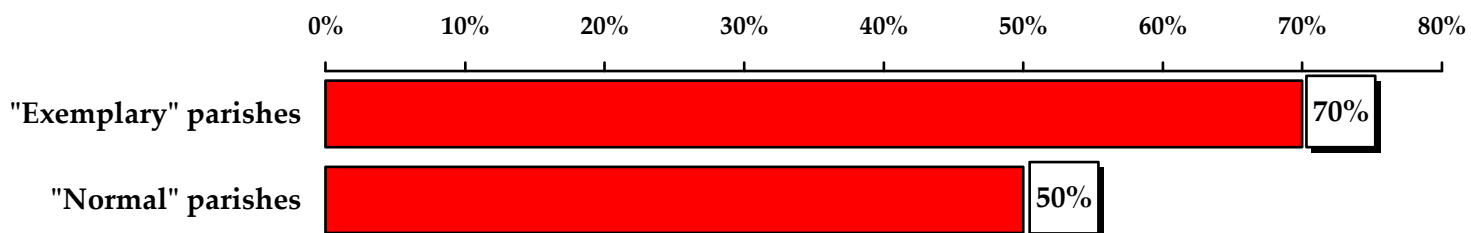


Fig. 3b Median Percentage (%) of Converts to Orthodoxy Among Regularly Participating Adult Parishioners

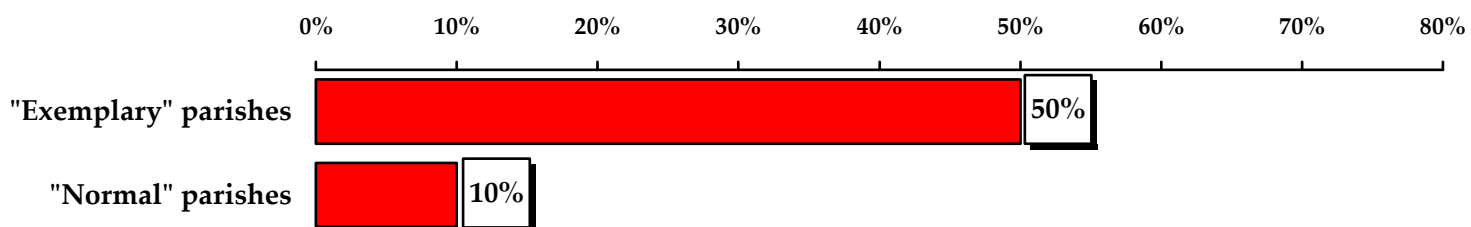


Fig. 3c Median Percentage (%) of Immigrants (Persons Born Outside US) Among Regularly Participating Adult Parishioners

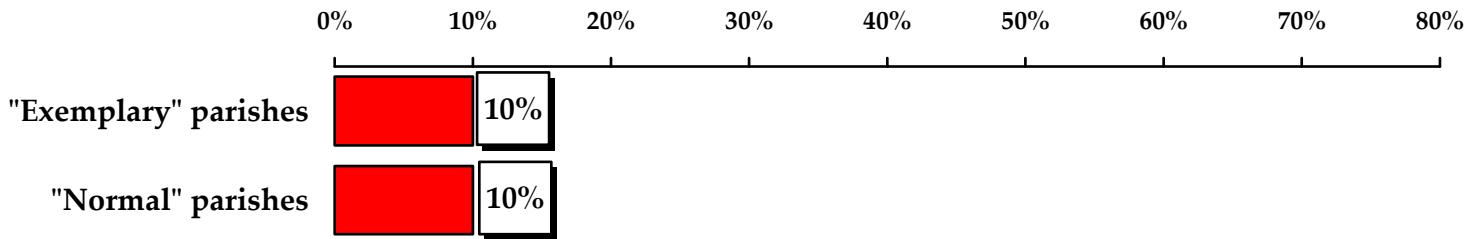


Fig. 3d Median Percentage (%) of Persons Who are New to Their Parishes in the Past 3 Years Among Regularly Participating Adult Parishioners

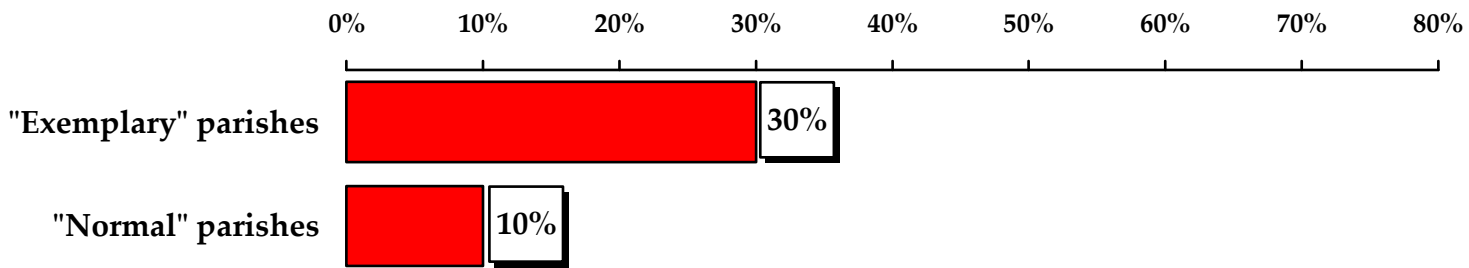


Fig. 3e Median Percentage (%) of Persons Living Within 30 min. of Their Parishes Among Regularly Participating Adult Parishioners

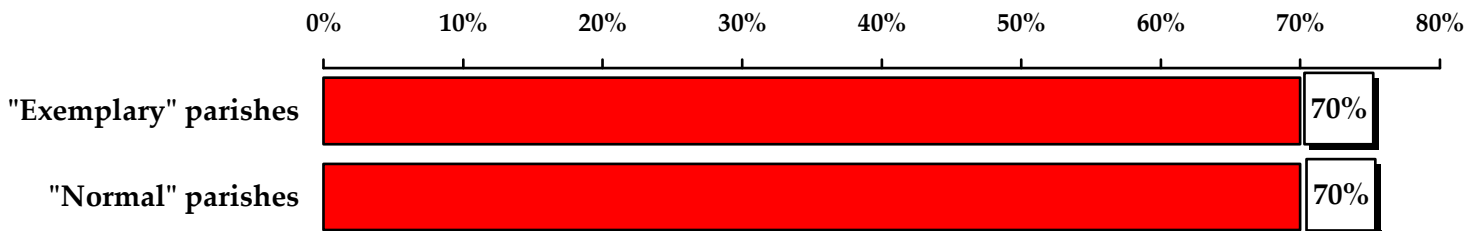


Fig. 3f Median Percentage (%) of Senior Citizens (Persons Age 65+) Among Regularly Participating Adult Parishioners

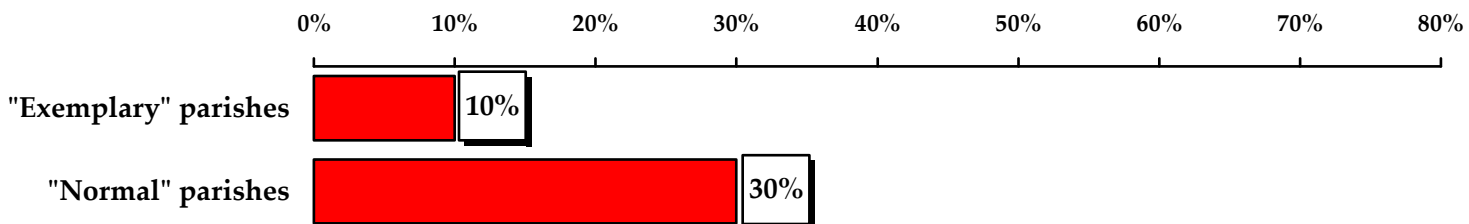
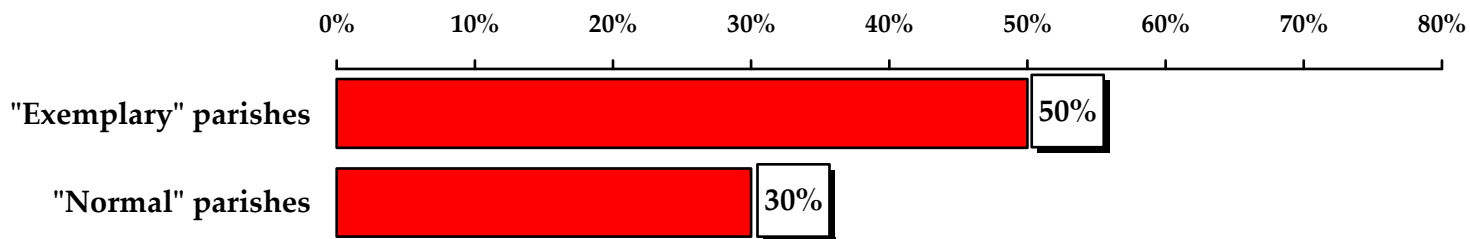


Fig. 3g Median Percentage (%) of Families With Children at Home



Figs. 3a-3g show that the demography of "exemplary" parishes is different from the demography of "normal" parishes in five aspects:

- ❖ "Exemplary" parishes have a ***much higher*** median percentage of converts to Orthodoxy among their members than the "normal" parishes (50% versus 10%)
- ❖ "Exemplary" parishes have a significantly higher median percentage of persons with college degrees among their members than the "normal" parishes (70% versus 50%)
- ❖ "Exemplary" parishes have a significantly higher median percentage of persons who are new to the parish in the past 3 years than the "normal" parishes (30% versus 10%)
- ❖ "Exemplary" parishes are less "grey-haired" than the "normal" parishes. That is, "exemplary" parishes have a significantly smaller median percentage of senior citizens (age 65+) among their members than the "normal" parishes (10% versus 30%)
- ❖ "Exemplary" parishes have a significantly higher median percentage of families with children at home than the "normal" parishes (50% versus 30%)

At the same time, there is no difference between "exemplary" and "normal" parishes in terms of the presence of new immigrants to US among their members or in terms of the number of people who live relatively close (within 30 minutes) to the church.

In a nutshell, compared to the "normal" parishes, the members of the "exemplary" parishes are younger and better educated, have more children and many more of them are converts to the Orthodox Faith. Also, predictably, the parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts have many more "newcomers" (people who are new to the parish) than the "normal" parishes. Clearly, these distinct demographic features of the "exemplary" parishes can be seen as both the reason and, at the same time, the outcome of being "exemplary in evangelization and outreach efforts." For instance, predictably, parishes with a strong emphasis on evangelization and outreach should have more converts to Orthodox Faith. At the same time, one can also assume that converts to Orthodoxy could have

stronger "missionary and evangelization zeal" than cradle Orthodox which would result in a fact that the parishes with greater number of converts to Orthodoxy have greater chances to become the parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach.

In order to further examine what is distinct about membership of the parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts the survey asked the follow-up question: "Is there anything else special or unique about the membership of your parish?" The answers that came from the clergy serving in "exemplary" parishes formed two strong patterns. The first and by far biggest group of responses was about very high diversity in members and about ability of the "exemplary" parishes to accommodate everyone and integrate these diverse groups into one parish community. Here are some quotes exemplifying this type of responses:

- "Racially mixed - Ethiopian and a few American blacks. Diverse immigrant membership. Some poor, many middle class, very few upper class. Women play an important leadership role in the parish and in liturgical participation to the extent that they are able. We are child-friendly and woman-friendly and minority-friendly."
- "When we moved from our inner-city location about 15 years ago, we deliberately targeted mixed marriages, while continuing to be sensitive to the ethnics."
- "We have 11 nationalities in our parish and they get along just fine - thanks and glory be to God."
- "We have 35 different nationalities, ethnic, and racial groups. We say the "Lord's Prayer" in at least seven different languages. We have a Spanish Liturgy on Saturday nights and an English Liturgy on Sunday mornings."
- "Our parishioners hail from various Orthodox countries, represented in the recitation of the Lord's Prayer in approximately 8 languages each Sunday."
- "Besides the usual 2nd or 3rd generation Orthodox and Converts from other Christian traditions, we also minister to sizeable populations from Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Moldova. We also had large groups of Kosovars and Ethiopians."

The second large group of responses from the "exemplary" parishes re-iterated what was already discussed previously: namely, that the "exemplary" parishes tend to have significant number of converts to Orthodoxy and young people among their members. Here are some quotes exemplifying this type of responses:

- "Membership is primarily convert and young. We have had only four funerals in 9 years and 160 baptisms or chrismations."
- "Surprising number of young, growing families that 'rotate in' to the parish, get involved, but 'rotate out'. Lots of turnover especially of active young adults."
- "Probably 70% of our total membership have converted to Orthodox Christianity either at our parish or in another parish before coming to us. We do not have many generational Orthodox."

The membership of any parish - its size, demographic, social, ethnic and other characteristics - evolves constantly. Some parishes are growing in members, while some are declining. Some parishes attract newly arrived immigrants with a strong ethnic identity and culture, while some have growing percentage of members who are US-born converts to Orthodox Church. Some parishes have more and more young families with children, while in some churches the parishioners are getting "grey-haired."

In some parishes, these changes in membership go at a slow pace, while in some they are much faster and "visible." But no parish community remains the same forever. And as the parish community changes, its vision for the future, scope of activities, its emphasis on certain programs and ministries evolve as well.

Is there any difference between the parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts and the "normal" parishes in terms of how their membership changes over the period of time? The survey asked: "Have there been any significant changes in membership while you have been with this parish (either in numbers or in the socio-demographic composition of parishioners)? Please describe or give some examples." The responses to this question that came from the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes were quite different in three aspects.

First, nearly all "exemplary" parishes mentioned some sort of *significant change* in membership, while an absolute majority of "normal" parishes replied something like "no significant changes in membership"

or "no other than transient nature of parish." That is, unlike "normal" parishes, the "exemplary" parishes are much more prone to dynamic changes in parish community. Put differently, normal parishes are more "static:" that is, the changes in membership occur much slower.

Second, out of 36 "exemplary" parishes, 24 indicated *steady and sometimes very fast growth* in members: "We started with 16 (8 in my family) and we average around 95 to 110 on Sunday. At present, we have 25 catechumens. The majority of this growth has taken place in the last three years" or "25% growth per year. Launching of new parishes" or "We started with 6 stewarding families and we now have 112 stewarding families" (the last response referred to the 9 years' period of time). Differently, out of 39 "normal" parishes, only 6 mentioned growth, while 7 reported decline in membership.

Third, unlike "normal" parishes, many more "exemplary" parishes wrote about constant *increase in diversity in parish membership*. More specifically, 13 out of 38 "exemplary" parishes mentioned that - one way or the other - their members are becoming more and more diverse²³ compared to only 5 out of 37 "normal parishes." As an example, here is one - rather lengthy - respond that came from one of the "exemplary" parishes and describes how this parish community became more diverse over the period of time: "It was a very Russian parish until the early 80's, but one that lost its 2nd and 3rd generations through its linguistic intransigence, its heavy drinking, and outside pressures as well. Gradually the parish de-ethnicized in order to survive. This involved the loss of some, as it turns out they were the people who indulged in parish politics. We are not anti-ethnic or obsessively American but multi-ethnic, multicultural. New people don't come as guests but are welcomed into every aspect of the life of the community. The Ethiopians in the parish (about 30% of us) invite new people regularly from their own ethnic community. We have a strong connection to 2 major local universities both in terms of ministry and also in terms of membership of students and professors. We have an unusually high proportion of Ph.D.'s in the parish (not including me). Bishop "X" was attached here for 20 years and attracted a number of Orthodox students to "Y" University's Theology program. Six of these now serve as priests throughout the US and Canada. We have long done lots of service activities in our neighborhood. Now we are finally beginning to attract neighborhood people not only as friends but as members. It takes

²³ This would include more diversity in the age of parishioners, in the presence of the various ethnic groups, in the presence of converts versus cradle Orthodox, in the presence of new immigrants versus US-born parishioners, in the presence of people who belong to different social class, etc.

time and patience. You can't just be somewhere - you have to show that you care about the people there disinterestedly."

In summary, unlike "normal" parishes, the parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts are: a) much more prone to dynamic changes in the parish membership and b) these changes typically include both the steady growth in the number of parishioners and in diversity among church members. We conclude this chapter with a respond from one of the "exemplary" parishes that serves as a very good example to the above statement: "There remains a small core of 'original' parishioners. In 2002 there were 35-40 adults; today there are ~145 adults and ~50 children. From 2002, the ethnicity of the parish has gone from about 4 groups to 35 today. From an 'ethnic' parish of mostly older persons, no children in the parish, to a majority of converts who are primarily young families."

IV. The Clergy in "Exemplary" and "Normal" Parishes and their Evolving Vision of Priestly Vocation

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS:

- ❖ Compared to priests serving in "normal" parishes, more clergy leading the "exemplary" parishes are converts to Orthodoxy: 33% for "normal" versus 50% for "exemplary" parishes;
- ❖ The clergy leading "exemplary" parishes tend to have much longer "tenure:" i.e. they have stayed a longer time with their churches. Indeed, compared to clergy in "normal" parishes twice as many priests in "exemplary" parishes stayed with their churches for more than 10 years: 35% for "normal" versus 69% for "exemplary" parishes. The median duration of service of the clergy in "normal" parishes is 8 years in comparison with 15 years among the priests in "exemplary" parishes;
- ❖ The majority of the responses to the question "How did you decide to become a priest: what was the most important motivation (or, perhaps, combination of circumstances) that brought you to the priestly vocation?" fell into three broad categories:
 - Firm determinations made in childhood by being deeply involved in the church from an early age and being strongly influenced by parents/grandparents and/or parish priests;
 - Decisions made in the later stages of life through the conscious deliberation and personal evolution;
 - Decisions made because of some spiritual revelation or experience.

- ❖ There is no significant difference between the clergy serving in the "exemplary" versus "normal" parishes in terms of their motives and reasons of becoming a priest;
- ❖ The majority of responses to the question, "If your understanding of your role as a pastor and leader of a parish has changed, please say a few words about how it has changed?" fell into three broad categories. Out of these three categories, two were similar for clergy in both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes, while one category of responses was different in the case of priests serving in "exemplary" versus "normal" parishes:
 - The first group of answers was about becoming more patient and developing ability to "love all" in their parish communities;
 - The second group of responses was about changes in the clergy' style of leadership and, especially, about moving from being more authoritarian leader to allowing parishioners to 'run things';"
 - The major distinction in responses of clergy from the "exemplary" versus "normal" parishes was in their different understanding of what a parish priest should concentrate on. Typically, the clergy from the "exemplary" parishes wrote that their original focus on "running programs and administration" shifted towards being a good teacher, preacher and "role model" for parishioners. The answers of the clergy from the "normal" parishes indicated an opposite trend. That is, as the years went by, many of them have become increasingly involved in administration, management, and fundraising.

DISCUSSION:

Seventy-five priests serving in the parishes of seven jurisdictions participated in this study. They entered the priesthood from a great variety of personal backgrounds. Some of them were born into the Orthodox Church, while some discovered the Orthodox Faith in the later stages of their lives. Some of them grew up in religiously involved families, while some were raised by parents who were religiously passive. Some of them served in their parishes for many years (or were even "founding" priests), while some are relatively new to their current churches. Quite different circumstances, motivations, and reasons brought them to the decision to pursue a priestly vocation. As the years of their ordained ministry went by, some of them changed significantly their understanding of their role as a pastor and leader of a parish community, while some retained their original vision of priestly vocation. On the following pages, we

will try to outline the collective "portraits" of the priests serving in the parishes involved in the study and to examine if there are any distinct features that distinguish the clergy in "exemplary" parishes from the priests in "normal" parishes.

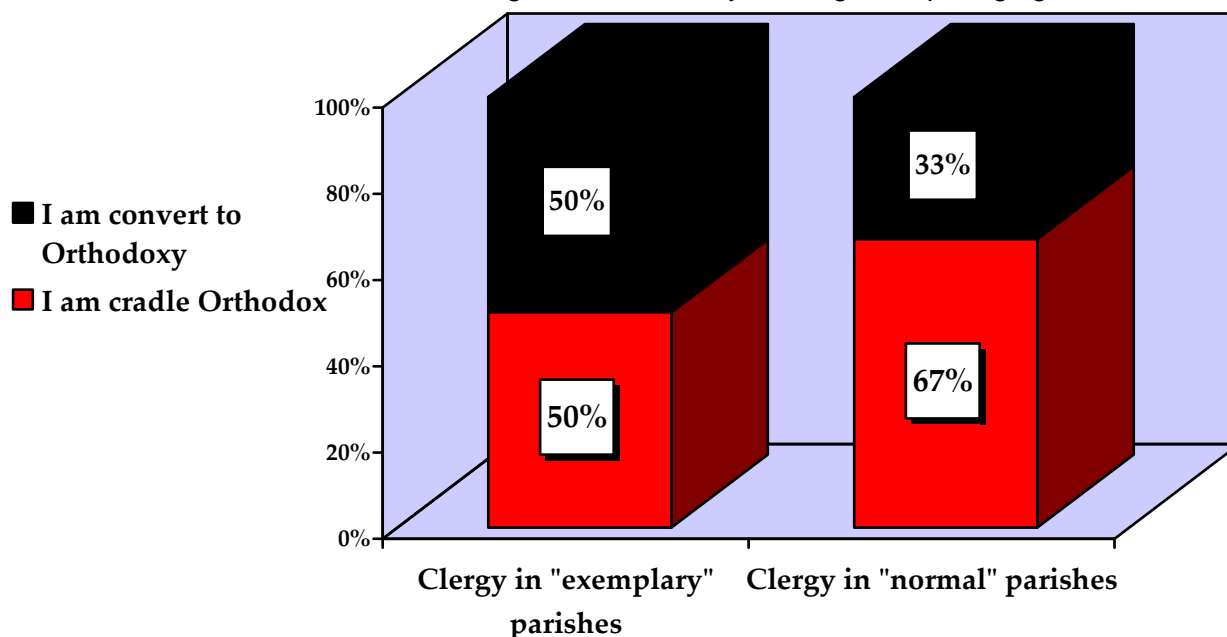
The questionnaire asked, "Which of the following best describes your religious upbringing?" The respondents were given four options to respond:

- ❖ "I was raised and have always been active in the Orthodox Church"
- ❖ "I was raised in the Orthodox Church, but was inactive in the Church for a period of time"
- ❖ "I was raised in a non-Orthodox religious tradition and became Orthodox later in life"
- ❖ "I grew up in a non-religious family and joined the Orthodox Church at a later stage in life"

Given the relatively small number of respondents (75 total), for the purpose of analysis, the first two answers were combined into one category "Cradle Orthodox" and the last two answers were combined into category "Converts to Orthodoxy." Fig. 4 shows that compared to priests in "normal" parishes higher percentage of clergy leading the "exemplary" parishes are converts to Orthodoxy: 33% for "normal" versus 50% for "exemplary" parishes.

Fig. 4 Religious Background of Clergy Serving in the Parishes Involved in the Study

"Which of the following best describes your religious upbringing?"



This difference in the presence of converts among the priests in "exemplary" and "normal" parishes is very consistent with the difference in the presence of converts among the members of "exemplary" versus "normal" parishes. Recall, the previous chapter indicated that the median percentage of converts to Orthodoxy among the members of "exemplary" parishes is 50% in comparison with only 10% among parishioners in "normal" parishes.

The survey followed up with the question about religious involvement of the families of our respondents when they grew up: "While you were growing up, was the Church - either Orthodox or non-Orthodox - an important part of your family's life?" The respondents could choose between four answers:

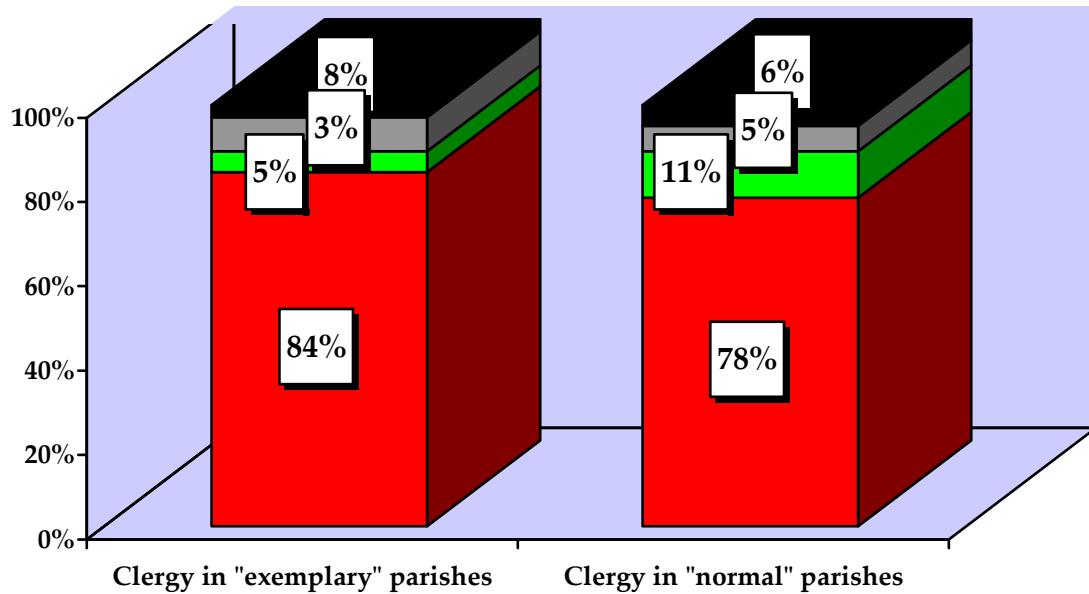
- ❖ "My family (or, at least, one parent) was active in the Church and it was an important part of our family's life when I was a child"
- ❖ "My family (or, at least, one parent) attended church regularly, but I wouldn't say that it was truly an important part of our family's life"
- ❖ "My family attended church, but only occasionally"
- ❖ "My family was not interested in church and it had very little (if at all) role in my life when I was a child"

Fig. 5 on the next page allows for two observations. First, nine out of ten (89%) of the clergy grew up in households where church was central to their lives or - at least - in the families with the habit of regular church attendance. Only 11% of priests were brought up by the parents who were either fully religiously passive or attended services only occasionally. Second, there is no significant difference between the clergy in "normal" and "exemplary" parishes in terms of their religious involvement during childhood and adolescence. In both groups, nearly 90% of them were raised in families with a high level of church involvement and attendance.

Fig. 5 Religious Upbringing of Clergy Serving in the Parishes Participating in the Study

"While you were growing up, was the Church - either Orthodox or non-Orthodox - an important part of your family's life?"

- My family was not interested in church and it had very little role in my life when I was a child
- My family attended church, but only occasionally
- My family attended church regularly, but I wouldn't say that it was truly important part of our family's life
- My family was active in the Church. It was important part of our family's life when I was a child

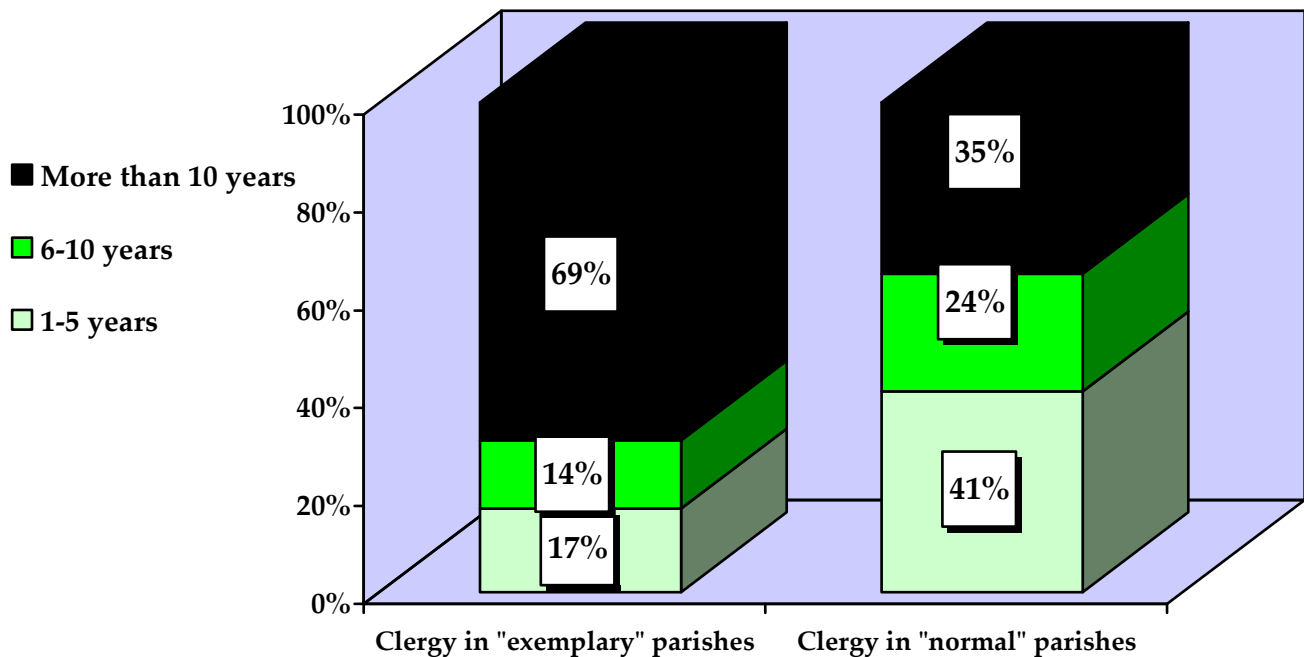


In summary, there is little difference between the clergy in "exemplary" and "normal" parishes in terms of their original religious backgrounds (i.e. cradle Orthodox or converts to Orthodoxy) and their church involvement during childhood and adolescence.

What is different between the priests serving in "exemplary" and "normal" parishes is the duration of ministry in their present parish communities. In short, the clergy leading "exemplary" parishes tend to have a much longer "tenure" (i.e. they have stayed longer time) with their churches. Fig. 6 shows that compared to clergy in "normal" parishes twice as many priests in "exemplary" parishes stayed with their churches for more than 10 years: 35% versus 69%. The median duration of service of the clergy in "exemplary" parishes is 15 years in comparison with only 8 years in case of the priests in "normal" parishes.

Fig. 6 Duration of Clergy's Work in Their Present Parishes

"How long (how many years) have you served this parish?"



In addition to a longer duration of service in their current parishes, a quarter of priests in "exemplary" parishes are also "founding priests:" i.e. they ministered to their parishes from the time when the parish was founded. Differently, very few (only 8%) of priests in "normal" parishes are "founding priests."

Both findings - longer "tenures" of clergy in "exemplary" parishes and greater number of them being "founding priests" - are relatively easy to explain. In many ways, clergy shape their parish communities. Having a longer time of work with a particular parish and, especially, being with a parish from its very origins gives the clergy more opportunities to create a parish according to their vision.

Clearly, it is first of all the personal talents, aspirations, passion and charisma of certain clergy that allow them to gradually develop a parish into a Christian community that is "exemplary" in its evangelization and outreach efforts. Nevertheless, having a longer time to influence their parishioners or even building the very foundations of a parish gives these outstanding clergy more opportunities to realize their vision.

In order to better understand the personalities and aspirations of the clergy serving in "exemplary" and "normal" parishes the survey asked two open-ended questions. The first question was about circumstances that led them to the priestly vocation: "How did you decide to become a priest: what was

the most important motivation (or, perhaps, combination of circumstances) that brought you to the priestly vocation?" The second question was about the changes in the clergy' understanding of their roles as the shepherds of their parishes over the period of time: "Between the time you were ordained an Orthodox priest and now, has your understanding of your role as a pastor and leader of a parish changed? If your understanding of your role as a pastor and leader of a parish has changed, please say a few words about *how it has changed?*"

All 75 clergy participating in the study answered the first question and shared their - sometimes very personal - stories about their paths into the priesthood. The analysis of their answers revealed that:

- ❖ there is no significant difference between the clergy serving in the "exemplary" versus "normal" parishes in terms of their motives and reasons of becoming a priest;
- ❖ despite the variety in individual stories, the vast majority of the responses to the question about the motives for choosing the priestly vocation fell into three broad categories.

These three categories in clergy' answers to the question "How did you decide to become a priest: what was the most important motivation (or, perhaps, combination of circumstances) that brought you to the priestly vocation?" can be described as:

- ❖ Firm determinations made in childhood by being deeply involved in the church from an early age and being strongly influenced by parents/grandparents and/or parish priests;
- ❖ Decisions made in the later stages of the life through the conscious deliberation and personal evolution;
- ❖ Decisions made through some spiritual revelation or experience.

Below we provide several examples of the answers for each of these three categories.

Firm determinations made in childhood by being involved in the church from an early age and being strongly influenced by parents/grandparents and/or parish priests.

- "It was a calling that I had since childhood - the priesthood always felt as the 'natural fit' vocation for me. Additionally, I was mentored by a priest (Uniate) in my late teens and college years who nurtured that calling by involving me in learning the services, attending to various pastoral duties, etc."

- "My Grandmother was the one who kept the faith for the whole family. She was the one encouraging everyone including me to stay strong in the faith despite the Communist rule. She was the one who believed I would be a priest one day, I guess because of my devotion to God and the Church."
- "I was taught to love the Church by my father who diligently and lovingly directed my way into priesthood. God also blessed me to meet wonderful people from whom I learned a great deal about kindness, generosity, patience, prayer, fasting, punctuality, dedication and other things absolute necessary for this vocation."
- "I always wanted to be a priest. Interestingly enough I saw the worst the church had to offer in my parish growing up with lots of discord. Having a loving and encouraging bishop helped foster that vocation."
- "Loved God very much as a child. Memorized the services. Sat in the front Pew first by requirement, then by desire. And our priest/youth minister cultivated a sense of calling in me from middle school on."
- "It was something in me since I was young. The priests in my home parish (both the pastor and pastor emeritus) were great influences."
- "My own parish priest growing up would sit with me and talk to me about being a priest and would encourage me. I was also called by God to serve Him as a priest."

Decisions made in the later stages of the life through the conscious deliberation and personal evolution.

- "The death of my son, and a desire to help others find God's live in similar circumstances."
- "I always felt drawn to the priesthood (Roman Catholic), but I consciously suppressed it for various reasons. After converting to Orthodoxy in college, my parish priest supported my desire to attend seminary to learn more about the faith. It was my confessor in seminary who ultimately vectored me towards ordination, though I was content to remain a deacon forever. Following graduation, it was my bishop who determined that I had the qualities to be a good priest and that he believed it was where I should be."
- "I began to discern my calling to ministry late in college, as clergy suggested that I might be called to this. I then attended a Lutheran seminary where I made the discovery of the Orthodox

Church in my studies, and then converted. Archbishop Dmitri encouraged me to continue on the path. The Church was, and is everything in my life."

- "Incremental progression in life in Christ. I did not decide to become a priest, I simply made myself available to our bishop. He decided."
- "I always considered myself to be a Christian growing up, but I realized during my freshman year of college that something major was missing in my personal faith. I was only a Christian intellectually. Jesus Christ was not actually a major relationship in my life that informed my everyday decision-making. I met someone who became a friend and helped me, through his own personal witness, to realize that I needed to deepen my relationship with Christ. At that point in my life, I made a commitment to Christ to do whatever He called me to do. Tensions between my Roman Catholic upbringing and some experiences I was having in the Evangelical Protestant Tradition motivated me to study church history. It was then that I discovered the Orthodox Church. I studied Orthodoxy for one year through books and conversations with an Orthodox priest before becoming Orthodox. After working a couple of years in the corporate world, I felt God's calling to go to seminary to see how I could better serve Him in the Church. It was at Holy Cross that I really felt my calling to the priesthood."
- "I was very interested in going to the seminary to learn more about the Orthodox Faith and had no desire to become a priest. I actually was determined not to get ordained, but God's will prevailed over my own."
- "Theology was my passion and later on I wanted to offer my spiritual help to the people in need. Liturgy was like a magnet to me."

Decisions made through some spiritual revelation or experience.

