Slide 1:

Understanding Parish Revitalization
2004 Evangelization Conference
"Continuing the Mission of the North American Saints"

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Slide 2:
I want to begin by talking about the average parishioner in certain parishes within the OCA. We have parishioners in some parishes today who today have known, for quite some time, only one negative piece of news after another. Churches that used to have 500 member or (often) more now have perhaps 200, or even less. Church schools that once enrolled over 100 children now have a dozen, if that. Complaints that "Nobody lives in the neighborhood anymore" are heard. There are fewer people to do the work, and fewer to pay the bills. All of this leads to frustration, fear and questioning: Why has this happened? Has God abandoned us? Before we answer that question, let's see if there is some data to back this up.

Slide 3:
Some statistics are in order here: The OCA in the continental US has been declining between 6 and 9% for nearly 20 years. The OCA's Census population in 1994 was 29,775; in 2004 it stood at 27,169. And this is just in the continental U.S., not including Alaska, Canada or the ethnic dioceses.

Slide 4:
Some more statistics: In the past ten years, 177 parishes have declined in membership or have had flat (i.e., no) growth. Of this number, 148 parishes declined in double digits. Collectively, this represents a loss of 6,129 people, while those churches that are gaining in membership showed an increase of 2,960 people (note: remember, these figures represent adults only).

Slide 5:
We are not reaching America! While the overall American population has increased by 11% from 1990 to 2000, the OCA's reported membership declined by 13%.

Slide 6:
And We're Not Alone. Among the Protestants and Evangelicals, 10 churches are closed everyday, 70-85% are thought to be in decline or plateaued, and 60,000 churches did not report a single convert last year (almost 16% of the total), in 2003.

Slide 7:
The Parish Life Cycle
Parishes have a somewhat predictable life cycle. The various stages may take differing lengths of time to reach, depending on the type of parish in question, but for the most

part, these stages can be traced through every parish in existence. One note: this curve tends to peak at the 25 year mark. This is therefore an important time for parishes to question and re-evaluate their vision, mission and objectives for future growth and outreach. Otherwise, as time goes by, concern for reaching the lost becomes replaced by a concern for losing the reached.

Note the stage marked "Nostalgia." This is a phase that starts with the question, "remember when...?" This tends to then lead to "Questioning," having to do with questioning the viability of the parish as well as the wisdom of those now running it. Such questioning results from statements of what "might have been," "could have been," "should have been" – all wastes of time, but this can then lead to "Polarization" between priest and leadership, or between two or more factions within the laity.

Slide 8 & 9:
The Parish Life Cycle
Church is always one step lower (on the downside) than where a parish is verbalizing where they think they now are.

Slide 10 & 11:
Symptoms of Decline
1. Demographic Changes: External factors and perhaps unfortunate circumstances. Are we still ministering to the same people as when the church was first founded?
2. Inadequate Leadership: Do clergy and laity have vision to move the parish forward to health and growth?
3. Poor Management: parish is not a business, but that doesn't mean that good business practices cannot be employed in the running of the parish.
4. Old Blood: Are we involving all our people, including the youth and young adults, in all the church's ministries?
5. Building Campaigns: Is newer and bigger necessarily better?
6. The Ingrown Family: Is the parish my whole world, or is the whole world my parish?
7. Resistance to Change: Power struggles. Range wars, leadership, past history. If we keep doing...
8. Spiritual Health: Healthy churches don't "exist," but lead people into the Kingdom. Healthy churches grow; unhealthy churches to not.

Other issues: extreme member dissatisfaction, low morale, declining bottom lines, consistent rewarding of activities unrelated to the main thing, activities that do not follow the church's purpose, power struggles. Declining bottom lines, both in attendance and in giving, are very telling: people "vote" every week!

Slide 12:
A Word @ Power Struggles
Result from two unresolved questions: first, "*Where is our church headed?*" and, second, "*Who determines that direction?*" Church elders are admonished to be diligent in opposing dangerous people – Acts 20:28-30. Jesus