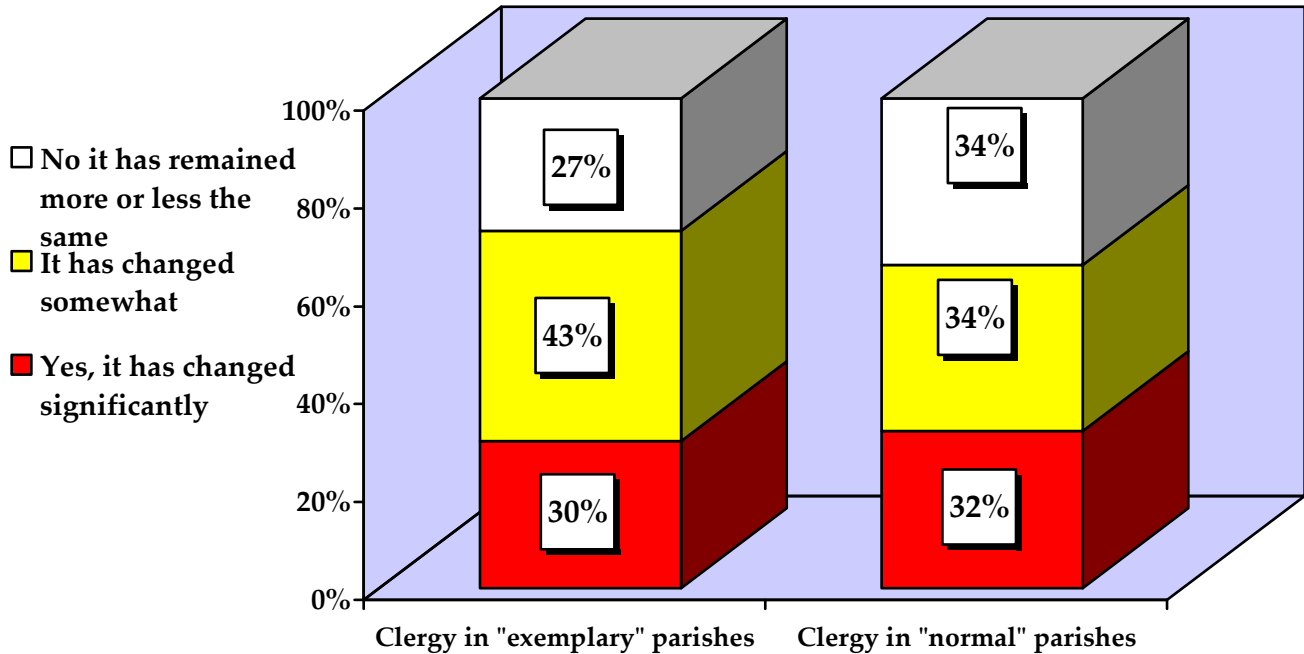
- "My calling to the Holy Priesthood came through the Holy Spirit inspiring others to encourage me to consider seminary and ordination."
- "God called me in a way that I could not refuse. When my wife agreed, it was decided."
- "Being called by the church to do so."
- "On the eve when I was preparing to enroll another school during the reading of my evening prayers I felt a strong vocation and that was it."

- "Discovery of the truth of Christ was irresistible, and eventually as it became more personal it was shown to me as a powerful calling."

As the time goes by, does clergy's understanding of their roles as pastors and leaders of the local Christian communities change? Fig. 7 shows that about one-third of priests in both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes experienced significant evolution of their vision for priestly vocation. Indeed, 30% of priests in "exemplary" and 32% of clergy in "normal" parishes reported that their "understanding of their role as a pastor and leader of parish" has "changed significantly."

Fig. 7 The Changes in Clergy' Understanding of Their Priestly Vocation

Between the time you were ordained an Orthodox priest and now, has your understanding of your role as a pastor and leader of a parish changed?



The follow up question "If your understanding of your role as a pastor and leader of a parish has changed, please say a few words about how it has changed?" resulted in a variety of answers. However, most of these answers fell into three broad categories. Out of three categories - that will be described below - two were similar for clergy in both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes, while one category of responses was very different in the case of priests serving in "exemplary" versus "normal" parishes.

The first group of answers was about becoming more patient and developing ability to "love all" in their parish communities. The answers from this category were equally present among the clergy in "normal" and "exemplary" parishes. Here are some examples:

- "The priest, too, must learn to love all irrespective of their attitudes and the priest's frailties. In a parish with 35 different nationalities, it is incumbent on the priest to love and know all, show preference to none, and always talk about 'us' and 'we'."
- "I become much more patient, and much less results oriented. Strive to remove the ego from what I engage in dealing with people."
- "I've have learned to be more patient with others and in ministry."
- "I realized that each soul in the parish is in a different place and that everyone has their own reason or understanding of the role of the church in the lives."
- "My understanding has deepened as I gain more experience and mature as a person and a Christian. I've become more patient, compassionate, courageous, and trusting."
- "I now better understand that the most important things in the ministry are love, understanding and compassion towards my flock rather than external observances and or certain liturgical practices."

The second group of responses was about changes in the clergy' style of leadership and, especially, about moving from being more authoritarian leader to allowing parishioners to "run things." The answers from this category were also present among the clergy in both "normal" and "exemplary" parishes. A few quotes exemplify this type of answers:

- "Allowing parishioners to take responsibility for their lives as they stand before God. Then I can simply enjoy and love without expectations."
- "I was very rigid initially. Then I realized that I am not a cop, and am not responsible to force anyone to do anything. My job is to preach the Gospel and the tradition of the Church. It has to be willingly received by the faithful."
- "I do not think I was completely prepared for the administrative expectations placed on the priesthood by the parish. Learning to delegate those duties has been a learning experience."
- "It has become focused much more on personal relationships rather than being an 'office'."

- "It was always that of a shepherd but how to be a shepherd has changed. As a young priest, it was more about getting the people to follow the rules. As I have grown older it is about getting them to confirm their lives to God using the tools and rules as a means."

The major distinction in responses of clergy from the "exemplary" versus "normal" parishes was in their different understanding of what a parish priest should concentrate on. A significant number of clergy from the "exemplary" parishes wrote that their original focus on "running programs and administration" shifted towards being a good teacher, preacher, and "role model" for parishioners. Differently, the answers of the clergy from the "normal" parishes indicated an opposite trend. That is, as the years went by, many of them have become increasingly involved in administration, management, and fundraising.

Here are some examples of responses from exemplary parishes:

- "The emphasis on prayer, trust in God, and co-suffering with parishioners has replaced my thinking that I needed to work plans and programs."
- "A move away from administration towards services, preaching, and teaching."
- "I realize priests have become more like cheerleaders and fundraisers, motivational speakers for the faithful."
- "I have learned that my biggest role as a priest is in my own growth in Christ. I cannot change others, only myself. I have also learned that I need to focus on being a shepherd to the faithful, the celebrant of the Divine Services, the Holy Sacraments and to take seriously my preaching and teaching. The laity can do almost everything else and need to in order to be stewards of their own gifts. This is how they grow in Christ and actualize their royal priesthood."

And here - very different - responses from the normal parishes:

- "I had not been aware of how much of an administrative role I would have to play."
- "I seem to become more of an administrator and project manager instead of a pastor and priest."
- "Taking on the role and responsibility of helping raise funds for the church as well as organizing things in the parish that needed fixing, running, repair, etc."
- "I spend very little time doing things that look 'theological' and a lot of time doing leadership/management and motivation."

- "I had certain responsibilities as a young priest, such as youth ministries and participation in the services. Now, however I have to be cognizant of all aspects of ministry. I must make sure the bulletins have the correct readings and changing hymns. Choir and Chanters are prepared and understand who is to sing the various music. The Acolytes are present, trained and prepared. Ushers are serving the laity. In other words, make sure that everything has been organized."

V. How "Exemplary" Parishes Achieve a High Degree of Involvement of Their Members into the Life of a Parish

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS:

- ❖ The parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts have much higher degree of involvement of parishioners in *all aspects* of the parish life than the "normal" parishes. More than two-thirds of "exemplary" parishes reported that at least half (or even dominant majority) of parishioners are actively involved in all aspects of the life of a parish. Differently, in absolute majority (57%) of the "normal" parishes only "small core group of parishioners does everything," whereas most members participate only passively;
- ❖ In 40% of "exemplary" parishes the evangelization and outreach efforts are perceived as the way that the *entire parish* community lives and sees itself. Only one quarter of "exemplary" parishes reported that their evangelization and outreach efforts are carried out by a limited group of designated church members. Differently, in absolute majority (55%) of "normal" parishes only a small number of parishioners are involved in evangelization and outreach work;
- ❖ The study found six "strategies" that the "exemplary" parishes use in order to achieve broad involvement and participation of all church members into various aspects of the parish life:
 - Creating and careful maintaining a variety of small "interest groups"
 - Requiring each parishioner (as part of membership "duties") to participate in at least one permanent parish ministry
 - Cultivating the sense of a parish's mission beyond worship services
 - Cultivating the atmosphere of joy and close-knit family in a parish
 - Being flexible in scheduling all events, activities and ministries: accommodating everyone's needs and time constraints
 - Assuring top quality and relevance of worship services for everyone in the church

DISCUSSION:

It was noted in the first chapter ("Approach, Goal and Procedure of the Study") that genuine evangelization is not about the work of the parish clergy or designated group of parishioners. Rather, evangelization is about efforts and "style of life" of an entire parish community. That is, evangelization should not be treated as merely "one of the many church ministries," but it should be seen as the engine that drives motivation and inspires each aspect in the life of a local Christian community.

And indeed, the results of the survey indicated that the parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts have significantly higher degree of involvement of parishioners in all aspects of parish life than the "normal" parishes. The survey asked: "Besides attending liturgical services, would you say that the dominant majority of your parishioners are actively involved in all other aspects of the life of your parish? Or is it rather a core group of parishioners that does everything, whereas most members participate only passively?" The parishes can choose from three answers:

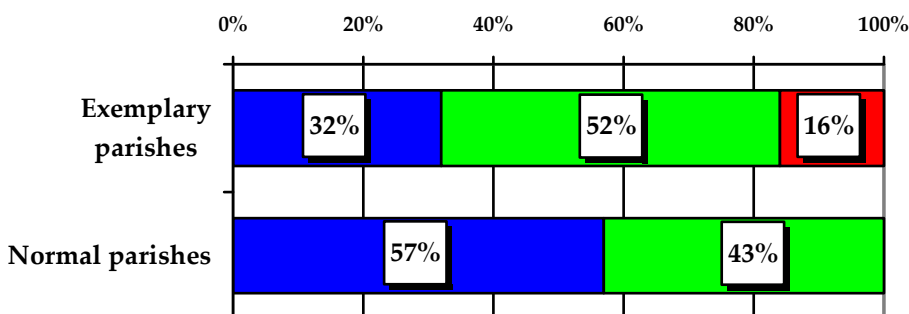
- ❖ "A relatively small core group does everything;"
- ❖ "About half of parishioners are actively involved;"
- ❖ "Dominant majority of parishioners are actively involved."

Fig. 8 shows that more than two-thirds of "exemplary" parishes reported that at least half (or even dominant majority) of parishioners are actively involved in all aspects of the life of a parish. Very differently, in an absolute majority (57%) of the "normal" parishes only a "small core group of parishioners does everything," whereas most members participate only passively.

Fig. 8 Degree of Involvement of Parishioners in the Various Aspects of the Life of a Parish

"Besides attending liturgical services, would you say that the dominant majority of your parishioners are actively involved in all other aspects of the life of your parish? Or is it rather a core group of parishioners that does everything, whereas most members participate only passively?"

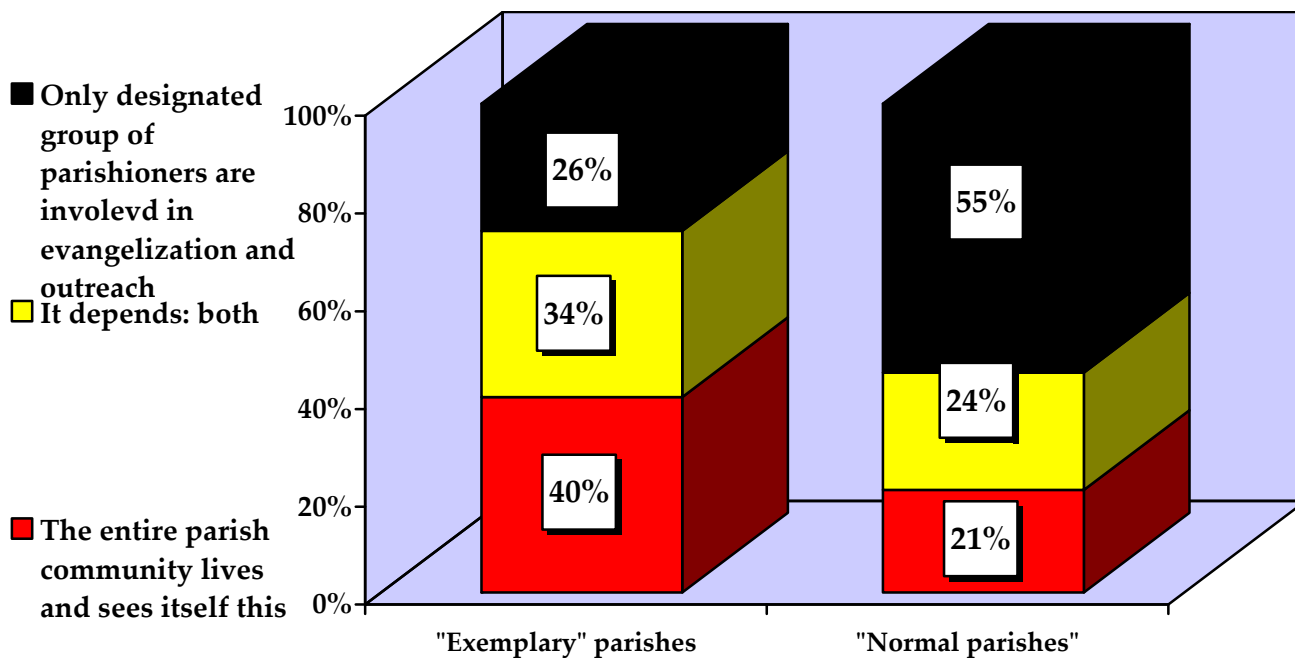
- A relatively small core group of parishioners does everything
- About half of parishioners are actively involved
- Dominant majority of parishioners are actively involved



The survey continued with a more specific question "Are your parish's *outreach efforts* carried out by a designated group of dedicated church members or is it rather the way that the entire parish community lives and sees itself?" This question was open-ended question so that the respondents could freely write their answers and provide any additional comments. All submitted answers were divided into three categories. In the first category were responses indicating that the entire parish community is devoted to and engaged in the outreach work. The second group was formed by the answers suggesting that "it depends:" i.e., sometime the whole parish is engaged and sometime only limited group of individuals. Finally, the third category consisted of responses describing situation when only small number of parishioners participated in parish's evangelization and outreach efforts.

Fig. 9 shows that in 40% of "exemplary" parishes the evangelization and outreach efforts are perceived as the way that the entire parish community lives and sees itself. Only one quarter of "exemplary" parishes reported that their evangelization and outreach efforts are carried out by a limited group of designated church members. Differently, in an absolute majority (55%) of the "normal" parishes only a small number of parishioners are involved in evangelization and outreach work.

Fig. 9 "Are your parish's *outreach efforts* carried out by a designated group of dedicated church members or is it rather the way that the entire parish community lives and sees itself?"



Overall, the content analysis of the answers from the "exemplary" parishes revealed that their typical attitude is that evangelization and outreach is something that penetrates all aspects of parish's life and defines "mindset" of a parish community. Here are five quotes from the answers to the question "Are your parish's *outreach efforts* carried out by a designated group of dedicated church members or is it rather the way that the entire parish community lives and sees itself?" that exemplify this finding:

- "It's not so much a concerted effort, rather than just the way we do things."
- "Outreach activities are organic - we engage all aspects of our parish community."
- "Outreach is more of a mindset and way of life, rather than a product of a few. Having said this though, our clergy, who are identifiable, really attempt to take the lead and reinforce this message."
- "This is part of our DNA."
- "Significant broad participation with moral and material support from the whole parish. We see outreach as something a parish is called to do. No one ever questions it or asks to see 'results!'"

Are there any particular "strategies" that the "exemplary" parishes use in order to achieve broad involvement and participation of church members into outreach efforts and more broadly onto all aspects of the life of a parish? The questionnaire asked: "If the majority of parishioners are actively involved in the life of your parish, how have you achieved this? Is there any formal system in place that encourages everyone to attend regularly and participate actively?" Our respondents - the clergy of "exemplary" parishes - offered a variety of answers to this question, but essentially their responses boiled down to six "recipes" on how to assure everyone's involvement into the life of a parish. These six strategies are:

- ❖ Creating and careful maintaining a variety of small "interest groups"
- ❖ Requiring each parishioner (as part of membership "duties") to participate in at least one permanent parish ministry
- ❖ Cultivating the sense of a parish's mission beyond worship services
- ❖ Cultivating the atmosphere of joy and close-knit family in a parish
- ❖ Being flexible in scheduling all events, activities and ministries: accommodating everyone's needs and time constraints
- ❖ Assuring top quality and relevance of worship services for everyone in the church

Below we provide the quotes from our respondents exemplifying each strategy and offering specific details on how they realize these approaches in their parish communities.

Creating and careful maintaining a variety of small "interest groups."

- "We have multiple core groups. Thus, we have: prayer group, men's group, women's group, home-schooling group, festival group, educational group, choir, reading & writer's guild, and Sunday school teachers. In order to maximize parishioner participation and leadership we do the following:
 1. When a parishioner opines, "Father, you know we ought to have a group that does _____." My response usually is, "You know, I believe that is a wonderful idea. Why don't you provide me with a proposal? I will review it, and you can lead it." In this way, the priest is knowledgeable of what the parishioners may want to do, the people are empowered, and the priest is always a de-facto member of every organization.
 2. All "proposals" must be reviewed by the priest, and he (the priest) must author a "charter" establishing lanes in the road for the new organization. The organizational membership, agenda, meeting times, etc., must be approved by the priest. The priest ought to attend as many meetings as possible as the spiritual advisor. The priest may not be able to attend every session, but each meeting must produce a documented outcome.
 3. If any group's activities go beyond the charter, the priest must be willing to step-in and refocus the entity.
 4. Praise and recognition must be acknowledged as commensurate with the group activities.
 5. In our parish, there are no ethnic or cultural groups permitted that would exclude anyone. No flag exists above a church.
 6. Of critical importance is outreach beyond the confines of the parish and into the local community. A parish that is not "growing" at a rate of 5%-10% per year is experiencing negative growth and soon will find itself in fiscal or spiritual constraints.
 7. Similarly, any parish that is depending on its festival to pay its bills and not the stewardship of its people is placing its future in the hands of the non-Orthodox."

- "(We have) A variety of ministries: serving meals to the homeless at 3 different locations, mission work in Tanzania, social events and fundraisers for Orthodox charities, four Bible studies (two of which meet in people's homes), youth ministries, retreats, outside speakers, expanding choir, encouraging congregational singing in Liturgy, etc."

Requiring each parishioner to participate in at least one permanent ministry

- "As part of membership in the parish every adult is expected to participate in some additional service group or ministry of the Church, as part of their stewardship. The Church is structured to identify, invite and draw new participants into the service groups and ministries. The parish is structured in an array of 8 Service Groups which is tasked with the oversight of a particular area of parish life with specific ongoing ministries under each: Liturgy (servers, readers, chanters, prosphora bakers, etc); Charitable Works (prison ministry, immigrant ministry, right to life, Community Care, intercession, etc.); Hospitality (events); Outreach-Evangelization (Greeters); Religious Formation (Church School, Adult ed, Catechumenate); Buildings and Grounds; Library/Bookstore; Parish Administration (Board, Web committee). These groups are encouraged to meet monthly and carry out tasks, including planning, budgeting and calendar, as necessary. Each person should be able to find something that they are interested in, and good at."
- "Our parish theme is "Strengthen the Core and reduce the periphery." We ask our parishioners on their Stewardship Pledge cards to join at least one ministry. We then track their responses and give their names to the ministry chairs to formally and personally invite them to join that specific ministry. We also have encouraged our ministry chairs to actively recruit new people to their ministries. When someone new to the parish becomes a member, we invite them to be a part of a ministry. Because we have many ministry opportunities, these act as small groups that people can be a part of and not feel like they are an unimportant part of a large, impersonal community. Finally, each Parish Council member is a liaison to a number of ministries, helping to keep them active and to help insure that the ministries they are overseeing are actually functioning as true teams that are actually supported and held accountable to fulfill their missions and their goals on an annual basis. All ministry chairs meet several times a year in gatherings we call "Council of Ministries." The purpose of these gatherings is to support one another, coordinate our efforts and to streamline and communicate about the Parish's Annual Master Calendar."

Cultivating a sense of a parish's mission beyond worship services

- "Church is not a Sunday-morning only event. There is a vision for parish-life that sees all of us together fulfilling the work of God in the world. We have a mission and we all need to be involved. The clergy's role is to equip the laity and help them mature and find their place to serve."

Cultivating an atmosphere of joy and family in a parish

- "I believe that parishioners involve themselves in our Parish because we pray, study, and serve others with joy. When others see us enjoying our lives in Christ, even in the midst of adversity, it's encouraging and inviting. Essentially, it's an informal mentoring program."
- "Our church, thanks be to God, has been able to maintain a close, family feel to it. We have teams that serve on the weekends (everyone is on a team), women's and men's groups that are active, we eat and "play" a lot together outside of services and I contact everyone that is not in attendance on Sunday."

Being flexible: accommodating everyone's needs and time constraints

- "I have an open-door policy, i.e. I will have services and/or classes no matter how many people are in attendance. I will also have classes at anytime during the day or night in order to accommodate peoples' crazy and busy schedules. I also understand that what worked last year might not work the next year. I encourage people to ask questions and share ideas. I like having different services - hours, akathists, daily vespers, etc. - that people can attend and experience. There is no formal system just an open and patient attitude to listen to the spiritual needs and wants of the faithful. People are spiritually hungry and want to be fed. I have four different classes during the week: Prayer, Spirituality, Catechism and Old Testament. All of them are well attended and interactive. People feel comfortable asking questions and sharing their spiritual life."

Assuring top quality and relevance of worship services for everyone in the church

- "It just is what it is. My fellow clergy and I try to preach homilies that relate to people's daily lives, homilies that hopeful and positive, that concentrate on the Gospel. The preaching is heartfelt and not repetitive or hackneyed. Our services are bright and accessible and we engage children in them. I think that it's the vibrancy and the openness of our life that draws people in."

VI. Four Distinct Features of Religious Education in the Parishes that Are "Exemplary" in their Evangelization and Outreach Efforts

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS:

- ❖ In their religious education programs, the "normal" parishes focus primarily on religious education for children. Differently, the "exemplary" parishes pay greater attention to and have stronger emphasis on continuing religious education and faith formation of the adult church members.
- ❖ The "exemplary" parishes are "experimental" in designing their own religious education programs: they employ a variety of forms of learning about the Orthodox Faith and "tailor" their religious education to the needs of particular groups of church members within the parish community. Differently, the "normal" parishes prefer to use the standard religious education curriculum and format developed and recommended by their respective dioceses and jurisdictions.
- ❖ In their religious education programs, many "exemplary" parishes set the double-goal: a) To involve everyone into continuing learning about the Orthodox Faith and b) To encourage as many as possible parishioners to become religious educators and teachers themselves. Differently, in the "normal" parishes, typically only limited group of church members is involved in religious education programs.
- ❖ In many "exemplary" parishes, religious education is viewed not as "stand alone" program but as a ministry that penetrates all other aspects of the parish life

DISCUSSION:

Evangelization work and efforts can be seen as having two aspects:

- ❖ "Inner" evangelization: continuing faith formation of the current members of a parish (and also efforts geared towards passive church members and "nominal" Orthodox);
- ❖ "Outward" evangelization: reaching out to unchurched people and non-Orthodox "inquirers" about Orthodox Faith.

In this chapter, we will look at the first aspect ("inner" evangelization) by examining and comparing the state of religious education offered to church members in the parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts versus "normal" parishes.

The survey asked parish priests: "What are the most remarkable and/or distinctive characteristics of your parish's religious education programs: e.g. how many people are involved, how the process is organized, what are the curricula, who teaches the classes, etc.?"

The answers that came from the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes were significantly different in four ways. First, nearly one-third of the "normal" parishes admitted overall poor state of their religious education programs and activities. Differently, out of all "exemplary" parishes, only one reported, "These programs (i.e. religious education) were cancelled due to lack of interest/attendance."

Second, the responses provided by the "normal" parishes were primarily about religious education for children and, especially, about the Sunday school programs and activities. Differently, the answers that came from the "exemplary" parishes revealed that - compared to the "normal" parishes - the "exemplary" parishes pay greater attention to and have stronger emphasis on continuing religious education and faith formation of the adult church members.

Third, the "exemplary" parishes are "experimental" in designing their own religious education programs: they employ a variety of forms of learning about the Orthodox Faith and strive to "tailor" their religious education to the needs of particular groups of church members within the parish community. Differently, the "normal" parishes prefer to use the standard religious education curriculum and format developed and recommended by their respective dioceses and jurisdictions. Here are several examples of responses from the "exemplary" parishes that reflect their desire to develop their own creative religious education programs:

- "Tailored specifically to each person. Nothing generic. Nothing cookie cut."
- "The church school program is highly flexible: it is a 'one room schoolhouse' approach. Students gather for a lesson and then are split into age appropriate groups for an activity. We rotate through different sets of volunteers every month."
- "Here, we sort of catch-as-catch can. Our curricula come from several sources, chiefly those that are provided by many of the Orthodox publishing groups. We have a small group of volunteer teachers who conduct these weekly classes [they meet each Sunday]. I've used several sources...OCA, the Greek Archdiocese being prominent."

- "Our Religious Formation Service Group fosters the life of the parish in a variety of ways. In addition to the Church school (20 students, 4 classes, 7 instructors), we encourage (financially support) youth participation in Church camps. For adults, we have periodic in-home instructions (at church is difficult to gather). We have instruction series (i.e. History of Christianity in Africa), an annual parish retreat, special speakers on timely topics. If Charitable Works is doing a program, it serves as an opportunity for a Religious Formation presentation on the topic. Regular topics on stewardship and hopefully the Sunday sermons are formative. We have special programs for demographic groups (death-dying, OCF, etc.) More of a topical approach than an ongoing bible study. There is also a set series for Inquirers and Converts."
- "We offer four to five adult studies each week, in addition to our youth program. Our youth program is made up of approximately 80 students, while our adult program serves between 80-100 individuals. I teach both a Bible study and theology course during the week; our deacon offers a Bible study every other week; the director of our Adult Education, offers one or two introductory courses as needed; and we have a professor from a local university teaching biblical Greek."

Fourth and, perhaps, most importantly, a number of "exemplary" parishes wrote about setting the double-goal:

- ❖ To involve everyone in the parish into continuing learning about the Orthodox Faith and, at the same time,
- ❖ To encourage as many as possible parishioners to become religious educators and teachers themselves.

Further, many respondents from the "exemplary" parishes emphasized that in their parishes the religious education is not viewed as a "stand alone" program, but as a ministry that penetrates all aspects of the parish life. Below are some examples of responses that reflect this tendency:

- "(We have) 'Total Parish Education' approach: providing opportunities in educating the parish on the Orthodox Faith through every activity and event."
- "The whole entire parish is involved in religious education because we feel that each person should be a life-long learner. Our parents and grandparents are integral in educating the youth."

We have 15 people involved in Sunday school. We have five youth groups, with 2 leaders per group. We have a weekly adult Sunday school that has around 60 participants. This runs concurrent with our youth Sunday school. We have two weekly Bible Studies. We have a monthly Senior gathering that includes a lecture and discussion and a luncheon. We have an annual Inquirers Series that runs 13 weeks and is team taught by six different teachers (2 priests, 1 deacon, and 3 lay teachers), we offer 4 serious retreats per year, including one for men, one for women, one parish wide, and one marriage retreat. We also have monthly men's breakfasts and lectures/discussion, as well as one woman's monthly presentation/discussion with the priest. Every couple of years we offer an in-depth series on parenting, because we have on staff a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, who has lots of contacts and colleagues who can give helpful lectures and answer questions. Every service is an opportunity for a homily, and before each Parish Council and Philoptochos meeting, the priest offers a reflection."

- "We have a strong adult education program for parishioners and inquirers. Please note, not all is taught by the priest. This is important. *I strongly encourage subject matter specialists by challenging the parishioners to teach.*"
- "In addition to clergy, we involve well-trained lay people in leading adult classes; Sunday school involves over 30 teachers and teachers aides in the classroom."
- "We emphasize religious education in all aspects of parish life and use every opportunity to increase the spiritual development and formation of every parishioner. We also focus first on the adult religious education."

VII. Church Governance and Finances in the "Exemplary" and "Normal" Parishes

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ The most important difference in the style of parish governance between the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes is that the "exemplary" parishes pay much greater attention to the conciliarity, consensus and the involvement of the entire parish community in the process of decision making. Differently, the "normal" parishes are more typically "run" by the limited group of people - the members of parish councils.
- ❖ The most important difference between the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes in the models of financial contributions of church members to their parishes is that a significant number of

"exemplary" parishes developed and employed successfully the "free will offering" model. "The free will offering" is a situation when parishioners are encouraged constantly to give to the best of their ability, but are not required to commit in advance any specified amount of money or percentage of their income. Differently, a significant number of "normal" parishes still employ the old-fashioned model of the "membership dues" - the fixed amount of required minimum contributions to be considered a member.

DISCUSSION:

An Orthodox parish may and should strive to reach out into the wider local community, but first it needs to organize itself internally. That is, parish's efforts in the area of evangelism and outreach are not likely to be successful, if it has a dysfunctional administration and decision-making system.

The questionnaire asked: "What are the most remarkable and distinctive characteristics of governance and decision making in your parish?" Among variety of individual responses, seven themes and subjects were often present in clergy's answers.

First, a number of respondents said that essentially there is "nothing special" about their parishes' administrations. Or, they simply skipped this question.

The second group of responses focused on some negative aspects and deficiencies in parish administration:

- "Sorry we are a hangover from 'trusteeism.' A delicate issue that needs to change."
- "It takes way to long to make decisions. Decisions get dragged out and there is major stagnation on a parish council level."
- "Our Board is 'typical' for a parish of our particular origin. We struggle with discord and gossip between various families that threaten to undermine our growth."
- "This is an area (i.e. parish governance) that needs radical change for an authoritarian model is currently in use."

Third, a significant number of clergy simply reported that their parish councils (parish boards, etc.) are capable and functional:

- "Our parish council is cooperative and functions well."
- "By and large, the members of our church board work well together, making church governance rather smooth."
- "Parish council is dedicated to well being of the Church."
- "It (Council) is well run. The finances are tight, but the books are professionally done. As a board, we do things in a conciliar fashion."

In the fourth category were responses that emphasized strong and healthy cooperation between parish councils and clergy:

- "The parish council is flexible, hard-working and shows great difference to the role of the priest in all matters."
- "Parish priest is getting along very well with the parish council."
- "We work like a team, parish priest and parish council. Decisions are done all by consensus and with full transparency."
- "The parish council works very closely with the priest and all decisions are made together."

Fifth, a number of answers was about truly conciliar and "family-style" nature of parish governance when not only clergy and parish council, but the entire parish community is fully engaged in the process of decision-making:

- "We have an expressed rule that no decisions are voted upon per se. It must be a consensus. We endeavor for transparency in all decision-making."
- "Consensus model is the predominant approach. We are trying to make that universal in the parish."
- "Tremendous emphasis on building consensus. Making sure minority opinions are heard. Transparency regarding finances."
- "Cooperation of the church council, the priest, and the parish. People are very helpful, respectful, and willing hear various points of view."

- "We operate as a family. Priest is a father and people of God are his children and brothers and sisters to each other. We try not to offend God because we need his blessings in order to prosper. We don't want to push him away."
- "It's open opportunity for all to participate in deliberation and decision making."
- "We try to have 100% consensus on major decisions. We promote an atmosphere of spiritual discernment rather than a traditional democracy."

One particular reply in this category of answers deserved full quotation, because it described in details how efficient parish administration and ministries could be organized through everyone's involvement and mutual accountability: "We make a conscious effort to empower and involve our laity to take ownership of their own ministries. This means actually having a real ministry team of several members of the parish as opposed to a ministry of one person. We hold them accountable to having a mission statement for their ministry, a stated vision and annual goals that our Parish Council liaison supports them in fulfilling. We make sure that every ministry has a ministry binder that serves as a manual for continuity and successful succession when the time comes. We help each ministry to create and manage their own budget and to effectively communicate their budget needs to our Parish Council Treasurer, so that the Parish's Operating Budget is a true reflection of the needs of each ministry. We try to train our leaders on how to lead and how to in turn train a successor, so we do not encourage burn out or parochial insecurity. We try to help our members to identify their unique gifts and talents and to encourage them to use them in ministry to the glory of God."

Sixth, in contrast to previous two groups of answers, a number of responses indicated that most of decisions in a parish are done predominantly by the clergy. Here are some examples:

- "Parish Council and people truly follow directions from the priest."
- "The church board does not need to convene to decide every possible idea. The parish president is not given much status, and when things are deferred to him, the priest is often consulted."
- "They respect the decision of the priest. There is little if any conflict."
- "(Parish is) led by vision and conviction of the priest."

Seventh, a few respondents wrote about "Christ-oriented" process of decision making in their parishes:

- "Parish council and others in leadership positions must first and foremost be committed to Christ, regularly participate in worship and sacramental life."
- "Christ-centered."
- "The parish council is largely drawn from the most spiritually serious members."
- "Our leadership prays and studies together in each gathering and our decision-making is collegial."
- "People who actually work together for the Glory of God."

There were also some answers that did not fit into described above seven categories. But the number of such answers was relatively small. However, one of them deserves full quotation, because it offers parish governance model which is driven by the strong focus on constant running of some programs or projects beyond liturgical life: "We remain focused on at least one project per month. Something is always occurring. We never stand still. I subscribe to the biological belief that things are either 'progressing' or 'regressing.' In biology, there is no such thing as 'stability.' This is Leadership 101. If anyone is seeking 'stability' they likely have no idea what they are doing to an organization. This attitude affects everyone. We keep moving and talk about the movement."

There was a significant difference between the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes in the number of responses that belong to each category. See Fig. 10 on the next page.

Fig. 10 "What are the most remarkable and/or distinctive characteristics of governance and decision making in your parish?"

Types of responses. Parish priests wrote about:

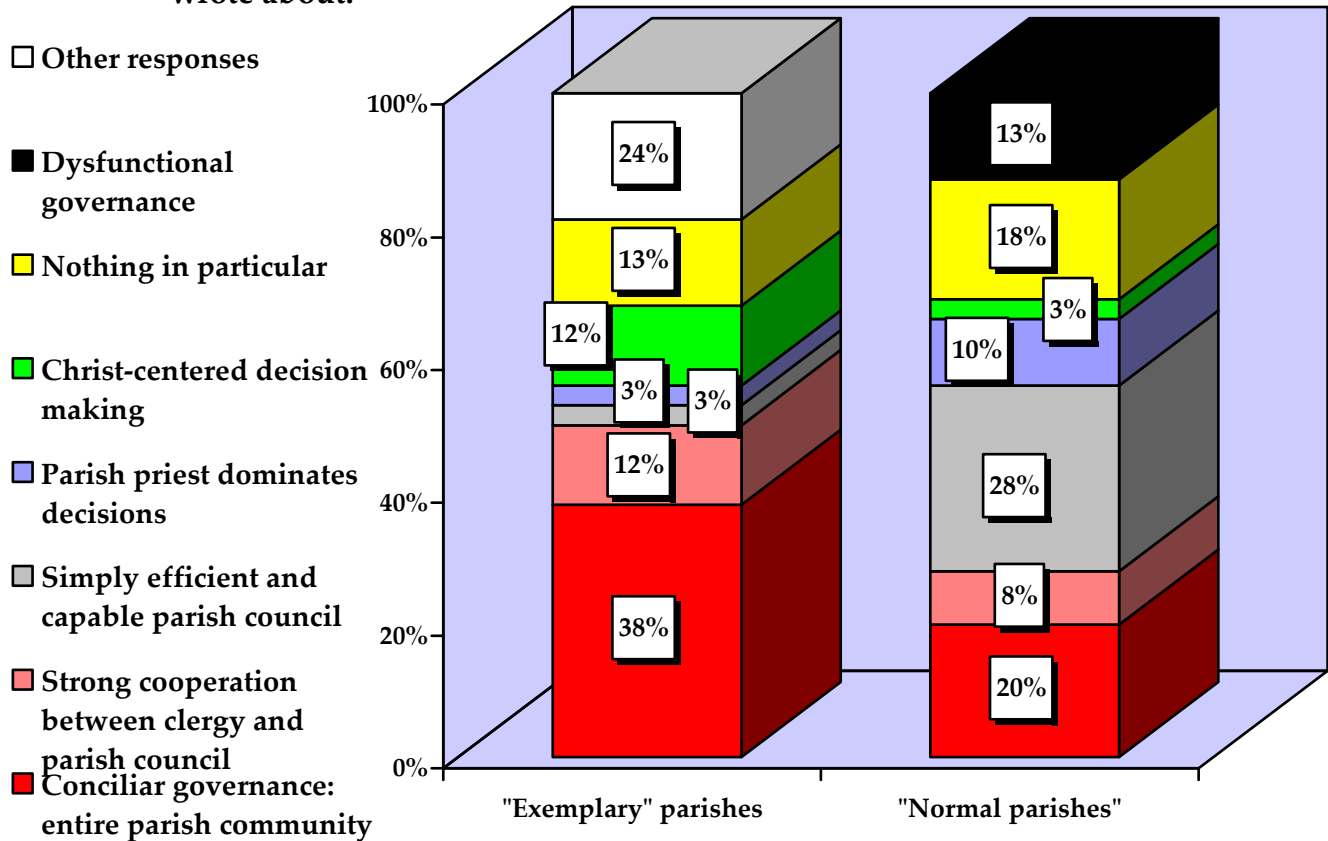


Fig. 10 shows that many more "exemplary" than "normal" parishes emphasize cooperative decision-making and governance style which engages various constituencies within the parish community. Indeed, 50% of the "exemplary" parishes reported having either "conciliar" governance model (the entire parish community is involved in decision-making) or governance model with the strong emphasis on cooperation between clergy and parish council. Only 28% of the "normal" parishes mentioned these two models in their responses.

Vice versa, nearly half of the "normal" parishes (46%) either simply reported having "good council" or replied that there is "nothing special about our governance." To compare, only 16% among the "exemplary" parishes provided these types of answers.

In a nutshell, the most important difference in style of parish governance between the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes is that the "exemplary" parishes pay much greater attention to the conciliarity, consensus, and the involvement of the entire parish community. Differently, the "normal" parishes are more typically "run" by the limited group of people - the members of parish councils.

US Orthodox parishes use a variety of systems for the financial contributions of their members: the old-fashioned "membership dues" (i.e. fixed amount of required contribution per individual or per household to be considered a member), stewardship/pledging (i.e. variable contributions committed in advance by the church members), "adjustable tithing" (i.e. parishioners donating certain percentage of income), "tithing" (parishioners donating 10% of income), or any combination of the above models. In addition, the reality of many parishes is that - within a single parish - some parishioners give nothing or very little, while some give a lot; some parishioners pay "dues," some pledge, while some aspire to tithe, etc.

Are there any distinct features of the "exemplary" versus "normal" parishes in terms of how the systems of financial contributions of the church members are organized? The survey asked, "Which model best describes your parish's system of financial contributions of parishioners?" See Fig. 11

Fig. 11 "Which model best describes your parish's system of financial contributions by parishioners?"

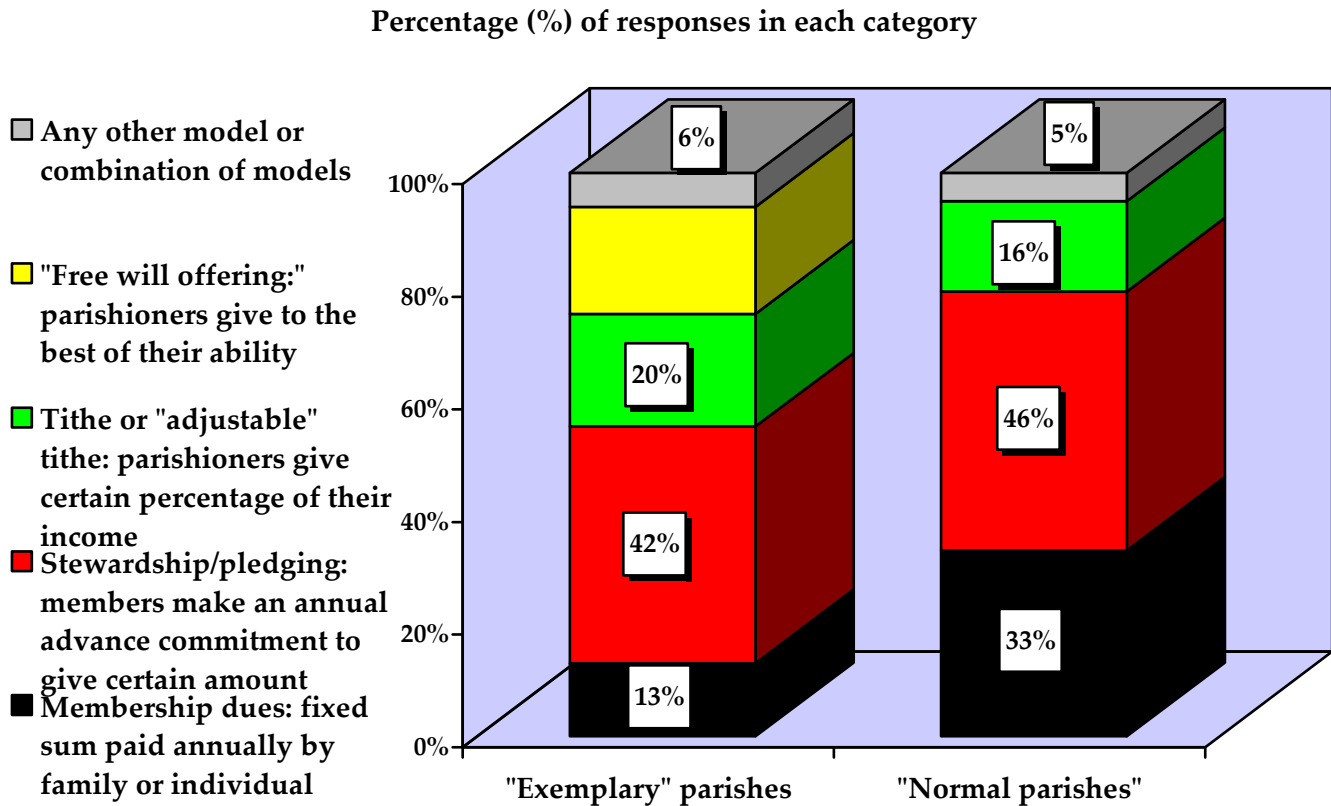


Fig. 11 shows two clear differences between the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes in how they solicit contributions from their members. First, the "membership dues" system (fixed sum paid annually by family or individual) is more common for the "normal" than the "exemplary" parishes. Second, and perhaps most importantly, only "exemplary" parishes (about one fifth of them) have developed and employed the model that can be defined as "free will offering."

"Free will offering" model can be described as the situation when parishioners are encouraged - one way or the other - to give to the best of their ability, but they are not asked to commit in advance any certain amount of money or percentage of their income. Clearly, this approach to balancing the budget of the parish may present many challenges (first of all, the uncertainty in how much income the parish will generate in any given period of time), but apparently, it works very well for certain parish communities.

Below are several comments from the "exemplary" parishes that employed "free will offering" approach and explained how it works:

- "We have run this parish through free will giving since its inception. No pledges, dues or tithes. Our parishioners give to the best of their ability."
- "No minimums or dues. Pledging was tried for years and had a low rate of return. Monthly, we publish a bottom line summary in the bulletin and the priest draws attention if deficits start to appear."
- "People simply give out of love and appreciation."
- "It's up to the person to do the best he/she can. It is successful in that our financial health is steadily improving and our budget is increasing without serious deficits."
- "The vast majority of our stewards make an ongoing commitment to the Church that is not based on calendar year (weekly or monthly giving). We utilize a formal mentoring program, 'Quill' that has done wonders. We don't talk about financial stewardship in Church, but rather provide opportunities to individuals to support other philanthropies of the Parish, Metropolis, Archdiocese, OCMC, IOCC, Project Mexico."
- "We present giving as a spiritual discipline. We ask people to give as much as they can joyfully and seek to increase their giving by growing spiritually. We don't view charitable giving in terms of a pledge but rather a principle."

It is worth noting that the above comments in support of the "free will offering" model of church members contributions came from the parishes representing a variety of jurisdictions: that is, "free will offering" approach is not "bound" to one particular "jurisdictional" (or "ethnic") culture. To conclude, when it comes to the financial contributions of church members to their parishes, the most remarkable distinction of the "exemplary" parishes is that a number of them developed and employed successfully the "free will offering" - the approach when parishioners are encouraged constantly to give to the best of their ability, but are not required to commit in advance any specified amount of money or percentage of their income.

VIII. Programs and Ministries in "Exemplary" and "Normal" Parishes

HIGHLIGHTS FINDINGS:

- ❖ Three differences emerged between the clergy in "exemplary" and "normal" parishes in their responses to the question "Have there been any significant changes in parish's programs and ministries while you have been with this parish?"
 1. The "exemplary" parishes typically embrace changes in ministries and keep trying new programs and activities even if they "don't work out." Differently, the "normal" parishes are more indifferent with regard to developing new programs and ministries;
 2. Unlike the answers from the "normal" parishes, the responses from "exemplary" parishes indicated understanding that "nothing is carved in stone," that programs and activities come and go depending on the parish's life-cycle and changing circumstances;
 3. The "exemplary" parishes are more likely to expand intentionally and significantly the diversity of new ministries. In contrast, the "normal" parishes typically add new or improve existing programs in only limited number of areas of a parish life.
- ❖ In their ministries, both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes pay primary attention to religious education of church members. However, unlike the "normal" parishes, the "exemplary" parishes offer a much greater variety of religious education and faith formation programs that address different subjects and issues and are geared to the needs and interests of various categories of church members.
- ❖ The outward oriented "social outreach and charitable work in the local community" ministries play greater role in the "exemplary" parishes, whereas "normal" parishes focus more on their internal lives: on "social life and fellowship" ministries and programs.
- ❖ A number of "normal" parishes mentioned various "ethnic programs and events" among their top-three most important ministries. Differently, no single "exemplary" parish included "ethnic programs and events" in the list of their top-three most important ministries.
- ❖ Surprisingly, among both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes, "religious outreach" programs and ministries (work with inquirers about Faith and catechumens, mission trips, Orthodox mass-media, education about Orthodox faith for the outside - non-Orthodox - community, etc.) were the least frequently mentioned among top three most important parish ministries.

- ❖ When asked about *one single* area of a parish life where a parish can "set an example" for other parishes, a significant number of both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes reported that their top strengths are in one of the following areas:
 - Being and building a strong and loving local Christian parish community;
 - Being friendly, open and welcoming community that attracts visitors and inquirers about the Faith;
 - High quality and engaging worship services and Liturgical life.
- ❖ Relatively few parish communities participating in the study believe that they can set an example for other parishes in one of the following areas:
 - Outreach and involvement into a local community;
 - Emphasis on including children and youth into the life of a parish;
 - Strong religious education and faith formation programs.
- ❖ Two strengths that are most uniquely expressed in the lives of the "exemplary" parishes are high quality and engaging liturgical life combined with the willingness and ability to "go out" and be involved in the local community. In the case of the "normal" parishes, their major strengths are more often related to building strong social relations within the parish community.

DISCUSSION:

This chapter will discuss the programs and ministries developed and employed in the parishes participating in the study. More specifically, we will examine three related subjects:

- ❖ Evolution and changes in parish programs and ministries over period of time;
- ❖ Ministries and programs that the parishes consider as being most fundamental and important to them;
- ❖ The areas of parish life that the parishes are most proud and see as their most fundamental areas of strength.

Three remarks should be made before analysis of the survey data. First, the overall approach of this study is *not only* "there is no silver bullet program/ministry" for being successful in Orthodox religious and social outreach, *but also* Orthodox evangelism and mission are not about programs and ministries. It was established in the first chapter that evangelization is not about the projects, programs or events

that merely increase the number of people who regularly attend the church. Rather, evangelization was defined in this study as the entire way of living of an Orthodox parish community. It is a continuing and evolving process that constantly wins new people to Christ and makes current church members more devoted disciples. As such, evangelism is not a certain ministry (or ministries), but it could be seen as the engine that drives motivation and inspires each aspect in the life of a parish. From this perspective, various parish-based programs and ministries can be seen as "tools" and "fuels" that help the engine to run smoothly and efficiently.

Second, on the following pages we will discuss a wide range of various parish programs and ministries. We are not suggesting, however, that some of these ministries are more important while some are less important for being a parish that is successful in Orthodox evangelism and outreach. Rather, following our allegory of evangelism as being a powerful engine that drives and inspires parish community, our approach is that the "engines" are as different as the various parish communities are. Therefore, the "tools" and "fuels" (ministries and programs) that serve one "engine" would not work for the other "engine."

The third and final remark is that while the questionnaire asked the respondents about "programs" and "ministries," a significant number of priests wrote also about their worship services: about changes and improvements in liturgical life of a parish, etc. Clearly, inspiring, engaging and meaningful liturgical life of a parish is fundamental to successful Orthodox evangelism and mission. Therefore, we will include and analyze this type of responses along with the answers of clergy about programs and ministries.

The questionnaire first asked the parish clergy: "Have there been any significant changes in parish's programs and ministries while you have been with this parish?" "Change" has always been a somewhat challenging subject for the Orthodox Church, because our dogmatic teachings are a received, handed-down tradition. While many areas of parish life have no direct relation to Orthodox religious teachings, "we have always done it that way" approach is, nevertheless, a widespread way of thinking in many Orthodox parishes.

Accordingly, the first noticeable difference in responses from the "exemplary" versus "normal" parishes was that the vast majority of "exemplary" parishes reported some changes in their programs and ministries and did so always in a positive manner. Even in the cases when a certain ministry did not work the way it was planned, the answers from the "exemplary" parishes still sounded upbeat and optimistic. As one priest reported: "We continue to consider and try new things, *whether they work or not*. We're obliged to be creative, making this our offering to God. If a ministry works, glory be to Him; if not, glory be to Him (we tried and again think creatively about how we can engage our parishioners and our greater community with love)!"

Differently, more than one-third of the normal parishes either reported "no change" or some negative change in their programs and ministries. And unlike "try and try again" approach typical for exemplary parishes, the tone of answers from some "normal" parishes was beaten-down and defeated. Here is an example: "Some new programs have been attempted but lack of interest caused them to fall away. Church school was terminated after my first year as there were no children in the parish but my own, and no one wanted to coordinate the program." Or: "Adult study and youth group were instituted. However, participation varies from month to month due to the seasonal nature of living in 'X.' Willingness to serve on established committees (such as the sisterhood) is in decline."

In short, when it comes to introducing the new programs and ministries, the first significant difference between the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes is their overall different attitude towards changes. While "exemplary" parishes typically embrace the changes, and keep trying new programs and ministries even if they "don't work out," the "normal" parishes are more reluctant or indifferent with regard to developing new programs and ministries.²⁴

Related to this first difference, the second distinct feature of responses from "exemplary" parishes was that they were not simply about "adding" new ministries, but also conveyed a sense that "nothing is carved in stone," that programs and activities come and go depending on the parish's life-cycle and

²⁴ As a side note, the more "experimental" nature of the "exemplary" than the "normal" parishes reveals also through the fact that some of them developed truly interesting and creative ways to reach out into the local community. Here is a good example: "Prison Ministry to State Pen. Accredited class time at State College on Orthodox Christianity. 350-word newspaper articles published regularly (for free). Public Inquirer classes in new cities where there are NO Orthodox Christians (seminar format). Guided Wine Tasting at church Social Hall."

changing circumstances. That is, the clergy in "exemplary" parishes understand that a program that is very important presently may become totally irrelevant in the future. Here are a few examples of answers from the "exemplary" parishes that demonstrate this attitude:

- *"We try to strive to be cognizant of the natural life of a program or ministry - and the need to organically start or cease involvement.* For example, we partnered with a local social service agency by providing ESL classes at our parish. That lasted 9 years but was stopped when clients were more fluent in English and less signed up. Vice versa, some programs that we stopped doing a few years ago (e.g., food distribution), were restarted due to an increasing demand of working poor in our local area."
- *"We have to stop some and bring new one.* Since we have our own church the activities become in 'good standing:' regular service, Sunday school, religious education, seminars on different topics as, health education."
- *"We've 'tried' a lot of things over the years - those things that became consistent became formal 'ministries' with a person identified to help coordinate it. Some things (serving meals at the Salvation Army) did not continue.* One of the hardest things to do is to keep people active in the leadership-planning process. All activities are open to participation by anyone in the parish. We just completed a 'Dave Ramsey Financial Peace University' course which served as both an outreach and an inner parish ministry. We may well do this sort of thing again."

Clearly, when the "normal" parishes develop the new programs and ministries they also - similar to "exemplary" parishes - do so out of desire to "fill the gaps" and to "add whatever is lacking." However, their responses did not demonstrate such a clear - as it was with the "exemplary" parishes - understanding that the ministries and programs may have their own "life cycles:" from birth, to maturity and, eventually, natural death.

Third, the answers to the question "Have there been any significant changes in parish's programs and ministries while you have been with this parish?" boiled down to four broad areas:

- ❖ Changes in worship services and liturgical life;
- ❖ Changes in religious education and faith formation programs;
- ❖ Changes in ministries that focus on religious and social outreach into the local community;
- ❖ Changes in programs addressing the needs and interests of children, teenagers and youths.

The changes in each of the above categories were mentioned more or less equally frequently by the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes. The difference, however, was that many more "exemplary" than "normal" parishes reported simultaneously multiple (i.e. related to several areas) changes in their programs and ministries. That is, compared to the "normal" parishes, the "exemplary" parishes are more likely not simply to add (or improve) some ministries, but also to expand significantly their diversity. Differently, with certain exceptions, "normal" parishes reported adding new and/or improving existing programs and activities in only one of above listed categories. Here are examples of answers that were much more typical for the "exemplary" than the "normal" parishes:

- "We have grown our ministries: parish outings, parish retreats, Youth mission teams to Appalachia, soup kitchen, adult mission trips, ESL classes for the local Latino community started and stopped, music concerts."
- "No programs or ministries when arrived. Now have youth group, OCF, 'mom's', ladies study, men's study. We run the youth camps and retreats and annual mission trip. Started coffee house/bookstore as an evangelical endeavor."
- "We had little to no youth programs. Now we have numerous children and youth programs (a vibrant vacation church camp with 50 kids, Greek dance group, St. Nicholas celebration, Christmas pageant, godparent\grandparent Sunday, bible bowl, etc.). Project Mexico, Habitat for Humanity, Blood drive, AA, NA. Bible studies, retreats twice a year, numerous guest speakers, and other educational programs."
- "We have built from the ground, basically. Development of, for example, Coffee Hour Teams, Greeters, Money Counters, Garden Team. Solid Choir with rehearsals. Web team. Etc."
- "Our church school has been revitalized, along with a youth group for teens and a young adult group. We have an active FOCUS chapter, and raise funds for our local Right to Life and Pregnancy Care Center."

In addition, by developing intentionally a variety of programs and ministries some "exemplary" parishes attempt to engage in active ministry-work all different constituencies within their parish communities. In other words, different ministries and programs are "designed" for various "small interest groups" within a parish community:

- *"We have created ministries for all ages* from annual pilgrimages, retreats, Bible Study, Fellowship nights, food feeding programs, special events and community building, adult education classes, web and web based teaching and streaming, etc."

After reviewing the past evolution and changes in the ministries and programs in the parishes participating in the study, the logical next question is: "Where are the parishes now? That is, beyond worship services, what do 'exemplary' and 'normal' parishes focus on now? What are the ministries and programs that the parishes consider as being most fundamental and important to them?"

The survey asked: "What are three ministries/programs/activities that are most fundamental and essential for your parish?" The answers provided by the parishes varied greatly both in terms of the types of the ministries and programs (e.g. religious education, youth programs, etc.) and in how comprehensive a description of the ministries was (e.g. simply "religious education" versus more detailed explanation of specific religious education programs). Some of the ministries and programs mentioned by the respondents appeared to be truly interesting, creative and efficient. We selected a number of such responses and offer them as full quotes in Appendix III ("Selected Quotes from the Survey That Can be Helpful for Other Parishes").

For the purpose of formal analysis, however, the answers provided by the respondents were divided into seven broad categories of programs and ministries:²⁵

- ❖ Religious education and faith formation of church members (various forms of children and adult religious education as well as spiritual retreats)
- ❖ Youth programs and ministries
- ❖ Social outreach and charitable work in the local community

²⁵ Clearly, several replies did not fit into any of these seven categories, but there were only few exceptions of this kind.

- ❖ Religious outreach (work with inquirers about Faith and catechumens, mission trips, Orthodox mass-media, education about Orthodox faith for the outside - non-Orthodox - community, etc.)
- ❖ "Ethnic programs and events" (ethnic festivals, dancing competitions, language programs, ethnic association and groups within the parish communities, etc.)
- ❖ "Taking care of parish needs" programs and ministries (including fundraisers, running kitchen and bookstores, beautification of church buildings, maintenance of church grounds, etc.)
- ❖ "Social life and fellowship" ministries and programs (including various associations, "small groups," brotherhoods and sisterhoods within the parish community; parish's various social events, etc.)

The first and, perhaps, most important observation is that both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes overwhelmingly focus on "religious education and faith formation" programs and ministries. Among both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes the answers in category "religious education and faith formation" outnumbered by far the replies related to other categories of programs and ministries.

However, while religious education and faith formation ministries appear to be a very central piece in the lives of all parishes, there was a noticeable difference in answers from "exemplary" versus "normal" parishes. Most replies from the "normal" parishes were short notes and indicate such forms of religious education that are routinely present in most parishes: e.g. "Sunday school," "Adult Bible study," etc. Differently, many replies from the "exemplary" parishes suggest that they are much more experimental, creative and use wider range of forms for religious education and faith formation of church members than the "normal" parishes. Unlike "normal" parishes, many more "exemplary" parishes wrote about religious education classes addressing particular subjects (or classes relating Orthodox teachings with various contemporary issues), invited guest speakers and lectures, spiritual retreats, the studies conducted by the small "interest groups," etc. Further, some of the "exemplary" parishes developed and employ successfully entirely new forms of continuing faith formation of the church members. One parish, for instance, wrote about so-called "St. James House" program. Here is a description of this program: "St. James House, a ministry of our parish, provides a one-year residential program where young, single people live in an extended-family setting and become better prepared to live in the world as faithful Orthodox Christian men and women. This is accomplished primarily through evening

studies, household work projects, and participation in the liturgical and community life of our parish, as well as their daily interaction with one another. The household itself is run by a resident family whose goal is to mentor the program's participants in facing everyday challenges responsibly and with faith in God. The pastor and clergy of our parish also oversee the program by providing instruction and spiritual direction."

This particular example combined with the overall greater variety of religious education forms offered in the "exemplary" (than the "normal") parishes suggest that the religious education and faith formation ministries in the "exemplary" parishes are also more engaging and designed with a goal in mind to include everyone in one or other form of continuing religious education. That is, different categories of church members present in a parish should be able to find some religious education program that would address their specific interests rather than joining generic and uniform "adult Bible study."

In summary, in their ministries, both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes pay primary attention to religious education of church members. However, unlike the "normal" parishes, the "exemplary" parishes offer much greater variety of religious education and faith formation programs that address different subjects and issues and are geared to the needs and interests of the various categories of church members.

With regard to other types of ministries and programs, the frequency of mentioning of each (in descending order) was as follows. For "exemplary" parishes:

- ❖ Social outreach and charitable work in the local community
- ❖ "Social life and fellowship" ministries and programs (including various associations, "small groups," brotherhoods and sisterhoods within the parish community; parish's various social events, etc.)
- ❖ "Taking care of parish needs" programs and ministries (including fundraisers, running kitchen and bookstores, beautification of church buildings, maintenance of church grounds, etc.)
- ❖ Youth programs and ministries
- ❖ Religious outreach (work with inquirers about Faith and catechumens, mission trips, Orthodox mass-media, education about Orthodox faith for the outside - non-Orthodox - community, etc.).

The sixth category, "Ethnic programs and events" (ethnic festivals, dancing competition, language programs, ethnic association and groups within the parish communities, etc.), was not present at all in the replies from the "exemplary" parishes.

For "normal" parishes, the frequency of mentioning of various types of ministries was somewhat different:

- ❖ "Social life and fellowship" ministries and programs (including various associations, "small groups," brotherhoods and sisterhoods within the parish community; parish's various social events, etc.)
- ❖ Social outreach and charitable work in the local community
- ❖ Youth programs and ministries
- ❖ "Ethnic programs and events" (ethnic festivals, dancing competitions, language programs, ethnic association and groups within the parish communities, etc.);
- ❖ "Taking care of parish needs" programs and ministries (including fundraisers, running kitchen and bookstores, beautification of church building, maintenance of church grounds, etc.)
- ❖ Religious outreach (work with inquirers about Faith and catechumens, mission trips, Orthodox mass-media, education about Orthodox faith for the outside - non-Orthodox - community, etc.)

Even a cursory glance on these two sequences reveals a few observations worth noting. First, the outward oriented "social outreach and charitable work in the local community" ministries play greater role in the "exemplary" parishes, whereas "normal" parishes focus more on their internal lives: on "social life and fellowship" ministries and programs. Second, as noted already, "ethnic programs and events" have no place in the lives of the "exemplary" parishes, whereas a number of "normal" parishes mentioned them among their top three important ministries. Third and somewhat surprisingly, among both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes, the "religious outreach" programs and ministries were the least frequently mentioned as part of their top-three most important ministries. There are, however, two possible explanations for this finding.

First, the chapter on definitions of Orthodox evangelism provided by the parish priests indicated that majority of clergy in both "normal" and "exemplary" parishes understand evangelism in the Orthodox Church as mostly "passive" evangelism: i.e. the emphasis is on "come and see" approach or on "witnessing by setting a personal or parish community example of the genuine Christian life." Following this understanding, the uplifting and engaging liturgical services, strong and continuing faith formation of church members which results in their desire to witness personally and collective witness of the parish community through the social outreach and involvement into local community are more important for the Orthodox evangelism than more proactive "religious outreach."

Second, it is also likely that many more "exemplary" than "normal" parishes developed and employ successfully various "religious outreach" ministries. However, the answers of the respondents were limited to selection of only three "top" most important ministries and programs. That is, "religious outreach" could have been ranked as #4 or #5 in importance, but the respondents were not given such opportunity.

The final question in this chapter is about what "exemplary" and "normal" parishes see as the most fundamental areas of their strengths. The questionnaire asked: "If you were asked to name one particular area of your parish life where your parish can set an example for other Orthodox parishes, what would that be?" Clearly, while a parish may excel in several various areas of church life, this question "forced" the respondents to pick-and-choose just the one aspect that they are most proud. Nearly all answers to this questions unfolded into six categories. They are listed below in order of frequency of their mentioning in the responses from - combined - "exemplary" and "normal" parishes:

- ❖ Being and building a strong and loving local Christian parish community;
- ❖ Being friendly, open and welcoming community that attracts visitors and inquirers about the Faith;
- ❖ High quality and engaging worship services and liturgical life;
- ❖ Outreach and involvement into a local community;
- ❖ Emphasis on including children and youth into the life of a parish;
- ❖ Strong religious education and faith formation programs.

It should be noted that there was a significant gap in frequency of mentioning of the top three categories versus the last three categories. In simple words, a significant number of parishes participating in the study are especially proud of themselves, because of:

- ❖ Being and building a strong and loving local Christian parish community;
- ❖ Being friendly, open and welcoming community that attracts visitors and inquirers about the Faith;
- ❖ High quality and engaging worship services and liturgical life.

At the same time, significantly fewer parish communities believe that they can set an example for other parishes in the areas of:

- ❖ Outreach and involvement into a local community;
- ❖ Emphasis on including children and youth into the life of a parish;
- ❖ Strong religious education and faith formation programs.

Below we offer a few - the most interesting - examples of answers to the question "If you were asked to name one particular area of your parish life where your parish can set an example for other Orthodox parishes, what would that be?" in each category

Being and building a strong and loving local Christian parish community

- "Realizing that we all have weaknesses, instead of provoking each other's weaknesses, we help each other deal with them."
- "We pray for each other."
- "We excel at maintaining love between our members."
- "We are good at bringing together teams of people with the proper gifts to identify a problem or opportunity and take action."
- "We pay a lot of attention to and are really good at getting everyone involved. We have programs for people from babies to those at the end of their life. It is important at our church that everyone feel like family and that they have a home at Saint Anthony Church."
- "We are good at blending the immigrants, the old timers and new converts. Everyone gets along and respects each other."

Being friendly, open and welcoming community that attracts visitors and inquirers about the Faith

- "Hospitality, openness, and a welcoming atmosphere. Not a lot of attention is paid to this, but the *whole community is effective at welcoming guests;*"
- "We are really good at welcoming guests. Many of our people were once guests in not very pleasant settings, so they go out of their way to be kind to our guests."
- "We are a very open and inviting community. We accept kids with joy. Visitors often remark at how easy it is to participate in our community."

High quality and engaging worship services and Liturgical life

- "We have significant number of people who have learned the services so that we have Matins and Vespers every weekday."
- "Liturgical participation of everyone."
- "Sunday Worship of the parish family is intimate and spiritually uplifting. We have non-Orthodox to come and just worship with us because they feel at peace."
- "We spend a lot of time on worship services; making sure we have a plethora of services to choose from. We started a Saint Anastasia Paraklesis once per month -- to pray for those who are struggling with substance abuse and mental health (she is the patron)."
- "Liturgical life and choir participation at every service, leading the congregation in singing the responses."

Outreach and involvement into a local community

- "Having a goal of tithing ten percent of our budget to the poor. Unfortunately, we haven't met this goal very often and we wind up patching the driveway or replacing the air conditioning."
- "Serving the people of the local community without any strings attached."
- "We pay a lot of attention and we are really good at connecting people to the Church. Our mission is extremely welcoming and loving."

Emphasis on including children and youth into the life of a parish

- "Children! We encourage families with young kids to sit up front during Liturgy so kids can see what's going on. We encourage boys to be altar boys and can have as many as 20 altar boys each Liturgy. The little kids come and hold the hand of the priest during the Prayer behind the Amvon. We have two distinct Sunday Schools each Sunday. The main one after the English Liturgy has approximately 110 kids and a second SS was added a few years ago for our bilingual immigrant kids, and approximately 20 attend that session."
- "Equipping our parents and educating them to be the 24 hour, 7 day a week catechists, evangelists and youth leaders of their own children. Our expectation is that our children will convert to the Orthodox Faith and make it their own before they leave their homes and go out on their own to college or young adulthood."

Offering strong religious education and faith formation programs

- "Adult Education - we try to come up with many creative ideas each year; we try to be creative with our offerings; In short, we make an effort to ensure that people understand what it means to be 'Orthodox'."
- "We pay a lot of attention to faith and science."

All what was said so far about the question "If you were asked to name one particular area of your parish life where your parish can set an example for other Orthodox parishes, what would that be?" reflected the responses that came both from the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes. When, we looked at the answers from these two groups separately, three telling differences emerged.

Significantly more "exemplary" than "normal" parishes reported that they could be an example for other parishes because of "high quality and engaging worship services and liturgical life." Similarly, significantly more "exemplary" than "normal" parishes reported that they could be an example for other parishes in the area of "outreach and involvement into a local community." Differently, significantly more "normal" than "exemplary" parishes wrote that their most fundamental area of strength is "being and building a strong and loving local Christian parish community."

Do these differences imply that the "exemplary" parishes are not good at "being and building a strong and loving local Christian parish community?" Or do these differences indicate that the "normal" parishes do not have "high quality and engaging worship services and liturgical life?" The answer is "of course, no," because this question in the survey forced the respondents to choose *just one* area in the lives of their parishes which they are most proud of.

At the same time, these differences reflect two different "sets" of major strengths that distinguish the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes. The strengths that are most uniquely expressed in the lives of the "exemplary" parishes are high quality and engaging liturgical life combined with the willingness and ability to "go out" and be involved in the local community. In the case of the "normal" parishes, their major strengths are more often related to building strong social relations within the parish community.

IX. The "Secrets" of Being a Parish that Attracts and Welcomes New Members.

Eight Good Practices of Welcoming First-Time Visitors and Inquirers about the Faith

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS:

- ❖ Three out of ten "normal" parishes do NOT view themselves as a "truly loving Christian community." In contrast, all "exemplary" parishes affirmed that they are "truly loving Christian communities;"
- ❖ Only few (14%) of the "normal" parishes think of themselves as "truly loving Christian communities," *because* their members care for one another and provide practical help to each other in times of needs. Differently, a significant number (41%) of "exemplary" parishes reported that caring for one another and providing practical help to each other in times of needs by the parish members is primary reason why a parish sees itself as a "truly loving Christian" community. That is, not simply maintaining an overall "welcoming" atmosphere but fostering mutual support and care among all church members is a benchmark of "exemplary" (versus "normal") parishes;
- ❖ Strong emphasis on welcoming inquirers about the Faith and first-time visitors is another benchmark of the "exemplary" (versus "normal" parishes). Only a minority of the "normal" parishes replied "definitely yes" to the question "Would you say that your parish is a *very welcoming* place for inquirers about Orthodox Faith and first time visitors?" In contrast, three-

quarters (75%) of the "exemplary" parishes are fully convinced that the inquirers about the Faith and first-time visitors would feel very welcomed if they come to this parish;

- ❖ Compared to the cradle Orthodox church members, the parishioners who are converts to Orthodoxy tend to be especially welcoming to first-time visitors and pay more attention to the inquirers about the Orthodox Faith;
- ❖ Eight "good practices and techniques" of welcoming to an Orthodox parish were identified from the personal stories of the parishes about how they "meet and greet" their first-time visitors and inquirers about Orthodoxy. These eight practices are described in this chapter and accompanied by the actual quotations from the parishes;
- ❖ There is not much difference in how "exemplary" and "normal" parishes address the issue of the search for new members. Relatively few parishes in both groups place strong emphasis on active "going out and bringing in" new members. Many more parishes believe in winning new members by simply witnessing the Orthodox Faith through the lives of their parish communities and by focusing on welcoming visitors and newcomers to the parishes;
- ❖ Only a handful of parishes pay attention to and were able to develop a good synergy of two ("active search" and "passive welcoming") approaches to acquiring new church members.

DISCUSSION:

One of the qualities inherent in the parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts is the "togetherness" of a parish community: i.e. the sense that everyone is "on board" and has shared vision for parish's mission and goals.

Indeed, we found previously that the "exemplary" parishes have a much higher degree of members' involvement in *all aspects* of parish life than the "normal" parishes. We saw also that - unlike the "normal" parishes - in the "exemplary" parishes the evangelization and outreach efforts are more often perceived not as "programs" and "activities" but as the way that the *entire parish* community lives and sees itself. Further, it was also noted that when it comes to continuing faith formation many "exemplary" parishes set the double-goal of a) involving everyone into continuing learning about the Orthodox Faith and, at the same time, b) encouraging as many as possible parishioners to become religious educators and teachers themselves.

Chapter V discussed several "strategies" that the "exemplary" parishes intentionally use in order to achieve broad participation of all members in the various areas of church life. However, regardless of various techniques that the parishes may employ to increase involvement of their members, it would be hardly possible to achieve this sense of "togetherness" among parishioners without being a loving Christian community - the community where all members feel "at home" and part of a large extended family.

This chapter will examine two related questions:

- ❖ What does it mean for a parish to be a truly loving Christian community?
- ❖ What does it take to be a parish that welcomes newcomers, first-time visitors and inquirers about the Orthodox Faith?

In addition, we will also discuss a question of whether it is important for a parish to actively search for new members.

The survey asked: "Would you say that your parish can be called a truly loving Christian community? If yes, why? Can you give some examples from the real life?" Despite variety in the individual responses, nearly all answers from the parishes fit into four major categories. In the first category were replies essentially saying that this parish is "not" or "not always" a "loving Christian community." For instance:

- "This is an area we need to work on."
- "Some parishioners are very welcoming. Others, not at all, to the point that they ask guests to move from their pew."
- "Not yet, there is work to be done, even though they can welcome people in, often the community falls short because we are not focusing on the community we are growing in Christ, but how to benefit myself."
- "Yes and no. We are good at welcoming newcomers but tend to ignore them after a few months when they become familiar faces. Parishioners claim close ethnic ties but rarely reach out to people outside their own families when a need arise, especially if the person is relatively new."
- "We have a long way to go! We are essentially a Sunday-only Eucharistic community of mostly barely evangelized folks that are not quite sure why they're there."

The second group of responses was formed by the answers simply saying "yes" (i.e. reaffirming that this parish is, indeed, a "loving Christian community"), but without any further explanation or examples why this parish could be seen as a truly loving community.

The third category consisted of answers indicating that this parish is a truly loving Christian community, because of its emphasis on welcoming and hospitality. Here are some examples:

- "We welcome and love everyone who comes into the church. (When I converted to Orthodoxy, I experienced the exact opposite since I was not Greek. Today, I still have families who come to our parish at the 'suggestion' of other ethnic churches, because I am willing to 'catechize anyone.' This is a sad reflection on Orthodoxy.) We have a strong welcoming committee for all entering the church. The welcome committee makes it a point to introduce all visitors to the priest and or member of the advisory council. We pray for non-Orthodox members of parishioner families. Do it and let them know you've done it. We never ask a child to be quiet during the liturgy or homily."
- "Yes. Inquirers and newcomers say we are a very kind and inviting parish. As the priest, I never have to worry if someone has been greeted or invited to stay and fellowship."
- "People mention it all the time when they visit. They feel wanted, welcomed, and loved. You can't fake that. We have both a Missions and Evangelism Ministry and a Welcome Ministry focused on systematically welcoming visitors to our parish and helping them through the services, connecting them with other parishioners and the clergy and respectfully making them feel invited to participate at some level."
- "There is real warmth and effort made in the efforts made by our greeters. People in Hospitality sacrifice a lot of effort to provide a coffee hour that is engaging. The real experience of the loving community is in the Holy Liturgy."

Finally, the answers in the fourth category focused on the fact that this parish is a "truly loving community," because its members care for one another and offer practical help to each other when needed. For example:

- "I would say that we are perceived as a loving parish, both by members and by those who have come to know us. 1. Women in our parish regularly prepare and deliver meals to new mothers and their families, to those who are recovering from long-term illness, etc. 2. *People take time* to visit those whom we haven't seen for a time, letting them know that they are missed and we care for them. 3. I have, on occasion, made visits to people who are not Orthodox but who have been mentioned to me as someone in need. 4. We established a St. Nicholas Fund a few years ago. It is rather like a discretionary fund from which we provide money to those who have needs that aren't easily met. Along with my discretionary fund, we use this reserve to help people with everything from paying bills to buying medicine."
- "We have several people struggling with addiction, mental illness, people who are shut-ins. *Everyone* does their best to help, to visit, to call, to cook, to offer rides, to visit, to pray for them."
- "YES! The popularity of our Parish charities program - financially helping parishioners that experience hardships - has proven to be a cornerstone of our community. We announce when people are hospitalized or request prayer. The outpouring of cards expressing support is incredible."
- "Yes. People know each other and are helping each other in different ways. We help those who are in need for a moment or for the long run."
- "Our people give to those that are in need, help others move, bring food to the sick and suffering, invite each other over to eat, stay attentive to members that are struggling and reach out to them, welcome everyone, lead others to Christ...I am blessed to be their priest."

Fig. 12 shows the percentage of "exemplary" and "normal" parishes providing the answers that fit into one of these four categories.

Fig. 12 "Would you say that your parish can be called a truly loving Christian community? If yes, why? Can you give some examples from the real life?"

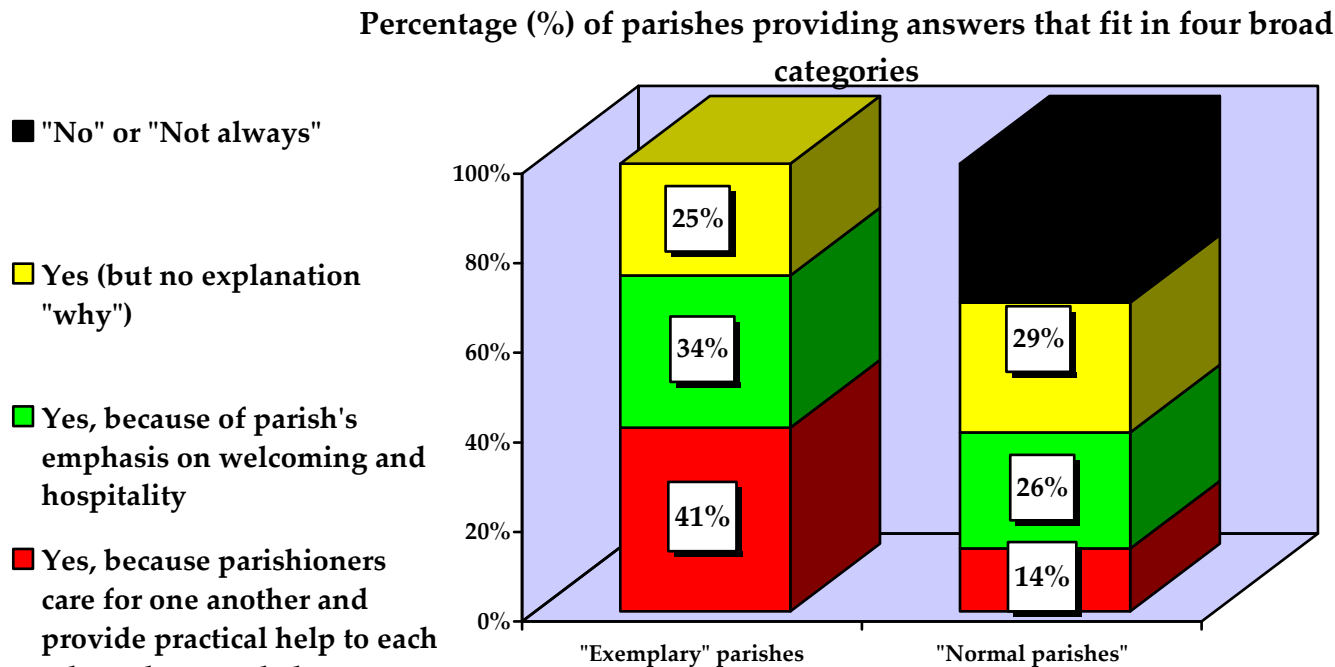
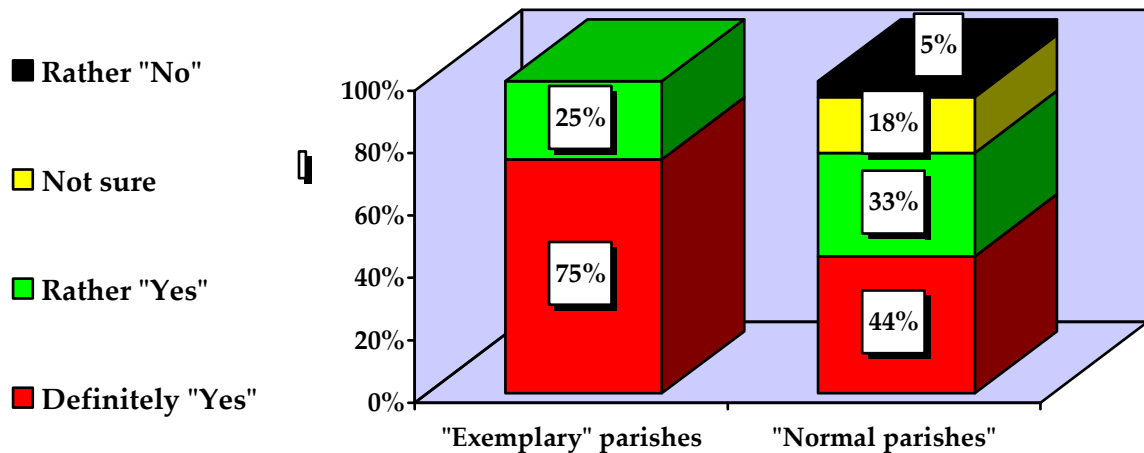


Fig. 12 shows clearly two major differences between "exemplary" and "normal" parishes when it comes to the question of being "a truly loving Christian community." First, three out of ten "normal" parishes do NOT view themselves as a "truly loving Christian community." Differently, without exception, all "exemplary" parishes affirmed that they are indeed "truly loving Christian communities."

The second significant difference is that only few (14%) of the "normal" parishes describe themselves as "truly loving Christian communities," *because* their members care for one another and provide practical help to each other in times of needs. Differently, as many as 41% of "exemplary" parishes reported that caring for one another and providing practical help to each other in times of needs by the parish members is primary reason why a parish sees itself as a "truly loving Christian" community. In a nutshell, fostering mutual support and care among all church members - not simply maintaining an overall "welcoming" atmosphere - could be seen as a benchmark of "exemplary" (versus "normal") parishes.

In order to better examine the issue of welcoming and hospitality of US Orthodox parishes, the survey followed with the question: "Would you say that your parish is a *very welcoming* place for inquirers about Orthodox Faith and first time visitors?" See Fig. 13

Fig. 13 "Would you say that your parish is a *very welcoming* place for inquirers about Orthodox Faith and first time visitors?"



The single most important observation from Fig. 13 is simple. Nearly one quarter (23%) of the "normal" parishes do not view themselves as being welcoming places for inquirers about Orthodox Faith and first-time visitors. And less than half (44%) of the "normal" parishes have no doubt that they are, indeed "very welcoming places" and replied "definitely yes" to the question "Would you say that your parish is a *very welcoming* place for inquirers about Orthodox Faith and first time visitors?" In contrast, three-quarters (75%) of the "exemplary" parishes are fully convinced that the inquirers about the Faith and first-time visitors would feel very welcomed if they come to this parish. Hence, strong emphasis on the welcoming inquirers about the Faith and first-time visitors is another benchmark of the "exemplary" (versus "normal" parishes).

The question "Would you say that your parish is a *very welcoming* place for inquirers about Orthodox Faith and first time visitors?" also gave respondents the possibility to offer any additional comments. Relatively few of them used this option. However, a number of replies indicated the same idea: namely, that the parishioners who are converts to Orthodoxy tend to be especially welcoming and pay particular

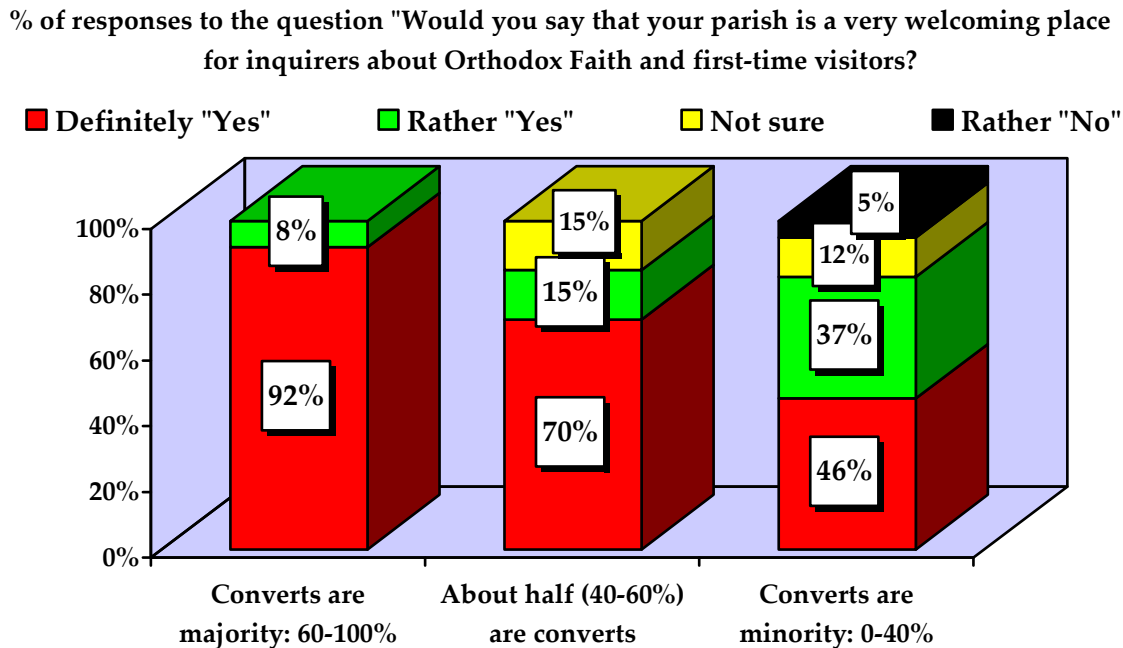
attention to the inquirers about the Faith and first-time visitors, because of their personal memories of walking first time into an Orthodox parish. Here are two responses exemplifying this:

- "A significant percentage of our community are converts (including the priest) and they are extremely happy to see people working their way towards Orthodoxy."
- "Most of my people were there at some point. They are very sympathetic to this with visitors."

The fact that parishioners who are converts to Orthodox Church are especially keen on welcoming inquirers about the Orthodox Faith and first-time visitors was confirmed when we compared the parishes with different presence of converts among their members with responses from the same parishes to the question "Would you say that your parish is a *very welcoming* place for inquirers about Orthodox Faith and first time visitors?"

Fig. 14 on the next page shows, nearly all (92%) parishes where the converts to Orthodoxy constitute majority of parishioners fully agreed that they are "very welcoming places for inquirers about Orthodox Faith and first-time visitors." To compare, less than half (46%) of the parishes where converts are in minority among church members replied "definitely yes" to the question "Would you say that your parish is a *very welcoming* place for inquirers about Orthodox Faith and first time visitors?"

Fig. 14 Presence of Converts among Parishioners and Responses of the Parishes to the Question "Would you say that your parish is a *very welcoming* place for inquirers about Orthodox Faith and first time visitors?"



Presence of converts to Orthodoxy among parishioners

The important practical question is: how exactly the parishes "meet and greet" their first-time visitors and inquirers about Orthodox Faith? Do they use certain established procedures and protocols? What can be learned about the best practices employed by the parishes with the goal to welcome their visitors and inquirers about the Orthodox Faith?

The questionnaire asked: "Do you have a designated group of people and an established process that assures that inquirers about the Orthodox Faith and first time visitors feel welcomed in your parish? Please describe." The analysis of responses from the parishes identified eight "good practices of welcoming to an Orthodox parish" Below we provide an overview of these eight "welcoming practices" developed by the parishes. For each "good welcoming practice" listed below, we also offer actual quotes from the parishes exemplifying this practice

First practice. Make a point and a policy to not miss a single soul visiting the parish for the first time.

- "Every single person - no exception- coming into the parish receives a personal greeting, simply a greeting. This is done without pressure and with gratitude for their presence. And always with a personal invitation to return and or inquire."

Second practice. Have a designated (and trained!) group of parishioners whose ministry is to greet and welcome visitors:

- "Our greeters are trained to be warm, welcoming, introducing newcomers to others, inviting them to coffee hour. Many folks have joined the parish specifically as a result of their first encounter at the door."
- "We have a vibrant ushering committee that welcomes everyone who walks into the church with smile. And we follow up announcing their names, walking them to Coffee Hour."
- "We have people, who when spotting a new face, would approach an individual and welcome him to the temple as well as invite them over for a social hour after church worship."
- "There are five or ten parishioners who 'keep an eye out' and personally greet visitors. I, in turn, personally greet them at our coffee hour or, if they had to leave early, write a little note."

Third practice. Simply "greeting" visitors is not enough: "welcoming" is a comprehensive process. It includes providing visitors with information about the parish, introducing them to other parishioners, inviting to Coffee hour and fellowship after worship, etc.:

- "Our welcoming is comprehensive, from guest cards, bread, follow up after visitation, web resources, etc."
- "The Greeters ministry is a formal part of our Outreach/Evangelization service group. They are trained, assigned and identified (name tag) to provide a warm welcome to all, basic information, encourage participation, answer questions, etc. I specifically ask greeters to introduce me to guests. If they are new to Orthodoxy we invite them to informal inquirer discussion and introduce them to people with whom they may have something in common (work, family, location, etc.)."

Fourth practice. Have someone who is available and prepared to explain Orthodox worship process to visitors. It is especially important for people who first time "walked right into Orthodox liturgy." Similarly, have some basic educational materials about Orthodox Church readily available for non-Orthodox visitors:

- "There are people designated to assist visitors in following the liturgy."
- "We have greeters, who are supported by a 'liturgy buddy' who is ready to help guide newcomers through the worship service if needed."
- "I have improved the parish's basic educational materials supply. I had the parish order a variety of Ancient Faith tracts that help answer visitors' questions while also providing a simple way for the faithful to learn/relearn the basics of the Faith for themselves and also to better engage visitors."
- "We do have a group of young theologians led by Father Deacon "X" that is in charge with welcoming first time visitors."

Fifth practice. Regardless of having designated group of "greeters," the entire parish community should be attuned to welcoming anyone who is new to the parish:

- "All of the parishioners are attuned to and respond reflexively to new people who come to our Church."
- "We have taught our people to be very welcoming to guests."
- "Everyone in the parish makes a point to welcome any visitors at some point."
- "The Welcoming Committee, the Parish Council members on duty, members of the Missions and Evangelism Committee, rank and file parishioners, our Deacon, the Bookstore Staff are all frontline servants focused on the task of welcoming, greeting and connecting with visitors, inquirers and new faces."
- "We have ushers, but in general everyone is on board with welcoming guests and inquirers."

Sixth practice. Make the visitors to meet parishioners first, "break the ice," and then introduce them to the priest:

- "We have greeters to welcome anyone new and to make them feel welcome. This helps them to connect with the priest for follow up welcome and also encourage those who interested in learning more to ask questions and talk more with the pastor."
- "The priests, of course, also participate in welcoming, but usually not until these people (visitors) have already been warmly embraced by the parishioners."

Seventh practice. Always think "out of the box:" what else - however small - a parish can do to make first-time visitors feel welcomed and comfortable?

- "Every person that visits receives a 'Thanks for Visiting Basket' that contains some liturgical information, a loaf of homemade pumpkin bread, a beeswax candle and other small items. It is hand delivered to them."
- "Each year, we sponsor a reception for parish's new stewards at the Pastor's home."
- "We dedicate 3 parking spaces near the entrance for visitors."
- "We have a junior greeter too: i.e. the greeter for young people."
- "Newly received folks (new members) always have an eye out for newcomers: use them as greeters!"
- "As the rector, I make it point to stand outside and greet everyone as they enter church each Sunday."

Eights practice. Remember that there is always something missing - something that should be improved in parish's "welcoming" practices:

- "We need to have a more consistent personal follow up, such as inviting them into our home for a meal."
- "We need to get better. For example, visitors arrive on-time but parish council members, ushers and most worshipers arrive late."

Even if a parish community follows the above "good practices of parish hospitality," it does not mean that this parish is active in bringing new members into church community. Indeed, simply welcoming

those who already somehow found their way to a parish and engaging in the active search for new parishioners are two different things.

What is the position of US Orthodox parishes with regard to the question of "recruiting" new church members? Is there any significant difference in this regard between the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes? It should be noted that the issue of retaining current and having steady influx of new members is important for all religious congregations - even those that are not particularly concerned with the goal of "church growth." The data from the 2015 national study of US Orthodox Churches²⁶ suggest that many US Orthodox parishes face decline in number of actively involved parishioners. One of this study's findings revealed that between 2010 and 2015 the median attendance in a "typical average" American Orthodox parish (i.e., for all US Orthodox Churches combined) at weekend services dropped from 90 to 75 persons. In simple terms, in 2010, half of US Orthodox parishes had more than 90 persons in attendance on a typical weekend and half of them had less than that. In 2015, this figure decreased to 75. Among three major American Orthodox jurisdictions, between 2010 and 2015, the median weekend attendance in the GOA parishes declined from 177 to 150 and it dropped from 85 to 75 in the case of Antiochian parishes. Only OCA churches showed a slight increase in the median weekend worship attendance: from 65 to 70. This decline in church attendance means that from 2010-2015 a number of Orthodox Christians either abandoned their churches altogether or - at the best - they became more passive and disengaged in the lives of their parishes (i.e. they stopped attending worship services on a regular basis).

²⁶ The 2015 study "Orthodox Christian Churches in the 21st Century America" was part of a much larger US national inter-Christian and interfaith study of American religious congregations titled "Faith Communities Today" (FACT). The 2015 FACT national survey and study was undertaken by the "Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership" (CCSP) which is an interfaith coalition of religious researchers representing broad spectrum of American faith communities. Originally, the "Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas" (SCOBA) and currently the "Assembly of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in North and Central America" has been and remains one of the partners in CCSP cooperative project. The study "Orthodox Christian Churches in the 21st Century America" was conducted via online survey of the local parishes. In each parish, the questionnaire was completed by one key-informant: typically - a parish priest. 580 parishes (or 30% of all US Orthodox parishes) participated in the "Orthodox Parish Life Study."

Despite this decline in actively involved parishioners, the data indicate that the vast majority of US Orthodox parishes are rather passive when it comes to reaching out to potential new members. In the same 2015 national survey of American Orthodox churches, when asked "Overall, to what extent are your parishioners involved in bringing new members into this parish?" less than one-in-five of US Orthodox parishes (18%) reported "Quite a bit/A lot," whereas nearly half (47%) admitted "Not at all/A little." See Tab. 4.

Tab. 4 "Overall, to what extent are your parishioners involved in bringing new members into this parish?" (2015 national survey, based on responses from 580 US Orthodox parishes)

	Not at all/A little	Some	Quite a bit/A lot
All US Orthodox parishes	47%	35%	18%
Antiochian parishes	32%	50%	18%
GOA parishes	51%	33%	16%
OCA parishes	43%	35%	22%

Why do the vast majority of American Orthodox churches NOT engage in an active search for new members? Is this a "conscious" position or simply the lack of knowledge/experience of how to do this?

In order to shed light on this question the survey asked "Some people believe that it is important for a parish to actively look for new members, while some think that it is sufficient to simply be a welcoming community that accepts and integrates people who somehow found their way to the parish. What is your opinion on this question? If you believe that it is important to actively search for new members, how do you do this in your church." All seventy-five parishes participating in our study responded: no single parish priest "skipped" this question.

The answers provided by the parishes revealed a number of truly insightful findings. Perhaps, the most important (and somewhat surprising) was the fact that only relatively small number (slightly more than quarter) of *both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes* adhere to the position that a parish should place an emphasis on an active search for new members. And out of those parishes that affirm this "proactive position" in theory, only few were able to make it a reality, whereas the other supported it in principle,

but - for various reasons - did not pursue in practice. Among the latter group of parishes (the ones that "support in theory, but do not pursue in practice"), the typical responses were:

- "I believe it is important to be searching for new members. However, we do not do enough. Parishioners should be more pro active."
- "Active searching is a good thing; it has to become a regular part of a parish's activity. I'm no expert, so until/unless we have a core group who will work with me on brainstorming and initiating activities, I haven't any quick answers."
- "I believe we should actively seek out new members. We have not done a great job in this area. Thus far, we are more of a welcoming community for those who come."
- "It is critical to seek and speak to new people, and socially network & 'feed' new members. Building friendships and connections are critical. But I wish we could better develop the concept and implementation. Still have not come up with anything."

Very few (about 10%) - again, among both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes were not only willing, but able to integrate the active search for the new members into the parish's day-to-day life. Here are examples of replies from such parishes:

- "Our Lord commanded us, 'Go and make disciples.' He did not say, 'wait and welcome visitors.' The command is 'Go.' That said, we mostly do the latter. I am struggling to develop ways to preach publicly, teach publicly. This includes newspaper articles, etc. I have also begun (done it three times) to invite a group of 20 or so Protestant pastors to retreat/lunches on topics of my choosing. 3 successes so far."
- "We are constantly looking for Orthodox Romanians that don't go to church trying to motivate them and to make them active in the community."
- "Passively waiting for growth has not worked for us. We are attempting to use deliberate plans for growth. It is too early to know if this will work or not."
- "We have to actively seek out people. Even if the doors are wide open, we must seek out and invite people to the church and follow up with them to show we care."

A significant number (about 40%) of both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes affirmed that being a "welcoming" and "loving" Christian community is sufficient and there is no need to actively search for new members. Here is what many respondents - from both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes - wrote:

- "I think if we just ""be the church"" those looking for truth will find us. Of course, we can be more visible to help them, but if we are generally living a Christian life and striving for holiness, people will be organically drawn to it."
- "We have found a trickle of folks that come to us through the Jesus prayer group, and have yet to find a meaningful way to find more. My bias is toward equipping the faithful to be the missionaries, but that simply doesn't seem to work very well in Orthodoxy, hence we do spend time periodically reflecting together on the state of our hospitality."
- "The Church should be present, open, and welcoming, but should not beat the bushes looking for converts or new members. This tends to look like desperation and, in the case of transfers, sheep-stealing. Actively preaching and living the Gospel is one thing, seeking out proselytes is something else entirely."
- "We need to do both but mainly to make the parish a welcoming place. We can actively seek hundreds of new parishioners but if the parish is not a welcoming and truly Orthodox place then we will either lose or they will get a wrong impression of the church if they do stay."
- "Our focus has been on being a welcoming community. We have advertised and held inquirers classes but it has been the one on one approach that has been the most successful."
- "All the growth that we experienced was not because of programs or projects. All the people who came, came because they were looking for the Orthodox Church. They primarily found us through the internet. Internet presence is HUGE."
- "Actively search for new members? No, we do not. We pray that 'God's will be done.' We have a weekly and sometimes 2-3 times/week Stewardship Moleben. When we began to pray, about three years ago, the people came, and they continue to come. Prayer leads people to search and church. If you do not pray, you can spend all of the money you want, develop all of the programs you'd like, and no one will come. Prayer changes the people in the parish, and the Holy Spirit will do the rest. We must learn to stay out of the way of the Holy Spirit. We are at maximum capacity, solely because of prayer. Growth must be grounded in prayer."

- "In the 27 years of existence, St "X" has done nothing more than open the doors and minister to whoever God places at our step. We have never had any type of recruitment drives, etc."

In addition to the clergy who more or less clearly identified their positions either by favoring the active search for new members or by adhering to the stance that simply "welcoming and offering hospitality" is sufficient, there were also some priests who simply offered their individual "recipes" on what are the best ways to bring new members into a parish. Remarkably, most of these "recipes" were either about witnessing the Orthodox Faith via involvement into local community or by encouraging parishioners to bring to the church their non-Orthodox friends. Here are some examples of responses in this category:

- "While we've tried all of the usual methods, I've found, the sociological data support and I've emphasized to our parishioners that the most effective method of Church growth is for parishioners to invite their family and friends to come to Church with them. And this has been the most effective way."
- "Most of my new members come out those people whom I meet when I visit my parishioners."
- "Developing an 'invite them to church' mindset among parishioners is extremely important. It needs to be part of the parish DNA."
- "Our primary way of looking for new members is to encourage existing members to bring their family and friends."
- "We are trying to be plugged into the local community. We are trying to approach people in a non 'churchy'" way. To care about them without stings attached. Not a sales job."
- "Getting a volunteer team to work for Habitat or some similar group may be one way."
- "Volunteer at hospitals, nursing homes, etc."
- "This is a small community set in its ways. We rely on interpersonal relationships with our neighbors as the means to evangelize. For instance, much of my evangelism is working on boats with fishermen and deck crews."

In conclusion. There is not much difference in how "exemplary" and "normal" parishes address the issue of the search for new members. Relatively few parishes in both groups place strong emphasis on active "going out and bringing in" new members. Many more parishes take different approach: they believe in winning new members by witnessing the Orthodox Faith through the lives of their parish communities and by focusing on welcoming the visitors and newcomers to the parishes. This Orthodox "more

passive" way of acquiring new adherents and winning new members for the Church is very consistent with what was found in the chapter that discussed personal definitions of the term "Orthodox evangelism" provided by the clergy participating in our study.

Clearly, it is beyond the scope of this study to judge the preference of some (minority) parishes for an active search for the new members, or, to the contrary the adherence of the majority of parishes to the witnessing the Faith within their parish communities and welcoming new prospective members. What was disheartening, though, was the fact that only a handful of parishes pay attention to and were able to develop a good synergy of two ("active search" and "passive welcoming") approaches. Below we provide three quotes from the parishes that appeared to be able to integrate both approaches into the lives of their communities (one response came from the "exemplary" and two from the "normal" parishes):

- "I think there's a healthy balance that can be struck. In general, I believe in the 'growth the attraction' model. Become a Christ-like community and people will gravitate to it! Still, there are many who may not know that they are welcome to come and join us - to that end, my parish has offered ads for adult ed in the paper, offered tours during our festivals, and some parishioners have boldly proclaimed their Orthodoxy to their friends/family. But that 'active seeking' has always been a natural outgrowth of our parish's faith. When they were at a point to receive people, warmly in Christ, they started asking about 'getting our name out there.' Just yesterday a parishioner said, 'we can't hold on to this light, selfishly - I feel like we need to share it!'"
- "Knocking on doors was ruined by the Jehovah Witnesses (as Fr. Peter Gilquist of blessed memory joked). However, active looking for members should involve: 1) Inviting others to services. 2) Interacting with the greater community, para-church ministries, and religious communities as the parish cares for those in need. 3) Participation in campus events with local OCF. The above items along with the ability and willingness to discuss the Faith are outstanding ways to engage others. We do not necessarily have to 'look' for new members, but our living the Christian life personally and as a community places us in the position for those encounters to occur. I strongly disagree with the notion that just being a 'welcoming community that accepts and integrates people who somehow found their way to the parish' is sufficient. That being said parishes need to take their websites seriously as that is oftentimes the first encounter a potential

visitor has with a parish. "X" parish does not have a website further contributing to the challenges the parish faces."

- "I think it is important to do both. I have already addressed this answer in a previous question. Suffice it to say that we as Orthodox Christians need to have the same burning love in our hearts for every human being that Jesus Christ has in His heart. He first emptied Himself, and then He gave up His life for the salvation of each human being. He then sent out His disciples to the end of the known earth. We should be actively rather than passively doing the same."

X. The Question of "Visibility" of American Orthodox Churches in Their Local Communities

"By creating religious congregations - in cities and on the frontier - Americans embodied the cultural and religious values they cherished in ongoing institutions, structures that gave those values and traditions a place to thrive. As communities grew and become more complex, social welfare and other functions were often moved from the religious congregations to associations of laborers and co-ethnics and lodge brothers. Still, congregations did not disappear for lack of anything to do. As some of their functions were taken up by and shared with others, they continued to carve out a space for themselves in the lives of persons and neighborhoods."

Nancy Tatom Ammerman, "Congregation and Community"²⁷

HIGHLIGHTS FINDINGS:

- ❖ The vast majority (61%) of parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts have made "considerable effort" to make themselves better known in their local communities in comparison with only about one-quarter in the case of "normal" parishes;
- ❖ Answering the question, "If you made a conscious effort to make your parish better known in the local community, what were the most important strategies and "tools" that you employed?" the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes were remarkably different in one particular area: "Participation in the local community events." Nearly half (47%) of the "exemplary" parishes participate regularly in various events in their local communities with the goal to make themselves better known in comparison with only 27% in the case of the "normal" parishes;

²⁷ Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. 1999. *Congregation and Community*. Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick. p. 1.
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- ❖ 61% of "exemplary" parishes self-evaluated themselves as being "well known in the local community and surrounding neighborhoods" compared to only 40% among the "normal" parishes;
- ❖ When the parishes were asked "If your parish is well known in the local community, why or for what reason?" most of their answers "fit" into five broad categories:
 - Because of the efforts to be a "good neighbor" through the broad participation in the local community
 - Because of very distinct religious (Orthodox) identity and/or appearance of church building
 - Because of "ethnic" culture: food, festivals, fundraisers
 - Because of some charities or "enterprises" (coffee shop, book store, concerts) run by a parish
 - Because parish was present in community and neighborhood for a long time
- ❖ An absolute majority of the "normal" parishes (55%) think that they are known in their local communities primarily because of their "ethnic" culture and events (food-sales, festivals, fundraising events, etc.). Differently, the parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts typically think that the main reason for being well known is their broad (religious and non-religious) participation in the local communities and consistent effort to be a "good neighbor."

DISCUSSION:

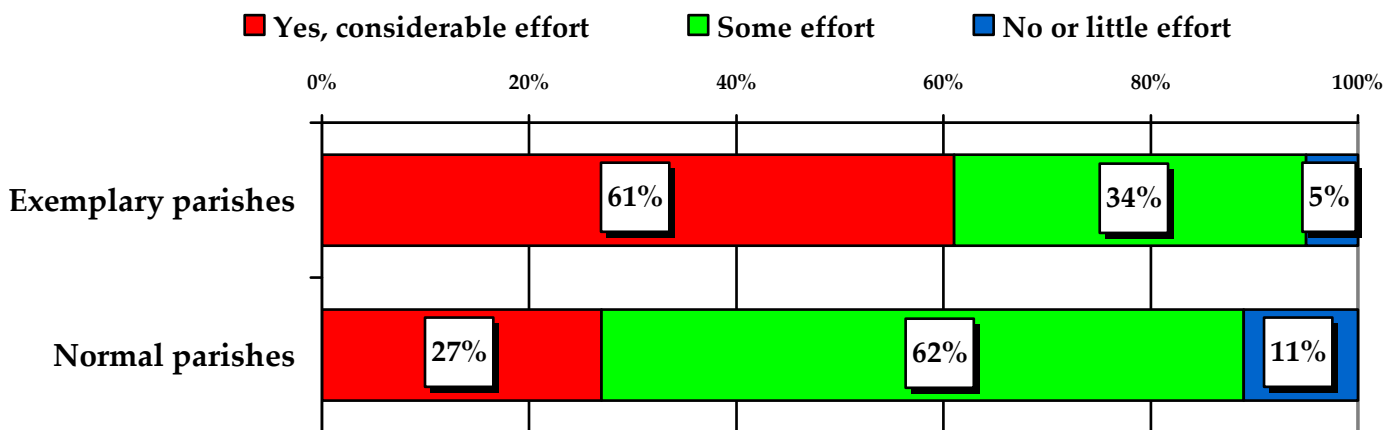
James Luther Adams wrote that voluntary religious institutions (and Orthodox churches fit this category) "function as a creative principle by making way for *free interaction* and innovation in the spirit of community."²⁸ It is feasible to assume that the parishes with a strong emphasis on evangelization and social outreach would actively interact with and build multiple connections in their local communities: with the local educational institutions, charities, other faith communities, various non-for-profits, mass-media, government agencies, etc. But the opposite relation is also true: if a parish is well known and "visible" in its community, this helps to promote this parish's evangelization and outreach programs and ministries. In short, the parishes that strive to be truly "outreach oriented" should pay great attention to being well known in their communities.

²⁸ Adams, James Luther. 1986. "The Voluntary Principle in the Forming of American Religion." Pp. 171-200 in *Voluntary Associations: Socio-Cultural Analyses and Theological Interpretation*, ed. J. Ronald Engel. Chicago: Exploration.

Not surprisingly, answering the question "Have you made a conscious effort to make your parish better known in the local community?" the vast majority (61%) of "exemplary" parishes replied "yes, considerable effort." Differently, only about one-quarter of "normal" parishes have made "considerable effort" to make the parish better known in the local community. See Fig. 15.

Fig. 15 Efforts to Make a Parish Better Known in its Local Community

"Have you made a conscious effort to make your parish better known in the local community?"



The survey followed with the question about how exactly the parishes are trying to increase their "visibility" in the local community: "If you made a conscious effort to make your parish better known in the local community, what were the most important strategies and "tools" that you employed?" The parishes were offered the list of six "strategies" and asked to indicate which of those strategies they have employed:

- ❖ Active usage of various social media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, etc.
- ❖ Frequent appearances in the local news media: television, radio, community bulletin boards.
- ❖ Parish festivals.
- ❖ Participation in the local events: farmer's markets, walks for charities, etc.
- ❖ Providing social services for local community: soup kitchen, homeless shelter, offering parish facilities for usage to other groups.
- ❖ Engaging in social justice work in the community.

Fig. 16 gives a good idea of what "exemplary" and "normal" parishes do (and what they don't do) in order to become better known in their local communities.

Fig. 5 Strategies Used by the "Exemplary" and "Normal" Parishes with the Goal to Make a Parish Better Known in the Local Community

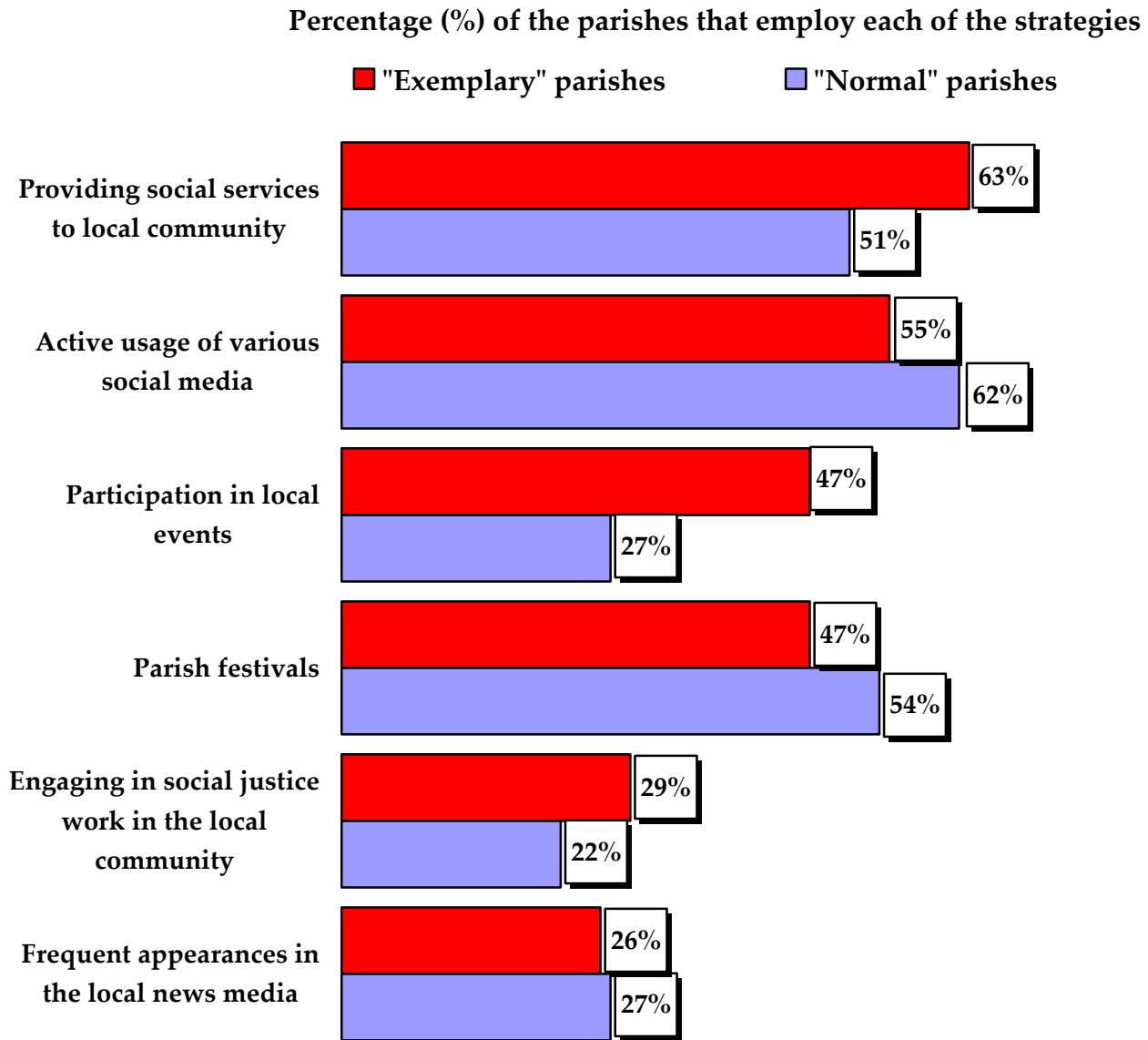


Fig. 16 shows that in many ways the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes are similar in their "preferences" for certain strategies which help them to promote themselves in their local communities. In both groups, "Providing social services to local community" and "Active usage of various social media" play a significant role in making the parishes more "visible" in their communities. Similarly, only a small

percentage of both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes reported that "Engaging in social justice work" and "Frequent appearances in the local news media" is what they do in order to become better known in their neighborhoods.²⁹

At the same time, Fig. 16 indicates one area where "exemplary" parishes are significantly different from the "normal" parishes. This area is "Participation in local community events." Nearly half (47%) of the "exemplary" parishes participate regularly in various events in their local communities in comparison with only 27% in the case of the "normal" parishes. This difference is quite important. Indeed, out of six strategies offered to parishes, this is the only one which fully imply "doing things together" with the other local social actors. In other words, compared to "normal" parishes, the parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach work are much more prone to "socialize and mingle" with the other (non-Orthodox) community' members and organizations.

Clearly, there are many more ways and possibilities that a parish can use to make itself better known in the local community. Therefore, the survey also asked an open-ended question: "Are there any other strategies that are being used to make your parish better known in the local community?"

The most important difference in the answers to this question provided by the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes was consistent with what was found previously: namely, that the "exemplary" parishes pay much greater attention to participation in a variety of community events which are not necessarily related to charitable actions or religious celebrations.

Indeed, when answering the question "Are there any other strategies that are being used to make your parish better known in the local community?" most of responses from the "normal" parishes boiled down to a) either participation in local clergy's alliances or b) to some sort of "advertising" of a parish (e.g. announcements in local newspapers, road signs, parish hosting various cultural events, offering tours of church building and grounds, etc.).

²⁹ Granted, "providing social services to the local community" may also include some cooperation with the other religious congregations or local charities. However, "participation in the local community events" definitely means greater degree of the simply "visual" exposure of the parish community to its neighbors.

Differently, a significant number of "exemplary" parishes emphasized that they are trying to be "physically" present and participate *together with other* religious and non-religious organizations in the various activities and events in their local communities. Below we provide a few responses from the "exemplary" parishes that exemplify this tendency:

- **"Presence is paramount.** We also participate in the County Fair. We simply have a booth and are willing to engage all comers. We find that social media is the least productive aspect of the above options.
- "Coffee house/bookstore; 'mobile chapel', present at local festivals, speaking at colleges, etc."
- "Involvement in local festivals, shopping and banking locally, etc."
- "Active with United Mine Workers in remembrance of miners having died in mine disasters and to protect earned pensions and healthcare."
- Special outreach events - like the annual Golf outing for Charity and the 'Financial Peace University', participating in community charity events and organizations, Guest speakers for the Va. Festival of the Book. We're open to try almost anything within reason."
- "Not 'parish festivals' really, but neighborhood festivals that we host."

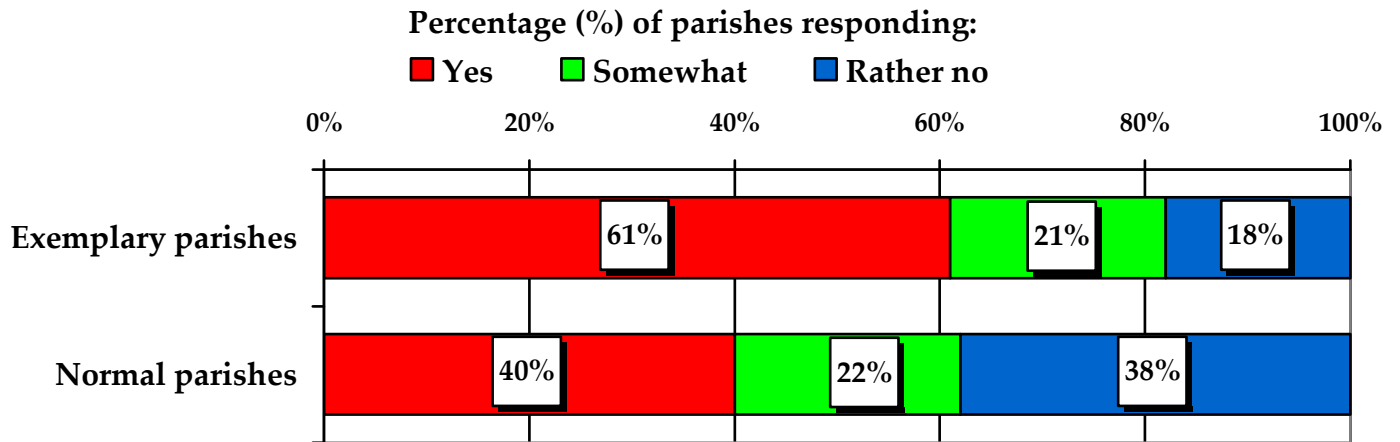
Hence, we saw that the strong majority (61%) of the "exemplary" parishes and some (27%) "normal" parishes have made "considerable effort" to make their church - one way or other - better known in the local community. The next question is: "What is the outcome of these efforts? How well in reality are Orthodox parishes known in their communities and - if they, indeed, are well known - for what reason?"

The survey asked two questions:

- ❖ "Would you say that your parish is well known in the local community and surrounding neighborhood?"
- ❖ "If 'yes', why or for what reason?"

Fig. 17 shows that - predictably - the parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts are better known in their local communities than the "normal" parishes.

Fig. 17 Would you say that your parish is well known in the local community and surrounding neighborhood?



Indeed, 61% of "exemplary" parishes self-evaluated themselves as being "well known in the local community and surrounding neighborhoods" compared to only 40% among the "normal" parishes. Given the size of our sample, this difference is significant, but not dramatic. However, what truly distinguishes the "exemplary" and the "normal" parishes are the main reasons for being "well known" in their local communities.

The question "If your parish is well known in the local community, why or for what reason?" was an open-ended question. That is, the clergy had full freedom and unlimited space to explain and describe the reasons for which their parishes are "visible" and "known" in their communities. Predictably, there was great variety in the responses with many individual stories and examples. Despite this diversity, however, most of the answers fit into one of five broad categories. The first category of answers was about the fact that the parish is well known in the community simply because it was there for a long time. Here are some examples:

- "The church is 112 years old and there were 20K Serbs in this town 100 years ago. Left a familiarity."
- "Mainly because of its prominent history in the community."

- "The church itself has been in the neighborhood for one hundred years, it's a local landmark."
- "The parish is turning 90 this year so many people have been at some event or another."

The second group of responses was about some charities, or "enterprises" (coffee shop, book store) or events (concerts) run and organized by the parish. Here are some examples:

- "Because of our parish offering the first nursery school in town, which continues to operate."
- "We organize concerts and invite communities."
- "Soup kitchen"
- "For our coffee house that is 'off-site' from the temple and is very popular."

The third pattern was formed by the answers that the parish is mostly known for its "ethnic" culture and events: ethnic food-sales, festivals, fund-raising events. Here are some examples:

- "Because of the many food oriented fundraisers that provide a product that is very popular in the community."
- "Ukrainian Festival is well attended. Best Holubtsi in the area. Participates in the Church Open House."
- "It seems that the Romanian festival is a good starting point. We had also some favorable articles about our church and community published in local newspapers."
- "We organize festival and invite the community."
- "Because of our Fall and Spring pie sales, and our Greek Festival."

The fourth group of the answers came from the clergy who said that their parishes are especially known in their community because of a very distinct religious (Orthodox Christian) identity and appearance of the church building. Here are some examples:

- "Because we are Orthodox and unique, especially in the very local community."
- "We have a huge sign on which we put different icons of Christ with different biblical sayings or sayings of the holy fathers and mothers of the church. Something motivating, which would help and soothe the heart of any one who passes by."
- "For architectural purposes (it was built as a jewel at the epicenter of a new-Urbanist community). For being in the news all the time. For the priest in a cassock."

- "It is the most photographed building in town."
- "As the Cathedral, it has long made its mark in sustained presence, beautiful building, strong worship and being the seat of the Metropolis/Diocese."

Finally, the fifth groups of answers were about the parishes that are well known in the local communities because of their conscious efforts to be a "good neighbor" through the broad (religious and non-religious) participation in their local communities. Here are some examples:

- "We reside in the middle of a neighborhood. We engage our neighbors when the opportunity presents itself; not for the purpose of evangelizing, but for the purpose of being a good neighbor. When a neighbor's tree falls, we assist in the clean up. When snow falls, we do not hesitate to clean a part of their drive or sidewalk. We just live our life as good Orthodox Christians. Vis-a-vis the local community, we yearly give a Pascha basket to the Police Department. At the festival, we give free meals to the police and fire department personnel. We feed the needy. We've given over 16,000+ meals to the local community in the last 3+ years. We work with the neighborhood watch. And we maintain routine liaison with the local police department."
- "We do a lot to support the town. We host Christmas tree lighting and bazaar, we participate in the Memorial Day parades, offer choral concerts to the town free of charge, offer monthly community meal at no charge."
- "Active and diverse outreach: homeless shelter work, food pantry work, social justice work, nursing home services, emergency aid to the poor, after-school programs, free neighborhood block parties, etc. The outreach ministries change and evolve as circumstances suggest."
- "We make it a point to support local charities and make connections when the donation is given. The Church needs to be known for what it gives out, not for what it receives."
- "Most importantly, the local Orthodox parish needs to integrate into its local community. Shop there, attend local events, get involved with local neighborhood concerns. This will put a real 'human face' on us as well as establish friendships. For example, our clergy have volunteered to say the opening prayer at City Council meetings. We were recently asked to bless their new Fire Truck and participate in a service honoring firefighters. We have invited our mayor and local alderman to parish events and picnics."

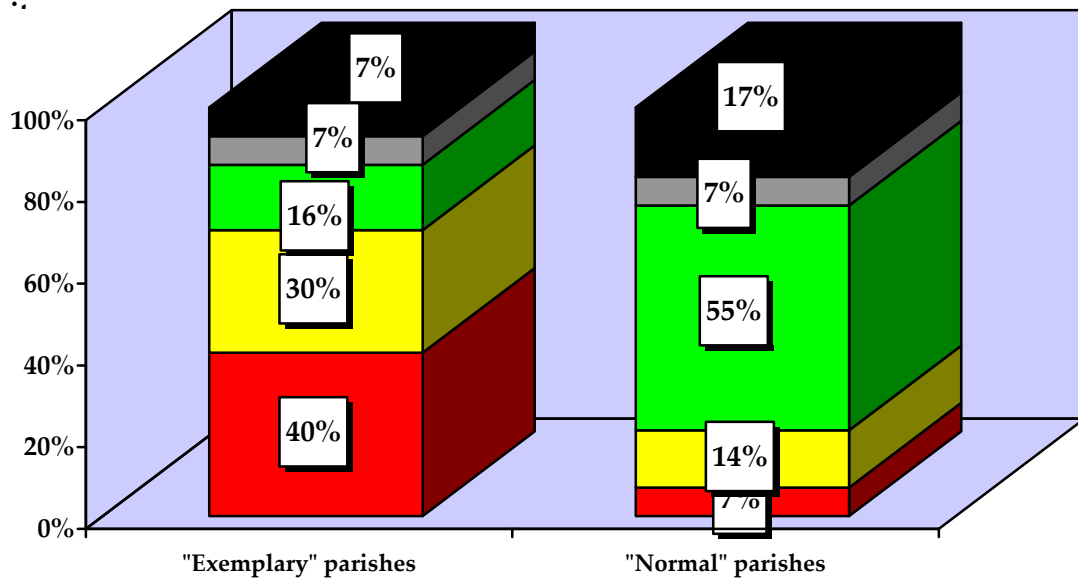
The answers fitting into one of the five categories came from both the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes. However, there was a significant difference in the percentage of answers belonging to one or the other category that were provided by the "exemplary" versus "normal" parishes. Fig. 18 shows that the biggest group of the answers from the "exemplary" parishes (40% of all responses) was about being well known because of parish's conscious efforts to be a "good neighbor" through the broad (religious and non-religious) participation in their local communities. Very differently, absolute majority of the "normal" parishes (55%) are well known in their local communities primarily because of their "ethnic culture and events (ethnic food-sales, festivals, fundraising events, etc.). In addition, to these two major differences, the "exemplary" parishes also leave a "stronger footprint" - than the "normal" parishes - in their local communities because of the distinct religious (Orthodox Christian) identity.

**Fig. 18 Five Broad Reasons for Being "Well Known" in a Local Community:
"Exemplary" Parishes Versus "Normal" Parishes**

"If your parish is well known in the local community, why or for what reason?"

Percentage (%) of parishes replying:

- Because parish was present in community and neighborhood for a long time
- Because of some charities or "enterprises" (coffee shop, book store, concerts) run by a parish
- Because of "ethnic" culture: food, festivals, fundraisers
- Because of very distinct religious (Orthodox) identity and/or appearance of church building
- Because of the efforts to be a "good neighbor" through the broad participation in the local



XI. Relations and Cooperation of "Exemplary" and "Normal" Parishes with the Non-Orthodox Religious Congregations

HIGHLIGHTS FINDINGS:

- ❖ More than three-quarters of priests in both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes support idea of building good relations and working jointly with non-Orthodox religious congregations situated in their local communities;
- ❖ From the perspective of the Orthodox parish clergy, the following are main reasons for building good relations and cooperating locally with non-Orthodox Christian Churches:
 - all Christian churches should join their efforts in fighting the growing secularism in America.
 - building good relations and fellowship with non-Orthodox religious groups is a good way to promote Orthodox Christianity: that is, to make non-Orthodox Christians more aware of the Orthodox Churches and, possibly, to attract more inquirers about the Faith and converts.
 - the local Orthodox parishes are typically small and their resources are very limited to do much for the local community. Hence, partnering with the non-Orthodox churches is the only way to be efficient in social ministries.
 - active participation in the local ministerial associations is personally important to many Orthodox priests, because these local inter-Christian alliances of clergy function as support networks for all persons who have chosen pastoral vocation.
- ❖ There were two differences between the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes in their answers to the question "If you think that it is important for an Orthodox parish to develop cooperation and fellowship with the non-Orthodox congregations, give us a few examples of what your parish does together with other Christian churches."
 - *in theory*, both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes are equally supportive of cooperating with "religiously other," but *in reality* "exemplary" parishes are more engaged in various forms of inter-Christian relations and cooperation;
 - ecumenical relations and cooperation of the "normal" parishes are typically limited (with certain exceptions) to either strictly charitable work (running homeless shelters, soup kitchens, food drives, etc.) or to participation of Orthodox priests in the local clergy associations. Differently, the "exemplary" parishes engage in a much greater (than simply charitable work) variety of joint inter-Christian activities.

DISCUSSION:

We saw in Chapter III ("The Parishes Participating in the Study") that nearly two-thirds of both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes are located in the communities with a high level of overall religious involvement and participation. Indeed, 63% of parishes described their neighborhoods as "Rather or Very Religious." Only 15% of the parishes are situated in the places where religion and religious institutions are not important: i.e. in the neighborhoods that were described by the clergy as "Rather secular: little religious activities."³⁰ In other words, about two thirds of both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes are surrounded by and coexist with many other non-Orthodox religious organizations that have significant impact on the local communities' lives.

In this chapter, we will examine how Orthodox parishes relate to the non-Orthodox churches situated in the same communities. More specifically, we will look at three questions:

- ❖ Are Orthodox parishes interested in building relations and working cooperatively with other (non-Orthodox) religious congregations located in the same communities?
- ❖ If the answer to the first question is "yes," how exactly Orthodox parishes cooperate with the non-Orthodox churches?
- ❖ Is there any significant difference between the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes in how they relate to and interact with the non-Orthodox religious congregations situated in their communities?

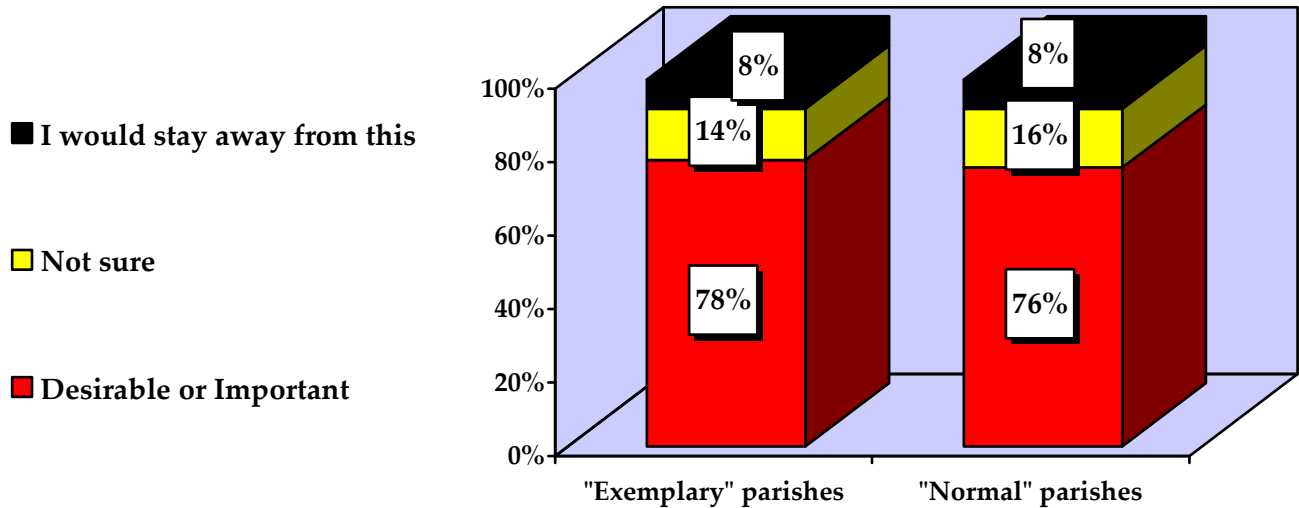
The questionnaire asked: "In your opinion, is it important for an Orthodox parish to work cooperatively and develop relationships with other (non-Orthodox) religious congregations located in the same community?" See Fig. 19. The most important conclusion is that more than three-quarters of both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes are in favor of building good relations and working cooperatively with the non-Orthodox churches situated in their local communities.

³⁰ The remaining 22% of the parishes evaluated their communities as "Neither 'secular' nor 'religious'."

Fig. 19 Relationship of the "Exemplary" and "Normal" Parishes with the non-Orthodox Religious Congregations Located in the Same Community

"In your opinion, is it important for an Orthodox parish to work cooperatively and develop relationships with other (non-Orthodox) religious congregations located in the same community?"

Percentage (%) of parishes replying:



The priests were also given an opportunity to provide any additional comments explaining their desire (or reluctance) to foster relations and work jointly with non-Orthodox churches. There was not much difference in the comments that came from "exemplary" and "normal" parishes and most of them focused on two subjects.

The first subject (addressed by a relatively small number of clergy) was about setting clear borders as to what is permissible and what should be avoided when building relations and partnering with non-Orthodox religious congregations. In a nutshell, most priests were open to joint work in various social ministries, but were weary of the ecumenical worship services and, especially, joint prayers that would involve "open communion" or female clergy from other denominations. Here are a few examples:

- "It depends on what kind of relationships we are talking about. A collaboration on social charitable issues is suitable, but - as you well know - according to the holy canons of the Orthodox Church we should refrain from praying with non-Orthodox and especially with non-Christians. Orthodox Christians should observe the Orthodox Canon Law tradition, even if this might seem 'politically incorrect'."

- "Past history with the local clergy association has put our parish in the awkward position of refusing to participate in ecumenical services that feature open communion, gender neutral prayer and other innovations."
- "This is difficult outside of social ministry efforts. To be frank, we as Orthodox do not play well with others. For example, we will probably not coalesce to others liturgical ways if we host an event, nor will we allow other churches to use our facilities for religious purposes. It seems that quite often 'we cannot return the favor.' Therefore, we limit our ecumenical gathering to simply joining the local Roman Catholics for various Right for Life events."

The second, and much more numerous, group of comments was about why it is indeed important to build good relations, communicate and work jointly with non-Orthodox churches. The Orthodox clergy offered quite a variety of reasons for cooperating with the "religiously other."

Some of them thought that all Christians should be united in their resistance to growing secularism in the American society. As one priest wrote: "First of all we have to work together with the other non-Orthodox Christian communities: we have to be united to fight progressing secularism in our country."

The other clergy believed that building good relations and fellowship with non-Orthodox religious groups is a good way to promote Orthodox Christianity: that is, to make non-Orthodox Christians more aware of the Orthodox Churches and, possibly, to attract more inquirers about the Faith and converts. Here are three comments exemplifying this approach:

- "It is perhaps the best advertising for us that there is."
- "This is how you become known, and most of the converts will come from some other religious background."
- "It has the affect of countering their misrepresentation that we Orthodox are somehow not Christian."
- "Start with the Roman Catholics. Their dissatisfied members are the first to become Orthodox, and the RC Church doesn't seem to mind that. Many see them as a threat to Orthodoxy, but I don't see that at all, in fact quite the reverse."

Yet another group of comments was about the fact that each Christian denomination or local congregation has something good and special to offer to others so that by sharing everyone will benefit. As one clergyman reported: "Other ministers and their congregations can inspire us to a more faithful Christian life, and we have treasures that we are called to share with them."

Some clergy offered a pragmatic consideration that local Orthodox parishes are typically very small and their resources are fairly limited to do much for the local community. Hence, partnering with non-Orthodox churches is the only way to be efficient in social ministries. Here is the comment reflecting this thought: "We are not big enough to necessarily operate on our own in a significant way. Why not partner with an already existing and successful organization and help them and us to have an even more significant impact on the greater community."

Finally, a number of priests wrote that active participation in the local ministerial associations is personally important to them, because these local inter-Christian alliances of clergy function as support networks for all persons who have chosen pastoral vocation: "I meet with the pastors each week to learn from and to fellowship with them. It's been invaluable for me to call them friends and brothers."

The fact that the vast majority of clergy in both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes *think* that developing relations and working cooperatively with the non-Orthodox religious congregations is desirable and important does not necessarily mean that the Orthodox parishes *actually engage* in such relations and joint inter-Christian work. Therefore, the survey followed with the open-ended question: "If you think that it is important for an Orthodox parish to develop cooperation and fellowship with the non-Orthodox congregations, give us a few examples of what your parish does together with other Christian churches." Predictably, there was great variety in answers to this question when the respondents described their local circumstances and particular forms of joint work with the non-Orthodox religious groups. There were, however, two obvious differences in responses that came from the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes.

First, significantly fewer "normal" than "exemplary" parishes answered this question and gave specific examples of building relations and partnering with non-Orthodox churches. That is, *in theory* both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes are equally supportive of cooperating with "religiously other," but *in reality* "exemplary" parishes are more engaged in various forms of inter-Christian relations and cooperation. As a clergyman from one of the "normal" parishes admitted: "Thinking that it (*i.e. inter-Christian relations and cooperation*) is important and carrying that out is not the same thing. There are no examples on the part of our parish." The priest from the other "normal" parish "echoed" by saying: "Our parish needs to cooperate with non-Orthodox communities/ministries/charities. But we don't. This is why some have the impression the parish is closed."

The second difference between the "normal" and "exemplary" parishes was that examples of ecumenical cooperation from the "normal" parishes were typically limited (with certain exceptions) to either strictly charitable work (running homeless shelters, soup kitchens, food drives, etc.) or to participation of Orthodox priests in the local clergy associations. Differently, the responses from "exemplary" parishes indicated that they engage in a much greater (than simply charitable work) variety of joint inter-Christian activities including ecumenical worships services, joint social and cultural events (picnics, concerts, etc.), work in the area of social justice (addressing jointly with other churches the issues of immigration, criminal justice reform, urban education, etc.), working together on reducing crime and violence in the neighborhoods and much more.

To conclude. The "exemplary" and "normal" parishes are equally supportive of the idea of building good relations and working jointly with the non-Orthodox churches. However, when it comes to the practice, the "exemplary" parishes are much more active in the area of interfaith relations and joint work and they are much more willing to embrace a variety of forms of cooperation and partnering with "religiously others."

XII. The "Lessons" that the Other Parishes Can Learn

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS:

- ❖ The parishes were asked: "In a nutshell, tell us: what is *most 'special'* about your parish that would distinguish it from the other parishes in your diocese or jurisdiction?" The following four patterns emerged from the responses of the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes:
 - Both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes were equally likely to describe themselves as very loving, welcoming and friendly Christian community;
 - Both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes were equally likely to describe themselves as the parishes with high quality and intensity of liturgical and Eucharistic life;
 - Unlike the "normal" parishes, only "exemplary" parishes wrote about parish's ability to integrate a variety of ethnic and cultural groups and create one close-knit community that is free of ethnic or cultural divides.
 - Unlike the "normal" parishes, only responses from "exemplary" parishes indicated parish's strong sense of mission and vision for the parish's future.
- ❖ The parishes were asked: "Based on your experience of building parish community, could you give any advice to other parishes in your jurisdiction as to what they should pay more attention to? If you think that many parishes tend to make the same mistakes over and over again, what are those mistakes?" The following four patterns emerged from the responses of the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes:
 - A significant number of "exemplary" (but not "normal") parishes wrote about the need for an Orthodox parish "to open its doors for the others and/or take Orthodox Faith to the others;"
 - A significant number of "exemplary" (but not "normal") parishes suggested that a parish should pay attention to making Orthodox Church and worship relevant and understandable to as many different people as possible;
 - Both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes offered some advice on how to build healthy parish community;
 - Both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes offered some suggestions on how to improve and deepen the liturgical and Eucharistic life of a parish

DISCUSSION

Two related questions will be discussed in this chapter. The first question is: *from the perspective* of each parish participating in the study, what is its most special/remarkable characteristic that would distinguish this parish from the other Orthodox parishes in the respective diocese and jurisdiction? Clearly, this question is very subjective (i.e. it is about self-perception of a parish) and general (i.e. the answer could be about anything). However, the replies to this question will help to discern what really "matters" for this or that parish.

The second question examined on the following pages is: again, from the perspective of each parish participating in the study, are there any unique qualities, experiences, approaches, areas of church life that this or that parish is especially proud of so that it can set an example to the other parishes.

The survey first asked: "In a nutshell, tell us: what is most 'special' about your parish that would distinguish it from the other parishes in your diocese or jurisdiction?" Predictably, this general question yields a great variety of responses. For instance, one parish described a unique outlook of its building:

- "We have what we half-jokingly call a 'Hoosier Byzantine' Church! Our new building is by no means a clone of a temple from one of the Greek islands or of a place in Russia. It is clearly not a Protestant Church since it has three golden tri-bar crosses on the roof. It does have the lineaments of a Midwestern church architecture on the outside, however."

The other parish community reported that its most remarkable feature is the cleanliness and neatness of its facilities:

- "We have tried to do everything with tastefulness and decorum. Too many parishes are dirty, dated, and give of the general appearance of being poor and ill designed. Even in our old cinder block building people have often cried upon entering the church for the first time because of its simple and elegant beauty. We have worked very hard to make our temple, our music and our services be an icon of the Kingdom of God in all the fine details, without however becoming stiff or inflexible."

Yet another parish's most distinct feature is: "being a place of pilgrimage at the relics of St. Herman."

Most of the answers, however, touched on more substantial matters: something about parish community, liturgical life, programs, relations with neighboring community, etc. Two common themes appeared relatively often in the *answers of both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes*.

One theme was about a parish being a loving, welcoming and friendly Christian community. The following examples of answers were equally likely to come from both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes:

- "Truly loving, welcoming people who deserve to grow and feel secure in the future of the parish."
- "How well we have been able to integrate new immigrants to our parish."
- "We are 'the friendly church.'"
- "Welcoming and friendly atmosphere."
- "Hospitality, close community and making sure that Orthodox services are 'accessible' to American visitors through congregational singing and sensible liturgical practices."
- "Welcoming, Friendly, Warm."
- "Our love for God and each other. We bear with one another well and are welcoming."

The second theme of the answers from both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes was the quality and intensity of liturgical and Eucharistic life. Again, the following examples were equally likely to come from both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes:

- "Divine Liturgy is served by the WHOLE Parish participating. ALL Children take active part in the service by holding candles during the Gospel Reading and singing the prayer of Our Father in Ukrainian, singing hymns before Holy Communion by themselves."
- "High degree of participation in the liturgical life of the parish, as well as other groups throughout the week."
- "We are a worshipping community. We have many faithful that participate in our worship on Sunday mornings, as well as other days. We try and offer each week a variety of services."
- "We're a parish that continues to mature in faith and grow in numbers. We have a rather robust liturgical life for a parish of our Archdiocese and also emphasize study. It seems to be a good combination, all to the glory of God!"

- "The Eucharistic life of our parish is vibrant - I can't think of another parish in our deanery (and possibly the diocese) that has people preparing for, and receiving, Holy Communion on a consistent basis."
- "We have a resident House on campus of the University of "X" and a vibrant OCF ministry. We have sent many young men to the Seminary from this parish. The priest also serves a small community (St. "Y" Chapel) in "Z" 45 miles to the East). Serving three Churches makes this ministry in "X" truly special."
- "Spiritual enthusiasm."

Side by side with similarities, there were also some remarkable differences in responses from the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes. First, a number of "normal" parishes replied that there is "nothing really special about us" or "we are fairly similar to other parishes in our diocese or jurisdiction." Differently, no single "exemplary" parish provided such answer.

Second, the subject that was often present in responses of the "exemplary" but not "normal" parishes was about parish's ability to integrate a variety of ethnic and cultural groups and create one close-knit community which is free of ethnic or cultural divides. Here are some examples of answers that were typical for "exemplary" but not "normal" parishes:

- "Unity in diversity. A place of refuge for people that have suffered from heavy-handed pastoring. A belief in the God-given and Godlike primacy of freedom."
- "We have successfully combined three distinct communities/Liturgies to function as one family."
- "Thirty-five different nationalities and ethnic groups and five different racial groups all present because of God and His Holy Orthodox Church."
- "We are multiethnic. We have many converts."
- "Multi ethnic and open to new comers"

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a number of answers that came from the "exemplary" (but not "normal") parishes were about parish's strong sense of mission and purpose. Some of the answers in this category were related to evangelism and outreach, while some were not. But in any case, unlike "normal" parishes, a significant number of "exemplary" parishes indicated their strong vision for the parish's mission and future. Here are several examples:

- "We are a parish founded on the idea of bringing Orthodoxy to anyone. We are not ethnically or parochially focused and we have attracted large numbers of converts who have integrated themselves into the life and community of cradle born Orthodox."
- "We are a parish that is geared to share the Gospel to the seekers and lapsed. We are largely made up of people continuously and actively converting to the Orthodox Christian Faith. We know what seekers and inquirers are experiencing. We have been there ourselves, and are uniquely equipped to help them find the one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church."
- "We're trying to do what God would have us do. We have so much to live and share in Orthodoxy - we've only scratched the surface."
- "The idea that all 30K people living in town can eventually become Orthodox."
- "The outreach/educational work in publishing and podcasting. This has often served as a gateway for new members."
- "We are grateful to God to be a good example of a new Romanian missionary church on the land of America."
- "95% of our people converted to Orthodoxy and they desire to share it with others in word and deed."

In summary. When it comes to the features and characteristics that the parishes are truly proud of, both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes are equally likely to see themselves as the welcoming and friendly Christian communities that have high quality and intense liturgical and Eucharistic life. At the same time, the "exemplary" parishes are different from the "normal" parishes by having much stronger sense of mission and vision for parish's future and by the ability to integrate various ethnic and cultural groups into one united Christian community.

The survey followed with the question about any advice that the parishes participating in the study could offer to the other parishes in their dioceses and jurisdictions: "Based on your experience of building parish community, could you give any advice to other parishes in your jurisdiction as to what they should pay more attention to? If you think that many parishes tend to make the same mistakes over and over again, what are those mistakes?"

Similarly, to the previous question, because of the general nature of this inquiry, it resulted in a great variety of responses. Their analysis revealed several insights that are worth mentioning. First, only "normal" parishes provided answers that essentially said "nothing to advise" or "think about" or "difficult to tell." Second, only "normal" parishes provided answers that were focused on various "mistakes" that the parishes tend to make rather than offering some sort of suggestion. In contrast, all "exemplary" answered this question in a "positive manner" by providing certain advice to the other parishes or by sharing some of their experiences that could be useful for the other parishes.

Third, a significant number of the "advices" was about the need for an Orthodox parish "to open its doors for the others and/or take Orthodox Faith to the others." Nearly all (with few exceptions) answers in this category were from the "exemplary" parishes. Below are a few examples that can be interesting and helpful for other parishes:

- "We can never be 'content' simply to be Orthodox for ourselves. Strive to gain a vision of Christ's heart for the world, to minister and bring Christ and His Church to them for their salvation. To quote St. Tikhon: 'This Orthodox faith is not for you alone'."
- "Accept people from the outside as having valid previous experiences with God, and always find a way to show LOVE."
- "Befriend the non-Orthodox at every opportunity you have."
- "I do know one thing, *if we don't open our doors to everyone and anyone as Christ wants us to, our churches will die out and close down.*"
- "Focus more attention on serving the local community. Be open to people in local community. Be more welcoming to the guests."
- "Do not go ethnic. Open the door to other Orthodox and converts."
- "Set aside line item funds, money \$\$\$ to go out and do mission work."

Fourth. Another group of answers suggested that a parish should pay attention to making Orthodox Church and worship relevant and understandable to as many as possible. Again, all answers in this category came from the "exemplary" parishes:

- "Add 'Christian' to the title of your Church Name: i.e. not just 'Orthodox Church. Delete ethnic designation. It is a hurdle. But do not lose the lineage of authenticity. English: at least 95%. Token use of other languages is fine and a nice courtesy. Less about ethnicity, and more about the faith. The Church is here for all, not just people with a certain kind of last name."
- "Be more intentional in explaining Orthodox theology and traditions in a less esoteric manner. Be less ethnically based and inward looking and more outgoing."
- "I can respond in this way: *offering the Liturgy in a way it may be understood by all.*"

Fifth. Predictably, the largest number of responses contained some advice on how to build healthy parish community. These type of answers were provided by both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes. Below we offer some examples that can help other parishes:

- "Learn Family Systems theory. That has been key in helping me/us survive transitioning from a toxic past to a more stable hope-filled future."
- "Emphasize charity within the parish: visiting the sick, helping those in need."
- "Our parish structure keeps key church ministries in the forefront of what we're supposed to be about. The more we do charity and hospitality to others, as well as to those within the community, the more love is present, God is present. Each parish has a distinctive charism and it is for the pastor and his flock to discover that and foster it as the Spirit leads."
- "Many faithful need to be helped to feel accountable (in a loving way). People want to give to a 'winning team' - make sure your parish is a winning team. Pay more attention to ALL the faithful -- not just those who give. Make everyone feel special."
- "Be aware of founder vs newcomer dynamics. Have zero tolerance for anonymous complaints and triangulation. Stewardship from the very beginning. Don't accept 'what I can afford'--give 'first and best' in all areas of Church life."
- "Priest and parishes are afraid to lose people who might be causing problems but who might give a lot of money. Don't give in to threats: 'If you don't do what I say or want I'll leave!' Let them go! They need to leave in order to make room for more spiritually healthy people. The Church, and

mission and evangelization is about the Truth not about numbers. Speak the Truth, Teach the Truth, preach the Truth. Don't worry about numbers. One plants, another waters, it is God that gives the growth."

- "I was successful and re-energizing the last parish I served 8 years. We need to foster ministry leaders; train them and empower them (and protect them from all the naysayers and gatekeepers)."
- "Give everyone a voice from young to elderly."
- "I think the Wednesday Family Nights are a good idea. A lot of work, but everything valuable always is."
- "Make use of the existing professional talent within the community, i.e., legal advisors, medical professionals, counseling, teaching, etc. This involves having a good understanding of who is in your congregation."
- "Pray hard and play hard. Do things to help build community like get together for meals, have a talent show, VBS, youth camps, celebrations throughout the year, etc. (this has to be coupled with a full liturgical life as well). Lastly, I have seen parishes that have factions that exist within it. My advice is do not have groups with presidents or formal leaders. This keeps little churches and power structures from existing within the parish itself. Instead, have volunteers not recognized officers."
- "My advice: a) Support campus ministry (for those parishes near a college/university); b) Work with other groups to care for those in need; c) Budget for and encourage your pastor(s) to receive ongoing "Professional Development"; d) Have a line-item in the budget for support of charities outside of the parish community; e) Instill the notion that every member of the parish should participate in at least one ministry of the parish."

Finally, a significant number of advices (from both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes) addressed the importance of improving and deepening the liturgical and Eucharistic life of a parish:

- "Encourage your people to be active in worship. Especially in understanding the feasts and the fast. When people-visiting, see people who are serious about living their Orthodox Faith: that will be attractive to others."

- "Every parish must: pray; admit to being counter-cultural; teach of God's mercy; and encourage the Holy Mystery of Repentance. If the parishioners' participation is not vibrant in this sacrament, something is wrong."
- "Foster congregational singing."
- "Make the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church the center of the life of your parish. Invite people to confession. *A good confession is worth a 1000 sermons.* Become more serious about repentance: We can't offer what we don't have."
- "If (our) people are not excited about The Faith and growing in it then why do we expect anyone to be interested in exploring it."
- "(Have) Daily services and prayers so that the church is open daily for prayer."
- "Involve more and more children in liturgical life of parish."
- "The more services the better."

In the same category, a lengthy, but very emotional and insightful answer came from one priest. He emphasized that the regular and frequent participation in the sacrament of Holy Communion should be central to any parish community. It is worth to quote his answer in full: "I cannot speak to the jurisdiction as a whole, but I can speak to my diocese - and I feel comfortable saying that there is a stagnant Eucharistic life. The vast majority of parishes do not have people that regularly communion - or, if they do, it is a fair few that encompasses the elderly and the children. We have encouraged this behavior, and *told people to flee from the chalice for fear of condemnation.* There are those, still, who actively tell their parishes 'twice is enough'. Those from other jurisdictions came to the funeral of a beloved priest and witnessed as not one of the hundreds of mourners took communion at the Liturgy. *I witnessed priests gathering in unity from across the diocese... only to have 5 or 6 take Communion (out of more than 40 priests present).* The mistake, in my humble opinion, is that we have allowed and encouraged people to become disconnected from their Liturgical participation. *Divine Liturgy is a show and, therefore, it is not important for children to be present* (so they have school during Liturgy) and not even parents need to be present (except for when the 'important' and 'holy' days happen). We have encouraged and allowed a complete disconnected from the Eucharist and it has effected the whole of the life of the church. Am I saying that becoming a parish with many communicants will solve every problem and make the people 'holier'? Not at all. I am saying that *having a sincere Eucharistic life in a*

community will radically change things, however: faith does deepen in terms of joy experienced and repentance sought after. In both of my parishes a concerted effort was made to bring a sense of Eucharistic life to the communities. That was my primary effort in both communities (and, if you talk to my parishioners, I bet they would tell you that as well). This was done through adult education (primarily), preaching (when it could be appropriately alluded to), coffee hour (in conversation), and in the home (talking with people outside of church). The importance of the Eucharist to Liturgy, and to the life of an Orthodox Christian, was never far from my lips - it filled me with a certain joy, and continual need for repentance, and (I think) people recognized that... and were curious about having that joy/repentance as a part of their lives (a deepening faith). In a few years' time, leaders in both parishes began receiving Holy Communion regularly - and then many others. *With that Eucharistic growth came growth in all areas of church life*: fasting - it was far from perfect, for many, at first... but then became a regular part of their lives; outreach - what were 'closed' communities in 'survival mode' became warm and welcoming; optimism - for many, the negative and dire effects of the few became intolerable to the community as a whole. Bad behaviors were confronted and self-policed; and so much more. *If 'growth' will happen in our communities, and our diocese, I firmly believe that Christ - and the Eucharist - will be at the heart of that growth."*

XIII. Six "Lessons" that Church Leadership (Bishops) Could Learn

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS:

The parishes were asked about desirable help on the part of the bishops that would support and encourage evangelization work: "In your opinion, how could the bishops better help to support and encourage evangelization work in their parishes?" From a variety of responses, six types "requests" were frequently sent to the bishops:

- ❖ "Be more frequently present in a parish and directly involved in the parish's life and evangelization work"
- ❖ "Set a personal example in the area of evangelism and outreach; provide broad and strong vision in which would take each parish beyond limited parish's 'fishbowl.'"
- ❖ "Be more like a 'father:' supportive spiritually and 'approachable' as a person."
- ❖ "Provide guiding materials and educating opportunities for the parishes (both for clergy and laity) on "101" of Orthodox evangelism."

- ❖ "Encourage inter-Orthodox cooperation between the local parishes in evangelism and outreach efforts."
- ❖ "Allow for more 'adaptation' of the Orthodox Church to American realities."

DISCUSSION:

The Orthodox parish is a local Christian community. However, this community does not exist "on its own:" rather it is an integral and inseparable part of the Orthodox Church at large. Each parish belongs to a certain "ecclesiastical family" - the Orthodox Church jurisdiction. Figuratively speaking, one can liken the national Orthodox jurisdiction to being each parish's "extended family," while the dioceses can be seen as each parish's immediate families. In most dioceses, the *direct* communications and cooperation among the parishes are scant and irregular. Much greater role in making this "immediate diocesan family" functional and healthy belongs to the diocesan centers and personally to the ruling bishops. True, most parishes can feasibly "survive" without any practical diocesan support and be "self-sufficient," but they would, nevertheless, benefit greatly if their diocesan centers and ruling bishops would pay more attention to their needs. Therefore, the questionnaire asked: "In your opinion, how could the bishops better help to support and encourage evangelization work in their parishes?"

The analysis of the answers to this question revealed that there is no discernible difference between the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes in what they "ask" their bishops in terms of possible help and support in the area of evangelization work. Among variety of responses, six "requests" to bishops from the local parishes were repeatedly present in the individual answers. These six "requests" to bishops can be described in summary as follows (in order of the frequency of answers in each category):

- ❖ "Be more frequently present in a parish and directly involved in the parish's life and evangelization work"
- ❖ "Set a personal example in the area of evangelism and outreach; provide broad and strong vision in which would take each parish beyond limited parish's 'fishbowl.'"
- ❖ "Be more like a 'father:' supportive spiritually and 'approachable' as a person."
- ❖ "Provide guiding materials and educating opportunities for the parishes (both for clergy and laity) on "101" of Orthodox evangelism."

- ❖ "Encourage inter-Orthodox cooperation between the local parishes in evangelism and outreach efforts."
- ❖ "Allow for more 'adaptation' of the Orthodox Church to American realities."

Below we provide actual answers from the parishes exemplifying each category of responses and "requests" to the bishops.

Be more frequently present in a parish and directly involved in the parish's life and evangelization work

- "Send out pastoral letters, not solely on an ecclesial season or feast day, but as a reflection on what the bishop has learned, seen, and or wants to share with us (absent requests for money); provide a straight pastoral reflection that will affect us."
- "Focus less on meaningless diocesan events, camps or publishing projects and by supporting the work of the priests in their manifold, concrete struggles to maintain the Faith and nourish their flocks."
- "Bishops can personally endorse a lecture or some other idea with a short letter, since parishioners tend to react more to bishops, due to being so familiar with the priest's many calls to attend certain activities."
- "The true work of the Church is founded in a local ministry with a unique people around an altar in a particular town. I would suggest that parishes will grow through a greater commitment by our bishops to fund local ministries. Hierarchs could also remain open to sharing in the work of a local parish, beyond simply celebrating feast days and services; what a witness this would be to parishioners and non-parishioners alike!"
- "Regular (annual at least) visitation to the parishes and missions, no matter how small. On those visits, to have supper with the catechumens and inquirers."
- "Have smaller dioceses so that bishops could be more actively involved in the day-to-day life of their parishes. I and my parish want to see more of them, not less. I want them to see where my people are spiritually, what they struggle with on a day to day basis. I as a parish priest need their help to minister to their parishes and people."

- "Show up and put some sweat equity into the life of the parish. Too often the bishop shows up, the parish has a party and the bishop leaves with no notable impact or lasting change in the life of the parish."
- "Be a part of what is happening in the local community."

Set a personal example in the area of evangelism and outreach; provide broad and strong vision in which would take each parish beyond limited parish's 'fishbowl.'

- "One of our bishops once said that the best idea he had for retirement was to lay aside the crown, and go establish a mission. I can't think of a better idea than that."
- "I don't think priests see themselves as aggressive evangelizers, so the bishops need to broaden the vision, kindle the Apostolic zeal, give priest/laity permission/encouragement to get out there and make things happen. Then we'd need lots of discussion of methods, strategies and when they might prove effective."
- "They should encourage parishes to think beyond our own people. They should encourage us to seek out catechumens, and to even develop mission parishes."
- "Casting a vision for it and committing resources to it; After having attended several Clergy Laity conferences regarding this theme; and seeing the continual decline in membership in the GOA-- 'the spirit is willing, but our flesh is weak.' Sadly, I believe evangelization is not a priority."
- "Bishops need to lead from the front. We are a hierarchical church. If our bishops are not missionary minded and evangelical, how do we expect their priests and the laity to be."
- "By writing and speaking about Evangelization all the time."
- "Become more evangelized themselves! Drop most of the imperial trappings of their office, and become joy-filled disciples who know, love, and serve the Lord and can help others to do the same."

Be more like a "father:" supportive spiritually and "approachable" as a person.

- "Don't be an aloof and distant Archpastor. Know your priests, encourage them and support their efforts. Our diocesan Hierarch has proven himself to be a great example of a humble and loving pastor!"

- "Send a clear and consistent message by being in the midst of their flock not distant and 'too busy' by administrative affairs. Teach more and delegate the day to day administration."
- "Meeting each parish and their Faithful on their level and lead them to perfection. Very important not to impose the authority but rather earn it by being a Light."
- "Support the clergy in their ministry and uplift them during pastoral visitations."
- "Listening to the concerns of their people."
- "He might get to know his priests better and help them avoid damaging 'life' problems ahead of time. But try telling a bishop what to do. A stone wall with ears is what one often gets. (hope that is not to blunt for this survey)."
- "By offering spiritual support."
- "Bishops need to be better pastors to their clergy, feeding their spiritual needs. They also need to become true pastors to their flocks by spending time with them instead of fly-by, in and out visits focused on liturgical services."

Provide guiding materials and educating opportunities for the parishes (both for clergy and laity) on "101" of Orthodox evangelism.

- "1. Have diocesan grants available for training and resources (Diocese "X" does this). 2. Provide more diocesan workshops and training for parish councils who oversee the budgets and should be supporting the vision of the priest. 3. Don't just verbally support campus ministry (and other endeavors) but actually support it with funding for priests to serve as campus ministers and in other para-Church capacities that *place clergy and lay leaders in the position to encounter people outside of their parish community*. Priests sometimes turn down opportunities to serve an OCF. 4. Increase opportunities for laypersons (men and women) to be trained as catechists and lay ministers/chaplains."
- "Train priests that work well with people and are willing to nurture them into disciples."
- "Offer seminars to parishes and speakers who challenge us to do more."
- "Offer regional workshops by qualified clergy and bishops who are successful in this area."
- "Teach mission development in the seminary and send students to missions in the summer."

- "Provide better resources and training at level of clergy and laity for how to evangelize in our communities. More teaching and training on how to effectively move our parish communities from being more ethnic and inward looking to more diverse and outward looking."
- *"Encourage (or mandate) Adult Education. Educating parents pays dividends with the children.* Our deanery education meetings focus, primarily, on youth education: "How are our church schools and folklore groups? What are the numbers? How many teachers? What curriculums do they use? And so on." Our children, however, will learn far more at home - from their parents - than they will in a church school lesson. Do they know the Old Testament? Maybe something from church school. Do they pray before meals, cross themselves, and make faith a part of their everyday living? Their parents will be most impactful there. *That education is a vital part of mission work* - as that interior growth happens in the parish, evangelization will naturally happen (or be easily encouraged by a leader)."
- "Our Diocese has provided us with excellent material for establishing and conducting stewardship education in our parishes. I would hope that our hierarchs would do the same for evangelism. Having 'in hand' resources that can be studied and put into practice, having resources that are pragmatic would be a great help. Provide us with video teachings on evangelism, it may be a great help."

Encourage inter-Orthodox cooperation between the local parishes in evangelism and outreach efforts.

- "Primarily our bishops need to encourage our missions and parishes to work together. If we are not united, then we are divided and can only bring a hypocritical message to those we are trying to evangelize. How can we proclaim the Gospel of Christ when the local Greeks, Russians and Arabs cannot stand each other or do nothing together? This does not reflect Christ's love in any form or fashion. Last thought on this, if there is only one Orthodox parish in a town of 200,000 to 800,000 people instead of saying "this is our territory" say "I pray our bishops encourage other canonical Orthodox jurisdictions to join them in their local vineyard for the fields are white for harvest."
- "Stop discouraging inter-Orthodox parish cooperation. Encourage inter-Orthodox parish cooperation. Think about preaching the Gospel first and climb out of a phyletistic paradigm."

- "Influence the local clergy to reach out to their Orthodox brothers. They can best do this by working closely with their brother Orthodox Bishops on specific projects that will positively effect evangelization."
- "Bishops should encourage local Orthodox churches to cooperate together. We need one Church (jurisdiction) in this country now. Our people suffer due to the ethnic ghettoization that is taking place in the Holy Orthodox Church in this country."

Allow for more 'adaptation' of the Orthodox Church to American realities.

- "They have to resist narrow Orthodox fundamentalism and allow Orthodoxy to naturally and slowly take on an American flavor. Orthodoxy cannot just be about preserving things. It is much more alive than this. We once said to one hierarch, 'If Orthodoxy is the 'mother church' then we should start acting like it and reach out as a mother would to her lost children to help the sincere and true Christians come home!'"
- "Encourage the parishes to better reflect and be opened to the immediate neighborhoods around them and to set conditions for this to happen."

**XIV. The Common Problem of the "Exemplary" and "Normal" Parishes:
the "Non-Evangelistic" Nature of their Websites**

It is common today to hear someone say that he will search for or validate certain information by "googling it," an expression which did not exist 10 years ago. Not only are we constantly "online," beginning in 2013, the majority of internet browsing in America is being done on smartphones. For those who want to face reality the situation is clear: in a very short time, the world has changed in the way people receive information and learn about something new. If the Orthodox Churches are serious and intentional about evangelism and outreach, if they want to make Orthodox Christianity better known to American society, they must express their mission on the internet. The first and most basic element of this internet-based mission of the Orthodox Church is a local parish website.

Therefore, in addition to the survey, we examined the web-sites of the parishes participating in the study. This examination focused on two aspects:

- ❖ We looked specifically at parishes' homepages: that is, the "front" pages of their web-sites that the people see first and before any further "digging" into a web-site's content;
- ❖ We evaluated those elements (as described below) that are especially crucial for attracting and informing the first-time visitors and inquirers about the Orthodox Faith.

Seven criteria were chosen for evaluation:

1. Whether or not a parish had an active website
2. Whether the dominant language of a website was English
3. The presence of information addressed specifically to visitors
4. The presence of calendar and schedule of worship services
5. The presence of contact information (phone, in particular)
6. The presence of directions or an address of the church
7. The presence of outdated content.

In summary, the analysis revealed that:

- ❖ There is no significant difference between the websites of the "normal" parishes and the parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts;
- ❖ The dominant majority of the web-sites were not very "evangelistic" by their nature. That is, the websites were not "user-friendly" or - sometimes - even understandable for non-Orthodox.

Here are two most common deficiencies that could be bothersome to non-Orthodox "first-time" guests to these websites. First, the high majority of the websites look old and dated, which suggests that the churches do not care about their "appearance for virtual visitors." Second, nearly all parishes in the study either failed to have a welcome message for non-Orthodox visitors on their homepages or this message was not very effective.

Browsing websites of many Orthodox parishes allows one to find some examples of a welcome message for non-Orthodox visitors that were appealing, inviting, and understandable. For instance: "We warmly welcome you to join us for a service. In the meantime, explore our visitor section for some introductory information about Orthodox Christianity." This message is simple, does not make assumptions about the

visitor wanting to worship, and also offers guidance to look into available resources for visitors that is already on the website.

Here is another example of a simple and inviting welcome message: "You are welcome to visit us during one of our services or you can contact the office to schedule a visit at a different time. Our priest loves to meet with visitors and we also offer tours of the church." The message above makes it clear that visitors are welcome anytime: not only at the services.

One more effective message: "We are a Christ-centered church who loves to have visitors. Whether you are a Christian or not, you are welcome to join us anytime." The above message is effective because it communicates who the church is, but, at the same time, makes it clear that all types of people are welcome to visit.

A critical item missing from almost all homepages of the parishes participating in the study were videos for non-Orthodox visitors. Videos offer powerful and "easy to digest" way of communicating information on the internet. It is not incidental, that YouTube has become the second most popular search engine.

In response to these and other shortfalls, we offer a short eBook for those wanting to make their parish web-sites more "evangelistic." Entitled "10 Steps to A Great Parish Website" it can be found in the Appendix of this study report.

XV. The Ultimate Goal: Witnessing Orthodox Faith in 21st Century America

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS:

- ❖ The parishes participating in the study were asked: ""Given the fact that Orthodox Christians are a small religious minority in America, what are the best ways for our Church to bear witness to our Faith in 21st century America? Can you provide some examples of how it is done in your parish?"
- ❖ Most of responses that came from the "normal" parishes offered two suggestions:
 - Orthodox Christians should hold firm to Orthodox Faith and traditions; be proud of them and be willing to explain them to "others," when (and if) they find their way to Orthodox Church;
 - Witnessing the Orthodox Faith to America can be done simply by setting a personal example: that is, by being good Orthodox Christian and living faithful life
- ❖ Most of responses that came from the "exemplary" parishes were about four approaches to witnessing Orthodox Faith in today's America:
 - Serve the community you are in - not only your own people. That is, be present in multiple settings/venues in the local community and offer your own "space" for the other. This will put a "human" face on your parish and make your parish community recognizable by the others;
 - Make Orthodoxy "understandable" for the others. Make an effort to disassociate the image of the Orthodox Church as being "ethnic church" and, instead, try to make it more "approachable" for the others.
 - Emphasize the importance of personal growth in Faith and personal witnessing by everyone in parish community. These two emphases are related: when Church and Faith become more "meaningful," it makes people more engaged in the parish and also eager to share their Faith.
 - Pay attention to having a vibrant and full liturgical life (not merely formal worship services) as one of the key-elements in successful Orthodox evangelism

DISCUSSION:

One of the study participants wrote: "People are looking for Orthodoxy, even though they don't know it. They want family, stability, true worship, and spiritual challenge. But we have to figure out ways to interact with others, invite them and follow up." His words can be seen as the very quintessence of this study. That is, we are firm in our conviction that the Orthodox Christianity is a true Faith which offers the most important things that a person needs. But we often struggle with how to introduce the Orthodox Faith to the "others" and to show how relevant it may be for their lives. This chapter is central to this study report, because it will examine how the clergy serving in "exemplary" and "normal" parishes approach this challenging goal - introducing and sharing Orthodox Faith with "religiously others."

The survey asked: "Given the fact that Orthodox Christians are a small religious minority in America, what are the best ways for our Church to bear witness to our Faith in 21st century America? Can you provide some examples of how it is done in your parish?" The lengthy and thoughtful responses provided by many clergy indicated that they pondered this question not one time.

There was a clear difference in the answers to this question between the "exemplary" and "normal" parishes. The vast majority of responses from the "normal" parishes fell in two categories. In the first category were the answers indicating that the clergy have various ideas and "recipes" for Orthodox evangelism, but for some reason were unable to implement these ideas in their parishes. For instance:

- "Outreach-outreach-outreach. I have served as a priest for over 20 years, pleading with congregations that I have been honored and privileged to serve. *But we are perceived as a closed community, even the property is gated (there is no sign, etc.).* Participation in ecumenical activities; social outreach- feeding the hungry, etc.; and more, are, in my opinion, what is needed. *But when a parish does not actively involve itself outside into the community, it becomes self-enclosed in my pastoral experience, and it simply atrophies spiritually and in membership."*
- "We need more effort in PR. That would best be exemplified in a saintly person, as St. Paul was, but a process of educating our people with unified Archdiocese-wide concepts, some kind of PR campaign to get the word out on the life and truth of our faith, not its small accomplishments but its big ones. Also, efforts to break down the xenophobia of our members, a willingness to share

and build word of mouth knowledge to our friends. *Most of this is impossible with how we are at present, but a steady push over a long period of time could change things.*"

- "The best ways for our Church to bear witness is to have a concerted, organized way to receive, educate and engage visitors/new members/ non-Orthodox persons. *But I have no examples to provide in my parish.*"

The second category of responses that came often from the "normal" parishes boiled down to the notion that the Orthodox Christians should hold firm to Orthodox Faith and traditions; be proud of them and be willing to explain them to "others," when (and if) they find their way to Orthodox Church. In other words, the responses from "normal" parishes were mostly about "passive" welcoming into Orthodox Church those who somehow discovered Orthodox Christianity. Here are some quotes exemplifying this line of thought:

- "It is very challenging how to motivate those in the pews each Sunday. How do we encourage the 'unfaithful faithful' to share the Good News of Jesus? How can we equip our churches to become inwardly strong yet outwardly focused with people who are ablaze with the love of Jesus? That is part of the Western challenge. As Christians, and as the church of Jesus Christ, we are called by our Lord to "Go and make disciples." The call to bear witness is part of God's plan to bring the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. Yet many of the evangelistic "magic bullets" that worked in the past are now not as effective, particularly in the West. *Our Community is traditional community, our only way to bear witness to our faith is to live the Gospel out in our lives, and welcome people in, or ushering them in.*"
- "Standing firm in the faith of our fathers and making sure everyone in the community knows how we stand!"
- "One of the best ways is to keep our true Orthodox faith and tradition, by raising our children this way."
- "Be honest about your faith, do not be ashamed of your faith. Have a festival or annual event *that people could come to the facility* and find out who you truly are."

In addition to these two major categories of responses from the "normal" parishes, some of them also suggested witnessing Orthodox Faith to America simply by setting a personal example to an outside world: that is, by being good Christian and living faithful life:

- "I think the most effective way to witness our Orthodox Christian faith in a secularized American society is our personal life, our example where we work, our friendly and modest attitude toward our co-workers or neighbors who belong to another Christian denomination or another religion."
- "To show our faith by our lives and actions. People must not only hear or read what it is like to be an Orthodox Christian, they must see examples of it from its members. We encourage the membership to think of church as not just a Sunday only obligation, but a life to be lived."

The answers that came from the "exemplary" parishes were significantly different. Unlike replies from the "normal" parishes, most of the "exemplary" parishes - one way or the other - suggested some "proactive" approach to sharing Orthodox Faith with the non-Orthodox America.³¹ In summary, the approaches of the vast majority of "exemplary" parishes to witnessing Orthodox Faith in today's America can be described as being based on four corner-stones:

- ❖ Serve the community you are in - not only your own people. That is, be present in multiple settings/venues in the local community and offer your own "space" for the other. This will put a "human" face on your parish and make your parish community recognizable by the others;
- ❖ Make Orthodoxy "understandable" for the others. Make an effort to disassociate the image of the Orthodox Church as being "ethnic church" and, instead, try to make it more "approachable" for the others.
- ❖ Emphasize the importance of personal growth in Faith and personal witnessing by everyone in parish community. These two emphases are related: when Church and Faith become more "meaningful," it makes people more engaged in the parish and also eager to share their Faith.
- ❖ Pay attention to having a vibrant and full liturgical life (not merely formal worship services) as one of the key-elements in successful Orthodox evangelism.

Below are actual quotes exemplifying each of these approaches.

³¹ In fairness, some of the "normal" parishes also offered responses which were more typical for the "exemplary" parishes, but the number of such responses from the "normal" parishes was small.

Serve the community you are in - not only your own people. That is, be present in multiple settings/venues in the local community and offer your own "space" for the other. This will put a "human" face on your parish and make the parish community recognizable by the others.

- *"Take a view that 'world is my parish' view, not 'parish is my world.'; invite the whole community to all events and services. Take advantage of our religious minority status. Write as a 'minority' religion in the newspaper. Send in ceaseless press releases. Become acquainted with editors of papers. Get in the neighborhood newsletter."*
- *"Get out of the 4 walls of the church to meet and serve people in the neighborhood and in the city, showing that we care about them and their lives. Why should they believe us when we say we love them if we don't serve them? To love people in the city - not to fear them, look down on them, flee from them. Not to divide people into the 'good' and the 'bad', the 'worthy' and the 'unworthy.' That's not the Gospel. Examples: seeking out and reaching out to unchurched immigrant groups; active outreach - homeless shelter work, food pantry work, social justice work, nursing home services, emergency aid to the poor, afterschool programs, free neighborhood block parties, etc."*
- *"Encouraging parishioners to live their faith through actions not only lips! Doing fundraisers for people in local community. Helping out our town. 2 years ago, our Parish allocated 15% of its annual income for care-giving purposes of those who are locally in need. Having some of the services outside the Church. Vespers with blessing of the animals. Memorial Service for 9/11 in front of the church. Inviting local community to join for social gatherings. We opened our doors for local Cub Scout Pack to have their meetings, fundraisers for free. Serving food every first Monday of the month at local homeless shelter. Collecting children cloth and hygiene items for homeless. Collecting food for Thanksgiving for veteran families in simple words serving God His people Serving the community we are in!"*
- *"What I want the parish to be known for is our love for each other and how we try to share that love and our blessings with our community. We try to be active in our community. We support the local hospice program with a 5K Road Race. I am the chaplain for the local Lions Club. We sponsor concerts in our church in which the entire community is invited. I try to have the parish be normally and actively involved in the community. I want the parish to be seen as a normal part of the local community that is supportive of the community needs."*

- "Most importantly, the local Orthodox parish needs to integrate into its local community. Shop there, attend local events, get involved with local neighborhood concerns. This will put a real 'human face' on our membership as well as establish friendships. For example, our clergy have volunteered to say the opening prayer at City Council meetings. We were recently asked to bless their new Fire Truck and participate in a service honoring firefighters. We have invited our mayor and local alderman to parish events and picnics."
- "We do a monthly community meal for the town and we typically attract about 130-150 people each month. *The goal is to serve them without any catch, to provide them with an opportunity to fellowship with others and to create a sense that the church is the center of life in the town.* It has helped us to achieve a positive attitude towards the church from the town."

Related to this category of answers were few mentions of the parish's work with the OCF chapters - not only for the sake of the Orthodox students, but because as one priest put it down: "Overall university environments are oftentimes much more open to dialog and discussion regarding matters of Faith."

Make Orthodoxy "understandable" for others. Make an effort to disassociate the image of the Orthodox Church as being an "ethnic church" and, instead, try to make it more "approachable" for the others

- "Take a step and simply actively make Orthodoxy available. Not judging others. Priest accessible and approachable to general public. Socially enjoying ALL the people God has given us (beyond parishioners). IE: Loving them."
- "Making the broader community more aware of what the Orthodox Church in reality is: i.e. debunking the 'ethnic Church' myth that has persisted for so many decades. This has been done through participating in community social and religious organizations. Having Bible Study classed open to the general public; doing seasonal Orthodoxy lectures; incorporating tours of the Church and talks about the Faith as part of food and other festival events."
- "We do need to think about ORTHODOXY as opposed to GREEK Orthodoxy, RUSSIAN Orthodoxy, etc. My family and I were indeed fortunate to have been in a predominantly English-language parish when we began our journey. *Since that time, we have worshipped in many communities where music, icons, and overall ambience were beautiful.* But in several of those

beautiful temples, we only knew what was going on because we had the Liturgy already in mind. Our parish uses only English. We have found many ethnic sources for music that Greek people know or that Russians, Romanians, Serbians know, but the language is what we speak in this country. I don't wait to have an inquirer's class or appoint a set time for such. As soon as someone professes an interest, I begin meeting with the person or family with study materials and question/answer times. I've tried the 'class' approach, and there's never a 'good time' or a 'good day.' So...with the best intention, I try to meet newcomers as and when time is available."

- "When I bless a home for example, I ask the family or the individual to bring as many other people as possible. I begin with a short explanation of what is going to happen and after the blessing I encourage people to ask me questions."

Emphasize the importance of personal growth in Faith and personal witnessing by everyone in parish community. These two emphases are related: when Church and Faith become more "meaningful," it makes people more engaged in the parish and also eager to share their Faith.

- "The best method is through the personal growth of our membership and word of mouth. As members grow in their relationship with Christ and experience His grace and healing, they become more active in the life of the parish and are excited to share the good news of what Christ is doing in their lives with those around them."
- "Members need to be invigorated with the message of the Gospel to bring in their family and friends. We do this mainly through adult education."
- "It is important for our people to invite others (family and friends) to services. The laity are the ones that are among the people outside of the Church all week. When they come across someone that has a need or is hurting it is important that they connect these people to Christ via the Church."
- "Our parish focuses on 'interior growth:' that is, growing and deepening our relationship with Jesus Christ. From that, there are natural expressions of our faith that bear witness to Christ in our homes and communities. Examples. One new family came to our church because, during a haircut, he got into a nice, religious conversation. During that conversation, he invited the person to come meet the new priest. During his visit, the community warmly embraced him. He, along with his wife and three children, have been coming for two years. One new family came because

one of our inquirers talked about how much he liked the class and how the community was 'like a family.' Our focus on Adult Education, in my opinion, is where this comes from. Those parishioners who take their faith seriously, and can cultivate it in the parish, will become 'missionaries' because it is the natural extension of who they are in Christ. In our 'Mega-Church' area, curious people will often stop by. If they find ""Christ"" in the church (in greeters, in warm words, in worship, etc) they will be curious to find out more. Having opportunities to learn more (for adults) is essential. As an aside, we advertised our classes once - for free - in the paper... and we got two faithful people from that one advertisement!"

- "The most important aspect is the education. Educating our kids, youth and adults they will be able to bear witness about our faith."

Pay attention to having a vibrant and full liturgical life (not merely formal worship services) as one of the key-elements in successful Orthodox evangelism

- "Orthodoxy should be outspoken, courageous, and engaged. When convert Americans 'go to Church' they want to participate and not just listen to chanters or a choir only sing. We encourage congregational singing and try to find music from various traditions that is singable. Our liturgical practices and our buildings need to be beautiful and all 'form' has to allow its 'meaning' to be clear. Multiple clergy in a parish encourage lay participation and allow for a variety of ministries to grow."
- We connect with people over their interest in meditation and centering prayer by way of our weekly Jesus prayer group, where we gather to learn about and practice the Jesus prayer together.
- "Maximizing liturgical life."
- "Having a good witness when people come is extremely important. How our people worship and pray, the beauty and orderliness of the worship services, the church and the overall campus are extremely important. The preaching, the music, the piety and seriousness, the friendliness and follow up are all important witnesses of a healthy Faith and a healthy church community. We also use the classes and retreats we offer as a means to bring people to attend and get a taste of Orthodoxy."
- "Be willing to explain the need for Repentance lovingly. Our rate of those practicing the Mystery of Holy Repentance has increased yearly. It is not unusual to hear 20-25 confessions in a week (in

a parish of 200 total). Willingly engage the parishioners during a homily, not often, but every once in a while, 'Isn't that right Tom?!' Engage the one who is listening, never the one who is not listening. Doing this places everyone on their toes."

We conclude this chapter with two notes. First, the answers to the question "Given the fact that Orthodox Christians are a small religious minority in America, what are the best ways for our Church to bear witness to our Faith in 21st century America? Can you provide some examples of how it is done in your parish?" do NOT suggest that the "normal" and "exemplary" parishes are different in their *willingness* to share the Orthodox Faith with religiously "others" and to do so in an inviting and welcoming manner. However, it is clear that the "exemplary" parishes are much more proactive in and use a variety of approaches to bringing Orthodox Faith into non-Orthodox America, whereas "normal" parishes typically prefer to simply "offer" Orthodox Christianity to those who somehow found their way into an Orthodox parish. Second, this chapter described four major approaches/strategies that are viewed by the "exemplary" parishes as the "best ways for our Church to bear witness to our Faith in 21st century America." It is our hope that by revealing these four strategies in this study report:

- ❖ more "normal" parishes will be willing to employ one of these strategies developed by the "exemplary" parishes
- ❖ more "exemplary" parishes will learn from each other and complement their current approaches to witnessing Orthodoxy in America by the approaches used in the other "exemplary" parishes.

XVI. The "Collective Portrait" of the "Exemplary" Parishes: The Key-Features That They Share

Fifteen chapters of this study report provided a great deal of information about American Orthodox parishes that can be seen as "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts. Each chapter discussed some area of church life and each was accompanied by the "highlight findings" - the summary of the most important findings. Some readers (especially those who looked only at limited number of chapters) may find it helpful to have a very abridged aggregate overview of the most salient features of the "exemplary" parishes that distinguish them from the "normal" parishes. The below table provides such overview. The table also indicates the pages of the full study-report with detailed discussion and actual data on each finding presented in the table.

Tab. 5 Major Distinct Features of the Parishes that Are "Exemplary" in their Evangelization and Outreach Efforts in Comparison with "Normal" Parishes

Area of church life	"Exemplary" parishes	"Normal" parishes
<p>MEMBERSHIP Demography of membership <i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 32-35 of the full study report</i></p> <hr/> <p>Other distinct features of membership <i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 36-39 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Much stronger presence of converts to Orthodoxy among parishioners; ❖ Significantly higher percentage of persons with college degrees among parishioners; ❖ Significantly higher percentage of persons who are new to the parish in the past 3 years among parishioners; ❖ Significantly smaller percentage of senior citizens (age 65+) among parishioners; ❖ Significantly higher percentage of households with children at home <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ High ethnic and cultural diversity among parishioners ❖ Steady growth in number of parishioners which is typically accompanied by increasing diversity among members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Much lower percentage of converts to Orthodoxy; ❖ Significantly lower percentage of persons with college degrees among parishioners; ❖ Significantly lower percentage of persons who are new to the parish in the past 3 years; ❖ Significantly higher percentage of senior citizens (age 65+); ❖ Significantly lower percentage of households with children at home <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ More homogenous social and ethnic-cultural composition of parishioners ❖ No significant changes in membership over period of time
<p>PRIESTHOOD Demography of priesthood <i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 41-44 of the full study report</i></p> <hr/> <p>Changes in priest's understanding of his role of a pastor and leader of a parish over period of time <i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 48-51 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ More converts to Orthodoxy ❖ Clergy have typically much longer "tenure:" i.e. they stay longer time with their churches <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The original focus on "running programs and administration" shifted towards being a good teacher, preacher and a "role model" for parishioners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Fewer converts to Orthodoxy ❖ Clergy have typically much shorter "tenure:" i.e. they stay shorter time with their churches <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ As the years go by, clergy are becoming increasingly involved in administration, management and fundraising tasks
<p>INVOLVEMENT of parishioners in the life of a parish and in evangelization and outreach <i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 52-54 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Typically, half or dominant majority of parishioners are actively involved in all aspects of a parish life ❖ Outreach efforts and evangelization are often perceived as the way the entire parish community lives and sees itself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Relatively small "core" group of parishioners does everything in a parish ❖ "Program approach" to evangelization: outreach efforts are typically carried out by the designated groups of parishioners
<p>RELIGIOUS EDUCATION</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Along with religious education for children strong emphasis is given on continuing faith formation of the adult church members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Religious education focuses primarily on children and is typically limited to Sunday school

<p>RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (continued from previous page)</p> <p><i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 58-61 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Religious educators are "experimental." They design parish's own religious education programs, employ a variety of forms of learning about faith, and "tailor" their religious education programs to the needs of particular groups within the parish community ❖ "Total Parish Education" approach with the double goal: a) involve everyone in a parish in continuing religious education and b) encourage as many as possible parishioners to become religious educators and teachers themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Religious educators prefer to use the standard religious education curriculum and formats developed and recommended by their respective dioceses and jurisdictions ❖ A limited group of parishioners is involved in parish's religious education programs
<p>PARISH GOVERNANCE</p> <p><i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 62-67 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ "Conciliar model" is typical. The entire parish community is involved in the process of decision-making. Decisions are often made by "consensus." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The parishes are typically "run" and decisions made by the limited group of people - the members of parish councils/boards.
<p>SYSTEM OF FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS BY PARISHIONERS</p> <p><i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 67-69 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Along with "pledging/stewardship" and "tithing" models, many parishes successfully employ a "free will offering" model. In this model, parishioners are encouraged constantly to give to the best of their ability, but are not required to commit in advance any specified amount of money or percentage of their income. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Along with "pledging/stewardship" and "tithing" models, many parishes remain with "membership dues" model: a fixed amount of contributions is required to be considered a member.
<p>PROGRAMS AND MINISTRIES Changes in programs and ministries over period of time</p> <p><i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 71-75 of the full study report</i></p> <hr/> <p>Top two areas of ministries that are seen as the most important by the parishes</p> <p><i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 76-79 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Parishes typically embrace changes in ministries and keep trying new programs and activities even if they "don't work out" ❖ Understanding that "nothing is carved in stone," that programs and activities come and go depending on the parish's life-cycle and changing circumstances ❖ Parishes are more likely to expand intentionally and significantly the diversity of new ministries <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Parishes pay primary attention to religious education and faith formation of church members. Parishes offer variety of religious education and faith formation programs that address different subjects and issues and are geared to the needs and interests of the various categories of church members. ❖ The second in importance are outward oriented "social outreach and charitable work in the local community" ministries and programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Parishes are more indifferent with regard to developing new programs and ministries ❖ Parishes tend to "hold" to existing programs and activities ❖ Parishes typically add new or improve existing programs in only limited number of areas of a parish life <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Parishes pay primary attention to religious education and faith formation of church members. Parishes prefer to use standard and uniform formats of religious education: e.g. Sunday school for children, Bible study for adults, etc. ❖ The second in importance are ministries and programs that focus on "social life and fellowship" within a parish

<p>PARISH COMMUNITY: Relations among members <i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 86-89 of the full study report</i></p> <hr/> <p>Attitudes towards visitors and inquirers <i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 90-95 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Parishes foster mutual care, support and practical help among parishioners. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Strong emphasis on welcoming inquirers about the Faith and first-time visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Parishes maintain overall atmosphere of welcoming and hospitality, but do not pay much attention to mutual care and support among parishioners <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ No particular emphasis on welcoming inquirers about the Faith and first-time visitors
<p>PARISH AND ITS LOCAL NEIGHBORHOOD</p> <p><i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 103-104 and 107-111 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Most parishes think that they are "well known in the local community and surrounding neighborhoods" ❖ Majority of the parishes have made "considerable effort" to make themselves better known in their local communities ❖ The parishes think that they are well known in their local communities primarily <i>because</i> of their participation in various community's events/initiatives and consistent effort to be a "good neighbor." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Minority of parishes think that they are "well known in the local community and surrounding neighborhoods" ❖ Minority of the parishes have made "considerable effort" to make themselves better known in their local communities ❖ The parishes think that they are known in their local communities primarily <i>because</i> of their "ethnic" culture and parish-based events (food-sales, festivals, fundraising events, etc.).
<p>RELATIONS WITH THE NON-ORTHODOX RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS</p> <p><i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 116-117 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ More parishes are involved in local inter-Christian relations and cooperation. ❖ The parishes engage in a variety of inter-Christian activities: charitable work, ecumenical worship services, joint social and cultural events (picnics, concerts), work in the area of social justice (addressing issues of immigration, criminal justice reform, urban education, etc.), working together on reducing crime in the neighborhoods, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Fewer parishes are involved in local inter-Christian relations and cooperation. ❖ Ecumenical cooperation is typically limited to either strictly charitable work (running homeless shelters, soup kitchens, food drives, etc.) or to participation of the Orthodox priests in local clergy associations.
<p>TYPICAL APPROACHES TO "HOW WITNESS ORTHODOX FAITH IN AMERICA" TYPICAL APPROACHES TO "HOW WITNESS ORTHODOX FAITH IN AMERICA" (continued on the next page)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Pay attention to personal growth in Faith and personal witnessing by everyone in parish community. When Church and Faith become more "meaningful" for parishioners, it makes them both more engaged in the parish and eager to share their Faith. ❖ Pay attention to having a vibrant and full liturgical life (not merely formal worship services) as one of the key-elements in successful Orthodox evangelism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Orthodox Christians should hold firm to Orthodox Faith and traditions; be proud of them and be willing to explain them to "others," when (and if) they find their way to Orthodox Church; ❖ Witnessing Orthodox Faith to America can simply be done by setting a personal example of being a good Orthodox Christian and living faithful life

<p><i>Detailed discussion of this subject is on pp. 136-144 of the full study report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Serve the community you are in - not only your own people. Be present in multiple settings/venues in the local community and offer your own "parish space" for community events and initiatives. ❖ Make Orthodoxy "understandable" for the others. Make a conscious effort to disassociate the image of the Orthodox Church as being "ethnic church" and, instead, try to make it more "approachable" for the others. 	
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XVII. In Conclusion. The "Law of the Natural Attraction" as the Major Model of the Orthodox Evangelization in America: Where Do We Go from Here?

The title of this study, "Go and Make Disciples: Evangelization and Outreach in US Orthodox Parishes," was chosen when the study was planned and designed, but before it was completed. As we analyzed the results and prepared this report it has become clear that of the two imperatives used in the title, "go" and "make disciples," only "make disciples" can be seen as the nature of Orthodox evangelism in the United States. Indeed, the American parish communities "make new disciples" for the Orthodox Church. And the parishes that were selected by the jurisdictions for this study as being "exemplary in their evangelization and outreach efforts" are especially successful in this task. However, they typically do not "go" out in terms of the active search for the new Church members and this is generally true for both the parishes that are "exemplary in their evangelization and outreach efforts" and the "normal" parishes.

An important finding discussed in chapter IX was that among both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes relatively few place a strong emphasis on an active "search for and bringing in" new members. Instead, the majority of parish clergy take a different approach. They believe in witnessing the Orthodox Faith by setting an example through the lives of their parish communities and by focusing on welcoming visitors, newcomers, and inquirers about the Faith to their parishes. This Orthodox "more passive" way of winning new souls for the Church is very consistent with what was concluded in chapter II. Recall, Chapter II discussed the definitions of the term "Orthodox evangelism" provided by the clergy participating in the study. A majority of clergy in both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes define evangelism in the Orthodox Church as "passive" (i.e. "Come and see") evangelism.

More specifically:

- ❖ The most common definition of evangelism provided by the parish clergy was about evangelism being described as living a genuine Christian life. By this definition, evangelism is about *personal growth in Christ that is witnessed by others and, therefore, draws them to Christ*. That is, when a person (or entire parish community) lives a life as an Orthodox Christian, people around see and come to a desire to know Christ through that example.
- ❖ The second common type of definition of evangelism was about Orthodox worship and the Liturgy. The definitions in this category suggested that one is introduced to the Orthodox Church chiefly through the experiencing the Liturgy. By this definition, the *fullness of liturgical life lived out in a parish is the key element in presenting Orthodoxy to the non-Orthodox* and attracting them to the Orthodox Church.

In short, the majority of Orthodox clergy (both in "normal" and "exemplary" parishes) believe that the people will be drawn into the life of the Church by discovering the power and truth of the Church's teachings and practices and the beauty of the Orthodox Liturgy. This fact does NOT necessarily prove that the clergy "fully discount and dismiss" the need to actively present the Gospel and the Church to the world. However, it definitely suggests that - when it comes to the question of "evangelism" - Orthodox priests rely heavily on their perceived natural attractiveness of the Orthodox Church for many religious seekers.

An inevitable question that the readers of this report would probably ask at this point: "So, what is the difference then between the parishes that are 'exemplary' in their evangelization and outreach efforts and the 'normal' parishes, if their parish clergy define and approach Orthodox evangelism in more or less the same fashion?" The answer is simple. Most priests in both "exemplary" and "normal" parishes adhere to similar definitions and general approaches to evangelization. At the same time, they are quite different in how they *practice these approaches and embody them in reality*. That is, all clergy believe in the power of witnessing the Orthodox Faith through the exemplary Christian lives of the individuals and their entire parish communities, but "exemplary" parishes provide a much better example of such life than the "normal" parishes. And, of course, "exemplary" parishes focus on the evangelical dimensions of the parish life more intentionally (or one can say "self-consciously") than the "normal" parishes.

Similarly, all clergy believe that the richness of Orthodox liturgical life lived out in a parish can attract new disciples to the Orthodox Church, but the "exemplary" parishes offer richer experience of the Orthodox worship than the "normal" parishes. "Richer" means not simply having more services, but the services being more inclusive, engaging and meaningful

Using an allegory, while all clergy believe that the people can be naturally attracted to and *drawn* into the life of the Church, the "exemplary" parishes are the magnets that are much more powerful than the magnets of the "normal" parishes. Not one, but a variety of sources of attraction contribute to the power of the "parish magnets." And the "exemplary" parishes are better users of these sources of attraction than the "normal" parishes.

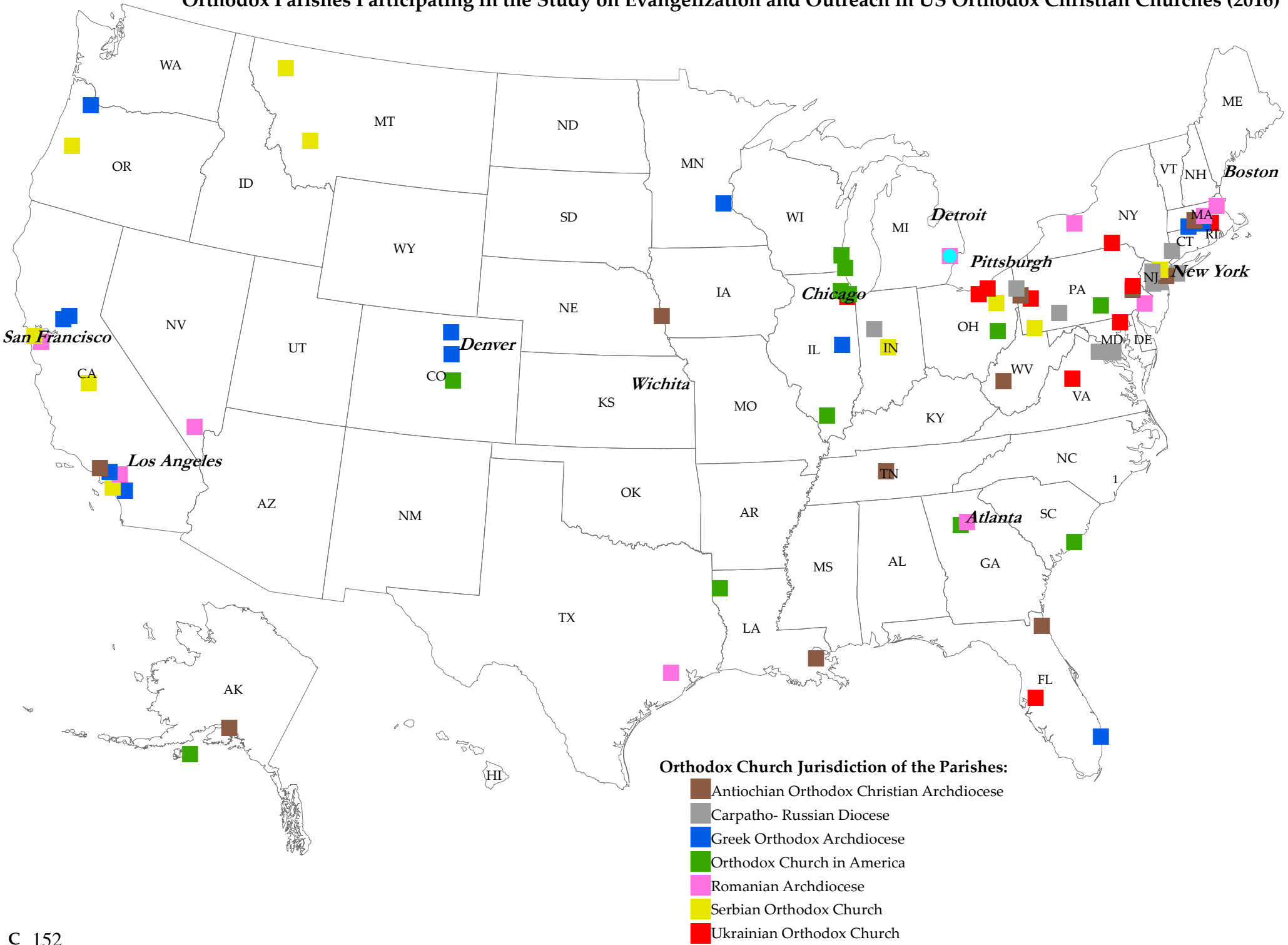
Previous chapters of this report discussed one-by-one these various sources of attraction to a parish. In each case, we indicated what are distinct features of the "exemplary" parishes that make them "stronger magnets" for new members and inquirers about the Orthodox Faith than the normal parishes. How internal relations in a parish are being built, how much attention is being paid to everyone's involvement into daily life of a parish and continuing Faith formation, how parish governance is organized, how clergy understand their role within a parish community, how much emphasis is given to "welcoming" visitors and inquirers about the Faith, how creative parish's education programs are and how carefully are they tailored to the needs of the certain groups of parishioners, how strong and multifaceted is parish involvement into the local community, how open parish is to communicating and cooperating with non-Orthodox religious congregations, how flexible the parishes are in developing new and adjusting old ministries and programs to changing circumstances, etc. - all these makes a difference for how powerful is the "parish magnet."

This study made a good but only very first step towards better understanding of Orthodox Christian evangelization and outreach in America. It offered a number of insights into the lives of the parishes that are "exemplary" in their evangelization and outreach efforts. It is our hope that the other parishes as well as diocesan and national church leadership will be willing to use these insights and to employ them in many other local parish communities. At the same time, the following stages of this study should address at least two further questions and issues.

First, while the "natural law of attraction" is presently the major model of Orthodox Christian evangelization and outreach in the United States and while most "exemplary" parishes are very successful at using this model, there are still parish communities that take more proactive approach to religious outreach: that is, these parishes place stronger emphasis on "going out" and active searching for new disciples. A few such parishes were present in our sample, but not enough for making any statistically sound conclusions. Either another survey-based study with significant representation from parishes that are more proactive in their religious outreach or more in-depth qualitative study of a few such parishes is needed in order to better examine and explore this alternative model of Orthodox evangelization.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, all that was discussed and concluded in this study was based exclusively on experiences, information, and perceptions on the part of the parish clergy. While priests' approaches towards Orthodox evangelization and outreach are very important and while they are the ones who "shape" their parish communities, the voices of the laity - both parish leaders and ordinary "people in the pews" - should be carefully heard as well. The opinions of lay church members about the best ways to make Orthodoxy better known in America and be more successful in Orthodox evangelical mission may or may not always correspond with clergy's points of view. Or, the laity's way of thinking about evangelization and outreach may complement and enrich clergy's way of thinking. In the final count, lay parishioners build local Orthodox Christian communities. Until we know their opinions and concerns, it will be very difficult to make any sound conclusions about Orthodox evangelism as being a way of life for entire parish communities. Therefore, the next stage of study on Orthodox evangelism and outreach in America should approach and listen carefully to our lay church members: old and young, cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, those who are very involved in their parishes and those who participate "once in a while." Everyone's opinion matters.

Orthodox Parishes Participating in the Study on Evangelization and Outreach in US Orthodox Christian Churches (2016)





10 steps to a great parish website

What Every Orthodox Church Needs To Know

Adam Lowell Roberts



**Is your website as
beautiful as your
temple?**

Did you know?

- **YouTube, which only has videos, is the second largest search engine**
- **In 2015 more people used a smartphone instead of a desktop computer at google.com**
- **Big words are intimidating, such as Theotokos**
- **Parish websites are the first impression to a visitor.**



Part of the equation of a healthy parish is a healthy website. Does your website speak life to its visitors or do they leave disgruntled?

Your website should be as easy to use and understand as a children's book. We have laid out the 10 steps to create a great website for an Orthodox parish.



Additional help is available at the end of this eBook on the Resource page. Also at the end is a glossary of terms commonly identified with websites.



01

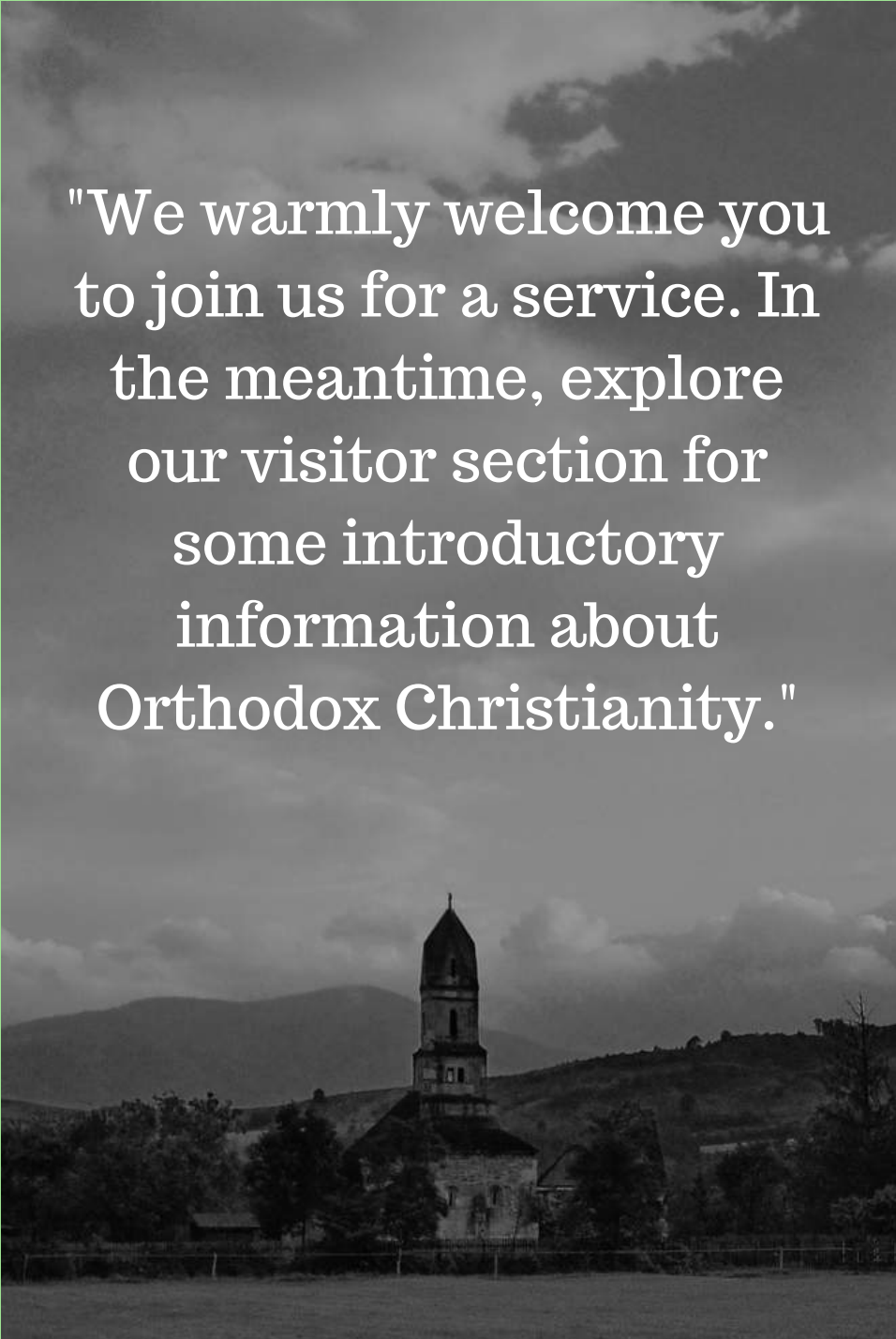
The Language Of The People

English should be the default language on your website. If you are a parish with other languages, then add a link on the home page for that language. As a web designer told me when helping me write this guide, "without English, the rest of the steps will not matter. English by default, (other language) as an option."

Next Action

Ideal: Hire someone to rewrite all pages in English. Also, have the contractor install a language plugin.

Resource Limited: Create a to do list for every page, and commit to a certain amount of pages every week.



"We warmly welcome you to join us for a service. In the meantime, explore our visitor section for some introductory information about Orthodox Christianity."

02

Welcome Message

What could be wrong with, "We welcome all visitors desiring to worship with us" or "All visitors are welcome who are seeking a deeper relationship with God." Sadly, these statements leave people out. What if someone is just curious? Look to the left for an example from St. George in Prescott, AZ. Also consider adding this message, "We are open for tours."

Next Action

Ideal: Hire a web developer to change/add your welcome message.

Resource Limited: DIY or find someone in your parish who can update your content.

Welcome!

elcome! We are glad you found our website! Saint Paul is a fellowship of Christians who have come from the Orthodox Church from a variety of denominational and devotional persuasions. The Orthodox Church is the oldest Christian Church, known in Europe, Asia and the Middle East, but it is one of the best-kept secrets in America. Here we have summarized some of our beliefs and practices on this site.

Paul Orthodox Church - Katy, Texas



our Church. She is the genuine community many of us had longed after for years, but she is not perfect. No family of sinners is. And yet, we have survived and thrived for two millennia. Thank

the good in the Church is credited to the Holy Trinity of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. When God the Son became Jesus the Man, He took on our greatest enemy, death. He died a crucified death with death, rose again, and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father.

ews! Jesus Christ, the victorious King accepts all who come to Him for their salvation. God calls all to be citizens of the kingdom. Life therein is a matter of choosing to enter and choosing to remain.

03

Short Video

Have a video front and center on your website that is 2 minutes or less in length. The best case scenario is a video of your priest. Or, record a lay person who is comfortable with public speaking. The welcome message should be simple, friendly, and inviting. Include a short description of something interesting about your parish, such your demographic makeup or an outreach activity.

Next Action

Ideal: Hire a videographer.

Resource Limited: DIY with a smartphone. Pay attention to your background, lighting, sound, and use a tripod.



"This Sunday we will be celebrating Jesus Christ ascending into heaven. You are welcome to be our guest at this and all services."

04

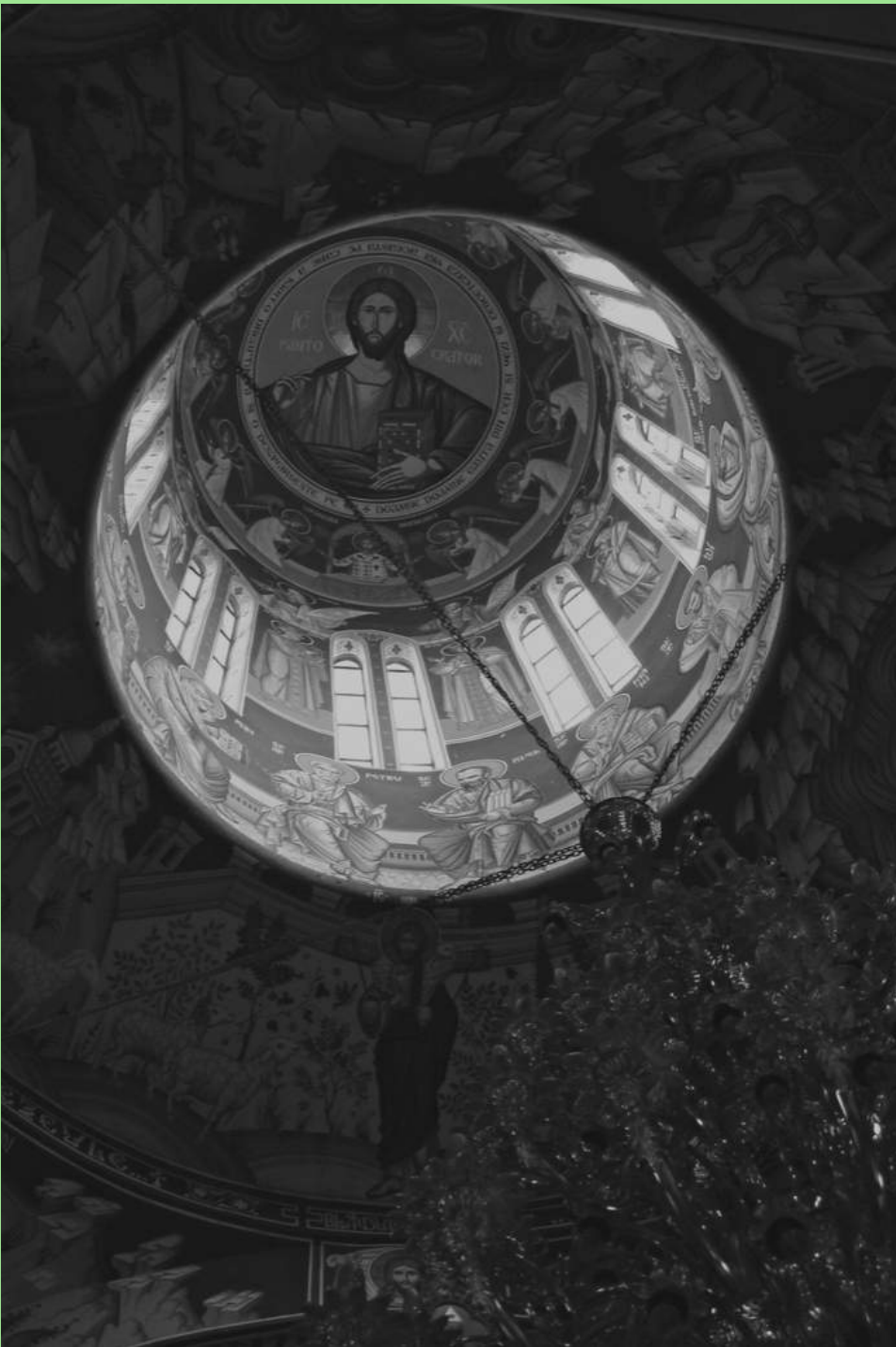
No Orthodox Lingo

Have explanations instead of terms. Phrases like, "Come visit to learn more about the Holy Orthodox Faith" are confusing to visitors. Also, information about saints is great but only if written at a 5th grade level. To introduce Orthodox terms have a glossary on your website. Having a simple message allows us to discuss the nuances of our faith. To work the other way round is to lose an opportunity.

Next Action

Ideal: Hire a journalist/PR Rep to rewrite the terms as explanations.

Resource Limited: Find a parishioner who is an author, blogger, or teacher/professor.



05

Mobile Friendly

Make sure the layout of your mobile version is clean and simple. Everything that is on the desktop version needs to be available in some form on the mobile version. Limiting information on the mobile version is frustrating to your visitors. 8% of the population has stopped browsing on desktops. If it is not available on the mobile version, then they will never see it.

Next Action

Ideal: Purchase a responsive website, with "Mobile" in mind.

Resource Limited: Add a mobile version and a link to the "Full Site"

Why does this matter?

according
to research

0.35%

of Americans participate in the life of the Orthodox Church. This includes Oriental Orthodox Christians.

This means only 0.35% of visitors to your website understand Orthodoxy.





06

Schedule, Phone, Location

Have clearly marked links to all three items to save space on your mobile version. On the desktop version you will have plenty of space for all of this initial information and more. For the contact page, consider listing your priest's name and cell phone number. Many parish phones are left unmonitored. Listing a cell phone helps visitors to the website feel welcome.

Next Action

Ideal: Hire webmaster to design your mobile website vs. the desktop website.

Resource Limited: Use one of the website providers listed on the Resources page.

Assumption Cathedral, Moscow, Russia



07

Dated Content

We all hate websites with outdated information. If you do not have an available webmaster who can update content weekly, then remove all dated content. Also, an empty calendar is awful. At a minimum put in all services. If you decide to have a blog, remove the dates. This way people will not know how old your blog posts are.

Next Action

Ideal: Regular fresh content uploaded by a professional webmaster.

Resource Limited: Remove all dated content and use one of the website builders listed on the Resources page.

Mt Athos, Greece



08

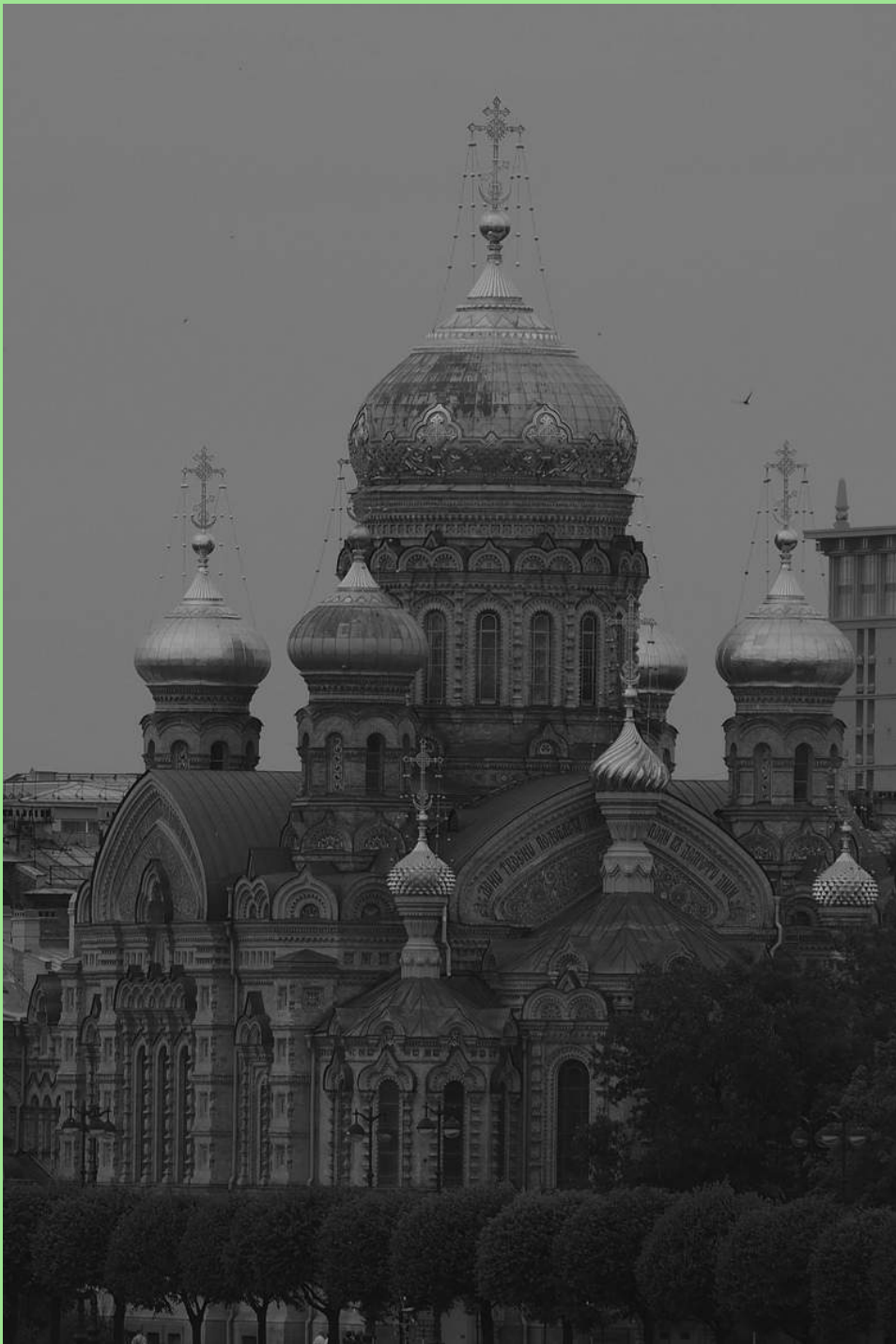
Test It

Show your new website to snake people, protestants, and non-Christians. Snake People are honest about websites. Expect negative feedback. Do not trust the opinion of your own parishioners or other Orthodox, because they too biased. Also you need to add **Google Analytics** (see glossary).

Next Action

Ideal: Have non-parishioners give feedback. Have a webmaster install **Google Analytics**.

Resource Limited: Have parishioners give feedback. Install **Google Analytics** yourself.



09

Implement, Then Repeat

After you implement the changes, return to those same people and ask for new feedback. Also consider recruiting some new people to test your website out. Repeat this process until most people LOVE, and I mean that word, your website. Once people LOVE your website, you are on the right path.

Next Action

Ideal: Have previous and new people give you feedback. Put the link to your website on Social Media and ask for honest feedback.

Resource Limited: Have parishioners give feedback.



10

Parishioners

Add a link to the home page titled "Resources." This is the new location for all parish information, such as Sunday school, chanters, etc. Some churches may like the idea of adding a sub-domain (see glossary) for their congregation. Now inform educate your parish about your new website and the outreach nature you are trying to embrace. Include this new information in all parish communication: emails, newsletter, Sunday announcements, etc. It might take a few weeks or months for parishioners to get used to the new location of member information on the website. That's okay! This kind of change is good for you and your parish.

RESOURCES

Here is a checklist of the 10 steps.

- [] Languages
- [] Welcome message
- [] Video
- [] Terms vs. explanations
- [] Mobile friendly
- [] Schedule, contact, directions
- [] Dated content
- [] Test the new website
- [] Test the feedback
- [] Inform the Parish

St. George, Tbilisi, Georgia



RESOURCES

DIY Website Builders:

Squarespace.com: Easiest to use, however not lots of bells & whistles.

Wix.com: Almost as easy as squarespace. Has lots of bells & whistles.

Wordpress.com: If you plan on having a blog, consider using Wordpress.

Hosting Companies:

Fatcow.com

Hostgator.com

Bluehost.com

OrthodoxInternet.com

Internet.goarch.org

Media Places:

Flickr.com: A website to find free images for your website.

Unsplash.com: A website to find free images for your website.

Professional Web Developers:

MTurk.com: Online marketplace of web developers, hosted by Amazon.

Upwork.com: Online marketplace of web developers and programmers.

The latest information will be maintained at:

adamlowellroberts.com/internet

GLOSSARY

desktop: having to do with a computer which has a full size screen, such as a laptop or desktop computer.

domain: the address of a particular website on the internet. For Google, the domain is www.google.com.

Google Analytics: a free tool to monitor the traffic to your website

html: a programming language which is used behind the scenes to design a website. HTML is not seen by the end user.

mobile: having to do with a mobile device, such as an iPhone or iPad.

social media*: noun, (usually used with a plural verb) Digital Technology. websites and other online means of communication that are used by large groups of people to share information and to develop social and professional contacts. Examples include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn.

sub-domain: a modified address which relates to the main domain in place of the www. For example, a sub-domain of google is mail.google.com.

webmaster: the person who is in charge of a website or is the primary contact person when changes/updates need to be made. This person may or may not perform the actual changes.

website*: noun, Digital Technology. a connected group of pages on the World Wide Web regarded as a single entity, usually maintained by one person or organization and devoted to a single topic or several closely related topics.

*Definition is from dictionary.com.

Living Out Our Faith: Orthodox Churches in 21st Century America

First things first...

Dear Father,

Please read this short introduction. It is important.

Your parish was selected for the national study "Living Out Our Faith: Orthodox Churches in 21st Century America." The study is being undertaken by the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA. The purpose of the study is to discover how local Orthodox communities bear witness to our Faith in today's America. There are many ways to pursue this goal and each parish is unique. Our hope is to gather insights and experiences from various parishes so that their best practices can be shared with and adopted by other parishes.

Please consider this study as an invitation to tell your parish's "story." A number of questions in the following survey are "open-ended" questions where you can freely express your thoughts and concerns. We understand that all parish clergy are "overloaded" with the pastoral work and that it may be difficult to find a sufficient time to finish the survey in one sitting. To assist you, this survey is designed in a manner which allows you to save a partially completed survey and to return to it later in order to finish it or to edit your answers.

To do so, please, follow these simple steps:

1. Answer the questions in the order they are asked. Do not "jump" between questions.
2. If you feel that you need to take a break, finish the survey page that you are working on (each page has only 4-5 questions), then click "NEXT" at the end of this page (this will save your answers) and close your browser.
3. To resume the survey, simply use the same invitation email (save it!) with the web-link that was given to you. The only requirement is that the entire survey should be completed on the same computer (or tablet).

Please consider each question carefully and take your time to respond all of them.

If you have any questions about this study, please communicate with me directly at:

773-551-7226, akrindatch@aol.com

Asking your prayers and thanking you for your help,

Alexei Krindatch

Research Coordinator, Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America

* 1. The name of your parish:

* 2. In what state is your parish located?

Please, select the state from the drop-down menu

State:

* 3. In which Orthodox jurisdiction is your parish?

Please, select church jurisdiction from the drop-down menu

Orthodox Church jurisdiction:

Please say a few words about yourself

* 4. Which of the following best describes your religious upbringing?

- I was raised and have always been active in the Orthodox Church
- I was raised in the Orthodox Church, but was inactive in the Church for a period of time
- I was raised in a non-Orthodox religious tradition and became Orthodox later in life
- I grew up in a non-religious family and joined the Orthodox Church at a later stage in life
- Any other answer? Please describe:

5. While you were growing up, was the Church - either Orthodox or non-Orthodox - an important part of your family's life?

- My family (or, at least, one parent) was active in the Church and it was an important part of our family's life when I was a child
- My family (or, at least, one parent) attended church regularly, but I wouldn't say that it was truly an important part of our family's life
- My family (or, at least, one parent) attended church, but only occasionally
- My family was not interested in church and it had very little (if at all) role in my life when I was a child

Would you like to add anything about your religious life when growing up?

6. How did you decide to become a priest: what was the most important motivation (or, perhaps, combination of circumstances) that brought you to the priestly vocation?

7. Between the time you were ordained an Orthodox priest and now, has your understanding of your role as a pastor and leader of a parish changed?

- Yes, it has changed significantly
- It has changed somewhat
- No, it has remained more or less the same

If your understanding of your role as a pastor and leader of a parish has changed (answer #1 or #2), please say a few words about how it has changed:

About your parish's neighborhood...

* 8. Please evaluate the general religious environment in the community where your parish is located. Do this on the five-point scale: from being "very secular/no religion at all" to being "very religious/a lot of religious activities"

Very religious/A lot of religious activities

Rather religious/quite a bit of religious activities

Neither "secular" nor "religious"

Rather secular/Little religious activities

Very secular/No religion at all

Do you have any additional comments about general religious situation in the community where your parish is located?

9. Say a few words about your parish's surrounding neighborhood from demographic and economic points of view. Are you in a residential suburb, downtown area, small town or rural area? Are you in an expensive and "trendy" place? Are you in an economically growing or rather depressed area? Racially mixed or mostly Caucasian? Are there any demographic groups that dominate among the local residents: e.g. blue or white collar workers, students, families with children, senior citizens, etc.

Living Out Our Faith: Orthodox Churches in 21st Century America

About your parish's membership

* 10. Approximately, how many persons ***are involved in any way*** in the life of your parish? Include in this number adults and children, regular and occasional attendees, and paid and unpaid stewards. Total number is about:

* 11. How many persons (including children) ***regularly participate*** in the life of your parish? About:

12. Of all regularly participating adults in your parish, estimate the percentage in the following categories (please answer each line):

	Few: 0-20%	Some: 21-40%	About half: 41-60%	Many: 61-80%	Majority: 81-100%
Persons who have college / university degree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Converts to Orthodoxy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Immigrants: i.e. persons born outside of the United States	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Persons who are new to this parish in the past 3 years	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Persons living within 30 minutes of your parish's church building	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Senior citizens: 65+	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Families with children at home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Is there anything else special or unique about the membership of your parish?

13. Besides attending liturgical services, would you say that the dominant majority of your parishioners are actively involved in all other aspects of the life of your parish? Or is it rather a core group of parishioners that does everything, whereas most members participate only passively?

A relatively small core group does everything

About half of parishioners are actively involved

Dominant majority of parishioners are actively involved

Any additional comment that you may like to make:

14. If the majority of parishioners are actively involved in the life of your parish, how have you achieved this? Is there any formal system in place that encourages everyone to attend regularly and participate actively?

Living Out Our Faith: Orthodox Churches in 21st Century America

About how this parish community has changed since you were assigned to the parish

* 15. Are you the first ("founding") priest to serve this parish?

Yes

No

16. How long (how many years) have you served this parish?

17. Have there been any significant changes in membership while you have been with this parish (either in numbers or in the socio-demographic composition of parishioners)? Please describe or give some examples.

18. Have there been any changes in parish governance while you have been with this parish (e.g. system of decision making, organization of administration, system of financial contribution by parishioners)? Please describe or give some examples.

* 19. Have there been any significant changes in parish's programs and ministries while you have been with this parish (some new ministries developed, some old programs/activities "died out")? Please describe or give some examples.

* 20. Given the fact that Orthodox Christians are a small religious minority in America, what are the best ways for our Church to bear witness to our Faith in 21st century America? Can you provide some examples of how it is done in your parish?



About organization and governance of your parish

21. Besides liturgical services, what are three ministries/programs/activities that are most fundamental and essential for your parish?

1.

2.

3.

* 22. If you were asked to name one particular area of your parish life where your parish can set an example for other Orthodox parishes, what would that be? Say: "We pay a lot of attention to and are really good at...:"

23. What are the most remarkable and/or distinctive characteristics of governance and decision making in your parish?

24. What are the most remarkable and/or distinctive characteristics of your parish's religious education programs: e.g. how many people are involved, how the process is organized, what are the curricula, who teaches the classes, etc.?

* 25. Which model best describes your parish's system of financial contributions by parishioners?

- Membership dues: a fixed sum paid annually by a family or an individual to be considered a member
- Stewardship/Pledging: members make an annual advance commitment to give a certain amount to the parish
- "Adjustable" tithe: parishioners donate a certain percentage of their income to the parish
- Tithe: parishioners (or most of them) donate 10% of their income to the parish
- Any other model. Please, describe your parish's model of financial contributions by parishioners:

About your parish's outreach

* 26. Would you say that your parish is well known in the local community and surrounding neighborhood? If yes, why or for what reason?

27. To follow up on the previous question, have you made a conscious effort to make your parish better known in the local community?

No or little effort

Some effort

Yes, considerable effort

Any additional comment that you may like to make:

28. If you have made a conscious effort to make your parish better known in the local community, what were the most important "strategies and tools" that you employed? Please check all that apply:

- Active usage of various social media: e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pintrest, etc.
- Frequent appearances in the local news media: e.g. television, radio, community bulletin boards.
- Parish festivals
- Sponsorship and participation in local events: e.g. farmer's markets, walks for charities, etc.
- Providing social services for local community: e.g. soup kitchen, homeless shelter, offering parish facilities for usage to other groups
- Engaging in social justice work in the community

Any other strategies that are being used to make your parish better known in the local community:

* 29. Would you say that your parish is truly "outreach oriented"?

Definitely no

Rather no

Not sure

Rather yes

Definitely yes

If "yes," what makes your parish truly outreach-oriented? Any particular ministries, activities, "ways of doing things?" Please describe:

* 30. Are your parish's outreach efforts carried out by a designated group of dedicated members or is it rather the way that the entire parish community lives and sees itself?

31. In your opinion, is it important for an Orthodox parish to work cooperatively and develop relationships with other (non-Orthodox) religious congregations located in the same community?

Very important

Desirable, but not important

Not sure

I would rather stay away from this

I would definitely stay away from this

Would you like to add any comment?

32. If you think that it is important for an Orthodox parish to develop cooperation and fellowship with the non-Orthodox congregations, give us a few examples of what your parish does together with other Christian churches:

About your parish's "welcome"

33. Would you say that your parish can be called a truly loving Christian community? If yes, why? Can you give some examples from the real life?

* 34. Would you say that your parish is a very welcoming place for inquirers about Orthodox Faith and first time visitors?

Definitely yes

Rather yes

Not sure

Rather no

Definitely no

Would you like to add any comment?

35. If you answered "yes" to previous question, do you have a designated group of people and an established process that assures that inquirers about the Orthodox Faith and first time visitors feel welcomed in your parish? Please describe:

* 36. Some people believe that it is important for a parish to actively look for new members, while some think that it is sufficient to simply be a welcoming community that accepts and integrates people who somehow found their way to the parish. What is your opinion on this question? If you believe that it is important to actively search for new members, how do you do this in your church?

Suggestions and insights for others

* 37. In a nutshell, tell us: what is most "special" about your parish that would distinguish it from the other parishes in your diocese or jurisdiction?

38. Based on your experience of building parish community, could you give any advice to other parishes in your jurisdiction as to what they should pay more attention to? If you think that many parishes tend to make the same mistakes over and over again, what are those mistakes?

* 39. Different people (clergy and laity alike) have different understandings of what "evangelization" means. Can you offer your definition of what "good evangelization" means? Perhaps, you can even provide some examples from the life of your parish?

40. In your opinion, how could the bishops better help to support and encourage evangelization work in their parishes?

Thank you! Please, click on the "Done" button and your completed survey will be submitted.

Appendix 4: Selected Quotes from the Clergy Participating in the Study that Can be Helpful for Other Parishes

The following pages contain a collection of quotes from our respondents - the clergy serving in US Orthodox parishes that were involved in the study. Some of these quotes were used already in various chapters of this study report, while some appear first time in this report. We offer this collection with very simple goal in mind: these quotes can be interesting, informative, useful and inspirational for the clergy and lay leaders in many other American parishes. In order to "easy navigate" between various subjects the quotes are divided in ten broad categories:

- ❖ About parish ministries, programs and activities beyond worship services;
- ❖ About parish finances and giving to the church;
- ❖ About worship services and sacramental life;
- ❖ About building loving local Christian community and relations within the parish;
- ❖ About question of ethnic identity and culture;
- ❖ About various ways (and specific examples) that can improve outreach and mission work in US Orthodox churches;
- ❖ About how the bishops can help the parishes in evangelization and outreach;
- ❖ About how US Orthodox parishes can witness Orthodoxy in the 21st century America;
- ❖ About religious education and faith formation;
- ❖ Other advices to the parishes and comments on commonly made mistakes.

About parish ministries, programs and activities beyond worship services:

- ❖ We make a conscious effort to empower and involve our lay leaders to take ownership of their own ministries. This means actually having a real ministry team of several members of the parish as opposed to a ministry of one person. We hold them accountable for having a mission statement for their ministry, a stated vision and annual goals that our Parish Council liaison supports them in fulfilling. We make sure that every ministry has a ministry binder that serves as a manual for continuity and smooth succession when the time comes. We help each ministry to create and manage their own budget and to effectively communicate their budget needs to our Parish Council Treasurer, so that the Parish's Operating Budget is a true reflection of the needs of each ministry. We try to train our leaders on how to lead and how - in turn - train a successor, so

we do not encourage burnout or parochial insecurity. We try to help our members to identify their unique gifts and talents and to encourage them to use them in ministry to the glory of God. We always focus on at least one project per month. That is, something is always occurring. We never stand still. I subscribe to the biological belief that things are either "progressing" or "regressing." In biology, there is no such thing as "stability." This is Leadership 101. If anyone is seeking "stability" they likely have no idea what they are doing to an organization. This attitude affects everyone. Keep moving and talk about the movement.

- ❖ We make use of the existing professional talent within the community, i.e., legal advisors, medical professionals, counseling, teaching, etc. This involves having a good understanding of who is who in your congregation.
- ❖ As part of membership and stewardship in the parish, every adult is expected to participate in some additional service group or ministry of the Church. The idea is to identify, invite and draw new participants into the service groups and ministries. The parish is structured in an array of 8 Service Groups which are tasked with the oversight of the particular areas of parish life with specific ongoing ministries under each: 1. Liturgy (servers, readers, chanters, prosthophora bakers, etc.); 2. Charitable Works (prison ministry, immigrant ministry, right to life, Community Care, intercession, etc.); 3. Hospitality (events); 4. Outreach-Evangelization (Greeters); 5. Religious Formation (Church School, Adult ed, Catechumenate); 6. Buildings and Grounds; 7. Library/Bookstore; 8. Parish Administration (Board, Web committee). These groups are encouraged to meet monthly and carry out tasks, including planning, budgeting and calendar, as necessary. Each person should be able to find something that they are interested in, and good at. This parish structure keeps key church ministries in the forefront of what we're supposed to be about.

About parish finances and giving to the church:

- ❖ The manner in which we handle finances has changed. We used to have one person to handle all financial transactions. We now employ a system of segmentation, whereby multiple people are involved in handling the church finances, but in a very limited role. Those who count money, do only that. Those who record donations and make deposits, do only that. He/She who pays the bills and provides a monthly balance sheet does only that;

- ❖ We present giving as a spiritual discipline. We ask people to give as much as they can joyfully and seek to increase their giving by growing spiritually. We don't view charitable giving in terms of a pledge but rather a principle;
- ❖ The vast majority of our stewards make an ongoing commitment to the Church that is not based on calendar year (weekly or monthly giving). We utilize a formal mentoring program - "Quill" - that has done wonders. We don't talk about financial stewardship in Church, but rather provide opportunities to individuals to support other philanthropies of the Parish, Metropolis, Archdiocese, OCMC, IOCC, Project Mexico;
- ❖ Oftentimes those who lead parishes are afraid to invest in "Kingdom work" (helping those in need, supporting charities, etc.) due to fear of the parish not meeting its financial obligations. This mindset does not encourage greater stewardship, inhibits evangelism, and in the end is more costly in financial ways as well as other ways;
- ❖ When trying to increase financial resources in support of the parish goals, we ask first for advice not money;
- ❖ We have run this parish successfully through free will giving since its inception. No pledges, dues or tithes. Our parishioners give to the best of their ability;
- ❖ No minimums or dues. Pledging was tried for years and had a low rate of return. Monthly, we publish a bottom line summary in the bulletin and the priest draws attention if deficits start to appear;
- ❖ Any parish that is depending on its festival to pay its bills and not the stewardship of its people is placing its future in the hands of the non-Orthodox.

About worship services and sacramental life:

- ❖ In our parish, Divine Liturgy is served by the WHOLE Parish participating. ALL Children take active part in the service by holding candles during the Gospel Reading and singing the prayer of Our Father in Ukrainian, singing hymns before Holy Communion by themselves;
- ❖ I don't believe I can tell other parishes what to do. But every parish must: pray; admit to being counter-cultural; teach of God's mercy; and *encourage the Holy Mystery of Repentance (if the parishioner participation is not vibrant in this sacrament, something is wrong)*.

- ❖ It is IMPORTANT to state that our liturgical services include a full panoply of akathists, molebens, and weekday liturgies. Additionally, the priest is available Monday-Friday from 4-6 P.M. for confessions and or to meet and talk with parishioners on any topic. This helps to increase the pastoral nature of the community, strengthening bonds, and creating trust. The Holy Mystery of Repentance hours, seven days per week - including Saturday before Vespers and Sunday before Divine Liturgy, reveals a strong bond between the parishioners and God;
- ❖ In our Prayer Group we pray for over 1500 reposed and living twice per month as a group.

About building loving local Christian community and relations within the parish:

- ❖ I would say that we are perceived as a loving parish, both by members and by those who have come to know us. 1. Women in our parish regularly prepare and deliver meals to new mothers and their families, to those who are recovering from long-term illness, etc. 2. People take time to visit those whom we haven't seen for a time, letting them know that they are missed and we care for them. 3. I have, on occasion, made visits to people who are not Orthodox but who have been mentioned to me as someone in need. 4. We established a St. Nicholas Fund a few years ago. It is rather like a discretionary fund from which we provide money to those who have needs that aren't easily met. Along with my discretionary fund, we use this reserve to help people with everything from paying bills to buying medicine;
- ❖ Priest and parishes are afraid to lose people who might be causing problems but who might give a lot of money. Don't give in to threats: 'If you don't do what I say or want, I'll leave!' Let them go! They need to leave in order to make room for more spiritually healthy people. *The Church, and mission and evangelization is about the Truth not about numbers. Speak the Truth, Teach the Truth, preach the Truth. Don't worry about numbers.* One plants, another waters, it is God that gives the growth;
- ❖ Make your parish feel like family with the priest as the father. Open your arms to the faithful. Love them for who they are not what you want them to be. Be present throughout the week in the office (priests need to be present). Stewardship must be emphasized and pushed. Many faithful need to be help accountable (in a loving way). Mail and email reminders are important. People want to give to a 'winning team' - make sure your parish is a winning team. Pay more attention to ALL the faithful -- not just those who give. Make everyone feel special;

- ❖ Pray hard and play hard. Do things to help build community like get together for meals, have a talent show, VBS, youth camps, celebrations throughout the year, etc. (this has to be coupled with a full liturgical life as well). In regard to mistakes, if people are not excited about The Faith and growing in it then why do we expect anyone to be interested in exploring it. Also, I have seen parishes that have factions that exist within it. These factions lead wars with each other and everyone else. My advice is do not have groups with presidents or formal leaders. This keeps little churches and power structures from existing within the parish itself. Instead, have volunteers, but not recognized officers;
- ❖ One of the mistakes we have made (unfortunately we did not have other choice) was that we focused too much on the "stone" church rather than on our faithful inner church;
- ❖ The more we do charity and hospitality to others as well as those within the community, the more love in a parish is present, God is present. He will lead and purify us if we let Him. Each parish has a distinctive charism and it is for the pastor and his flock to discover that and foster it as the Spirit leads;
- ❖ We have multiple core groups. Thus, we have: prayer group, men's group, women's group, home-schooling group, festival group, educational group, choir, reading & writer's guild, and Sunday school teachers. In order to maximize parishioner participation and leadership we do the following:
 1. When a parishioner opines, "Father, you know we ought to have a group that does _____." My response usually is, "You know, I believe that is a wonderful idea. Why don't you provide me with a proposal, I will review it, and you can lead it." In this way, the priest is knowledgeable of what the parishioners may want to do, the people are empowered, and the priest is always a de-facto member of every organization.
 2. All "proposals" must be reviewed by the priest, and he (the priest) must author a "charter" establishing lanes in the road for the new organization. The organizational membership, agenda, meeting times, etc., must be approved by the priest. The priest ought to attend as many meetings as possible as the spiritual advisor. The priest may not be able to attend every session, but each meeting must produce a documented outcome.
 3. If any group's activities go beyond the charter, the priest must be willing to step-in and refocus the entity.

4. Praise and recognition must be acknowledged as commensurate with the group activities.
5. In our parish, there are no ethnic or cultural groups permitted that would exclude anyone. No flag exists above a church.

About question of ethnic identity and culture:

- ❖ Add 'Christian' to your church name: i.e. not just 'Orthodox Church.' Delete ethnic designation. It is a hurdle. But do not lose the lineage of authenticity;
- ❖ The deep questions of identity, language and culture must be addressed. These issues can be solved if people are respected and honored - if we see ethnicity and culture as something to be shared, but never lorded over others.

About various ways (and specific examples) that can improve outreach and mission work in US

Orthodox churches:

- ❖ Set aside line item funds, real money \$\$\$ to do mission work. A bishop needs to 'show up' frequently for mission work to advance better;
- ❖ We need far more parishes even where there may be existing parishes, even if they are small - if they are willing to seek the Lord's leading and their distinctive 'charism;'
- ❖ Four ideas: 1. Teach mission development in the seminary and send students to missions in the summer 2. Send priests where there is no parish, or a clearly identified need - and say 'do it'. 3. Support overseas missionaries who bring something very special to the conversation 4. Dedicate a real line item in the diocesan budget and fund it. And then figure out what God would do with it;
- ❖ We connect with non-Orthodox people over their interest in meditation and centering prayer by way of our weekly Jesus prayer group, where we gather to learn about and practice the Jesus prayer together;
- ❖ I lead the parish in Columbus, OH, and the chapel at Ohio University in Athens, OH. Campus ministry has proven to be one of the more effective ways of reaching people who are not yet in the Church. I serve as the OCF chaplain for Ohio State, Ohio University, and Denison University. *University environments are oftentimes much more open to dialog and discussion regarding matters of Faith.* Also, the ability to engage those in need of the community and the

organizations that serve those in need also provides a positive witness in addition to caring for the poor, hungry, etc;

- ❖ We have tried to do everything with tastefulness and decorum. Too many parishes are dirty, dated, and give of the general appearance of being poor and ill designed. Even in our old cinder block building people have often cried upon entering the church for the first time because of its simple and elegant beauty. We have worked very hard to make our temple, our music and our services be an icon of the Kingdom of God in all the fine details, without however becoming stiff or inflexible;
- ❖ We have a goal of tithing ten percent of our budget to the poor;
- ❖ We have prison Ministry to State Pen. Accredited class time at State College on Orthodox Christianity. 350 word Newspaper articles published regularly (for free). Public Inquirer classes in new cities where there are NO Orthodox Christians (seminar format). We also offer guided Wine Tasting at church Social Hall;
- ❖ About Agia Sophia coffee house and bookstore in Colorado Springs, CO. For years the vision of Ss. Constantine and Helen parish was to more fully develop an Orthodox Christian witness and presence in Colorado Springs. Colorado Springs is known for its high percentage of various ministries and Protestant churches, yet for all of “Christendom” present in town, many of us at Ss. Constantine and Helen were painfully acquainted with friends, co-workers, and neighbors who were all but “post-churched” in their Protestant experience. Our acquaintances had not given up faith in God, but nonetheless had grown cynical, disillusioned, even despondent when it came to “church”—many members of Ss. Constantine and Helen having “been there” prior to discovering Orthodoxy. What could we do to enable persons to discover, and come to trust, the riches, depths, and fullness of the Orthodox Church life? We desired Orthodox Christianity to be available to the person “on the street”. We envisioned a warm, inviting, comfortable, non-threatening yet definitively “Orthodox”, space. We wanted people to spend time therein; reading, conversing, discovering, and perusing the books. Months were spent finding the perfect location, remodeling the interior, ordering books and equipment, hiring qualified staff. By the grace of God Agia Sophia opened its doors in May of ’06. The vast majority of books that sell are those of, or about, Orthodox Christianity. We anxiously await the intrinsic reward of seeing Agia Sophia bear fruit as a means of introducing people to the Orthodox Church, in the meantime we

humbly accept the fact that it is for us to obediently sow the seeds, and for God to bring the harvest;

- ❖ Our parish's Society of St. Catherine cares for the ill, those mothers with young children, and the Sunday meals after liturgy. We feed approximately 100+ adults and youth every Sunday;
- ❖ "Shoes for school" is an active ministry of our parish. It raises funds to purchase new shoes for poor school children.

About how the bishops can help the parishes in evangelization and outreach:

- ❖ They have to resist narrow Orthodox fundamentalism and allow Orthodoxy to naturally and slowly take on an American flavor. Orthodoxy cannot just be about preserving things. It is much more alive than this. We once said to one hierarch, "If Orthodoxy is the 'mother church' then we should start acting like it and reach out as a mother would to her lost children to help the sincere and true Christians come home;"
- ❖ Regular (annual at least) visitation to the parishes and missions, no matter how small. On those visits, to have supper with the catechumens and inquirers. To encourage and be aware of strategic lists of cities where new Orthodox Communities should be established, and be active in promoting this work. By writing and speaking about Evangelization all the time;
- ❖ Primarily our bishops need to encourage our missions and parishes of various jurisdictions to work together. If we are not united then we are divided and can only bring a hypocritical message to those we are trying to evangelize. How can we proclaim the Gospel of Christ when the local Greeks, Russians and Arabs cannot stand each other or do nothing together? This does not reflect Christ's love in any form or fashion. Last thought on this, if there is only one Orthodox parish in a town of 200,000 to 800,000 people, instead of saying "this is our territory" say "I pray our bishops encourage other canonical Orthodox jurisdictions to join them in their local vineyard for the fields are white for harvest;"
- ❖ Although I understand the desire for great national offices, I would suggest that parishes will grow through a greater commitment by our bishops to fund local ministries. Hierarchs could also remain open to sharing in the work of a local parish, beyond simply celebrating feast days and services; what a witness this would be to parishioners and non parishioners alike!
- ❖ The bishops could: 1) *Develop and offer resources that could be utilized by clergy in local missionary efforts.* Every parish will have a different effort approach to 'evangelization' - and a lot of it

will depend on their core leaders, where they are in their relationship with Christ, where the community is located, and so forth. With such diversity, there can be no official 'checklist' for evangelization. Communities that wish to evangelize need some pool of resources that they can delve into as they start reaching out (or opening up); 2) *Encourage (or mandate) Adult Education. Educating parents pays dividends with the children.* Our deanery education meetings focus, primarily, on youth education: "How are our church schools and folklore groups? What are the numbers? How many teachers? What curriculums do they use? And so on." Our children, however, will learn far more at home - from their parents - than they will in a church school lesson. Do they know the Old Testament? Maybe something from church school. Do they pray before meals, cross themselves, and make faith a part of their everyday living? Their parents will be most impactful there. *That education is a vital part of mission work* - as that interior growth happens in the parish, evangelization will naturally happen (or be easily encouraged by a leader); 3) *Clergy Education.* As a young priest I was thrust into a parish with little preparation for the realities of parish life - apart from my seminary formation. Paperwork was a mystery; language was a struggle; new names and new faces were a constant part of my early priesthood, while I struggled to grow comfortable with serving. The priesthood can be an isolating vocation - and, unless a priest is self-motivated, it is easy to focus so much on the community that one forgets to grow closer to Christ himself. *After seminary, there is a great need for priests to continue their education* - to reflect on their pastoral growth, evaluate their God-given skill-set and continue to grow into their responsibility. Clergy need to learn from other priests whose skills are different from their own - who can teach them 'how to teach adults', or 'organize a church school'; they need to evaluate their preaching habits and evolve in that craft; they need to learn about 'mission', and what works for parish growth and revitalization. No person can do all these things perfectly - but all priests can grow in all these areas;

- ❖ Bishops can: 1. Have diocesan grants available for training and resources (Diocese of the Midwest does this); 2. Provide more diocesan workshops and training for parish councils who oversee the budgets and should be supporting the vision of the priest; 3. Don't just verbally support campus ministry (and other endeavors) but actually support it with funding for priests to serve as campus ministers and in other para-Church capacities that *place clergy and lay leaders in the position to encounter people outside of their parish community.* Priests sometimes turn down

opportunities to serve an OCF. 4. Increase opportunities for laypersons (men and women) to be trained as catechists and lay ministers/chaplains;

- ❖ Bishops can encourage evangelization work, but not at the expense of other parishes. Too often missions or outreaches are planted within the sphere of another church causing problems. Support the work of smaller parishes who could use the resources and guidance while directing the outreach of larger parishes to areas with no Orthodox presence;

About how US Orthodox parishes can witness Orthodoxy in the 21st century America:

- ❖ Here are a few ideas: 1) Encouraging parishioners to live their faith through actions not only lips! 2) Doing fundraisers for people in local community and helping out our own. 2 years ago our parish allocated 15% of its annual income for care-giving purposes of those who are locally in need. 3) Having some of the services outside the Church. Vespers with blessing of the animals Memorial Service for 9/11 in front of the church. 4) Inviting local community to join for social gatherings. We opened our doors for local cub scout Pack to have their meetings and fundraisers for free. 4) Serving food every first Monday of the month at local homeless shelter. 5) Collecting children cloth and hygiene items for homeless. 6) Collecting food from Thanksgiving for veteran families. In simple words: serving God His people and serving the community we are in!
- ❖ 1. Welcome and love everyone who comes into the church. When I converted to Orthodoxy, I experienced the exact opposite since I was not Greek. Today, I still have families who come to our parish at the "suggestion" of other ethnic churches, because I am willing to "catechize anyone." This is a sad reflection on Orthodoxy. 2. Have a strong welcoming committee for all entering the church. Those working on welcome committee make it a point to introduce all visitors to the priest or member of the advisory council. 3. Be willing to "bless" all attendees. 4. Afford all attendees, especially newcomers, the means of contacting either the priest and/or parish administrator. 5. Be willing to work 7 days per week. 6. Be willing to explain the need for Repentance lovingly. Our rate of those practicing the Mystery of Holy Repentance has increased yearly. It is not unusual to hear 20-25 confessions in a week. 7. Have a vibrant Sunday School program. Demand teacher preparation, participation, and discipline of students. 8. Get out of the office. Paperwork is not pastoral work. 9. Maintain email, text, or phone conversation with everyone. Know when you last saw or spoke to someone. 10. Go out of your way to pray for non-

Orthodox members of parishioner families. Do it and let them know you've done it. 11. Do not email parishioners only on Saturdays or Sundays. Reach out during the week in mass emails on subjects of Orthodoxy relevant to their lives. Sometimes this results in education and other times it affords parishioners to hit "reply" and simply tell you what has been occurring in their life. 12. Know every child's name. 13. Keep moving, don't let one person or group of people dominate all of your time every Sunday. Every once in a while, go into the kid's playroom and play with them. 14. Never ask a child to be quiet during the liturgy or homily. Be willing to go out and pick up the child and comfort them. Be willing to walk around and stand close to a parishioner who is talking. 15. Willingly engage the parishioners during a homily, not often, but every once in a while, "Isn't that right Tom?!" Engage the one who is listening, never the one who is not listening. Doing this places everyone on their toes. Be lovingly dynamic. 16. Always be willing to say, "This is what the bishop wants of us and we're going to do it." 17. I know some priests do not look at who donates what. That is personal preference. I do look and assess who donates what. It is how I learn who has lost their job. And it gives me an opening to ask if all is well. In this regard, "stewardship" is not only to the church, but from the church to the parishioner. Stewardship works both ways.

- ❖ First and foremost be Orthodox. That of itself is attractive as it brings Christ into a world that is falling apart around us. If one looks at the major Protestant churches they are imploding theologically and being influenced morally by the culture. People are looking for the Church. Therefore, we have to hold to the Tradition that we have inherited and not compromise our faith, the Faith, in any form or fashion. While many people want 'change' more want stability. Second, it is important for our people to invite others (family and friends) to services. The laity are the ones that are among the people outside of the Church all week. When they come across someone who has a need or is hurting, it is important that they connect these people to Christ via the Church. Third, it is extremely important that visitors feel are welcomed when they enter an Orthodox Church. We assign parishioners/greeters to watch for visitors and to stand with them during the service. Normally if someone visits a church and they are not greeted by others they will not return. I visited numerous Orthodox parishes before I became a priest and many of them did not care if I was there or out, unfortunately. Fourth, a priest has to be accessible. Return calls, emails, texts, etc., in a timely manner and meet with people whether it be late, early, etc. When

parishioners are not there text them. During the week pray for them and let them know via email or text. Fifth, I wear my cassock all the time. This alone has lead to two families converting to Orthodoxy. One of my now parishioners, before he was Orthodox, called me and said, "I was thinking about who is religious that I can talk to and I thought about you in the black dress with a cross." Also, get out the church and be in the community. Lastly, use FB and other social media outlets to communicate the message of the Church and not as a means of debate or theological banter.

About religious education and faith formation:

- ❖ (We have) 'Total Parish Education' approach: this means providing opportunities in educating the parish on the Orthodox Faith through every activity and event;
- ❖ The whole entire parish is involved in religious education because we feel that each person should be a life-long learner. Our parents and grandparents are integral in educating the youth. We have 15 people involved in Sunday School. We have five youth groups, with 2 leaders per group. We have a weekly adult Sunday School that has around 60 participants. This runs concurrent with our youth Sunday School. We have two weekly Bible Studies. We have a monthly Senior gathering that includes a lecture and discussion and a luncheon. We have an annual Inquirers Series that runs 13 weeks and is team taught by six different teachers (2 priests, 1 deacon, and 3 lay teachers), we offer 4 serious retreats per year, including one for men, one for women, one parish wide, and one marriage retreat. We also have monthly men's breakfasts and lectures/discussion, as well as one woman's monthly presentation/discussion with the priest. Every couple of years we offer an in-depth series on parenting, because we have on staff a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, who has lots of contacts and colleagues who can give helpful lectures and answer questions. Every service is an opportunity for a homily, and before each Parish Council and Philoptochos meeting, the priest offers a reflection;
- ❖ We have a strong adult education program for parishioners and inquirers. Please note, not all is taught by the priest. This is important. *I strongly encourage subject matter specialists by challenging the parishioners to teach;*

- ❖ We emphasize religious education in all aspects of parish life and use every opportunity to increase the spiritual development and formation of every parishioner. We also focus first on the adult religious education;
- ❖ By equipping our parents and educating them to be the 24 hour, 7 day a week catechists, evangelists and youth leaders of their own children. Our expectation is that our children will convert to the Orthodox Faith and make it their own before they leave their homes and go out on their own to college or young adulthood;
- ❖ About faith formation. St. James House is a ministry of Saint John Orthodox Cathedral in Eagle River, Alaska. It provides a one-year residential program where young, single people live in an extended-family setting and become better prepared to live in the world as faithful Orthodox Christian men and women. This is accomplished primarily through evening studies, household work projects, and participation in the liturgical and community life of St. John Cathedral, as well as their daily interaction with one another. The household itself is run by a resident family whose goal is to mentor the program's participants in facing everyday challenges responsibly and with faith in God. The pastor and clergy of St. John Orthodox Cathedral also oversee the program by providing instruction and spiritual direction;
- ❖ Faith-Tree is a ministry of St. Michael Antiochian Orthodox Church in Van Nuys, California, a parish of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. Its purpose is to provide educational programs from a Traditional Orthodox Christian context in the language of our day, and to equip families in North America to live what they believe;
- ❖ We use "Cooperative Catechism:" our instructors and students are from all Orthodox parishes in the area;
- ❖ We have begun a Bible study in a city which is an hour from the parish in order to meet the need of those parishioners.

Other advices to the parishes and comments on commonly made mistakes:

- ❖ Be more intentional in explaining Orthodox theology and traditions in a less esoteric manner.
- ❖ Advices: a) Try to be international. That is, living the faith by loving and thinking of others, of the neighbor first; b) Budget for and encourage your pastor(s) to receive ongoing "Professional Development;" c) Have a line-item in the budget for support of charities outside of the parish community; d) Instill the notion that every member of the parish should participate in at least one

ministry of the parish; e) OCFs, OCMC support, local charities, etc. are important and worthy of local parish support. An additional benefit of participating in these ministries is that it draws attention away from those in the parish and places it on those outside of the parish. I think this is important in order for the parish to be a healthy, Christian community;

- ❖ Children! We encourage families with young kids to sit up front during Liturgy so kids can see what's going on. We encourage boys to be altar boys and can have as many as 20 altar boys each Liturgy. The little kids come and hold the hand of the priest during the Prayer behind the Amvon. We have two **distinct** Sunday Schools each Sunday. The main one after the English Liturgy has approximately 110 English speaking kids and a second Sunday school was added a few years ago for our bilingual immigrant kids, and approximately 20 attend that session;
- ❖ The current system of Leadership through parish service groups (all parishioners are assigned to one of groups) and ministries evolved over the past 10 years.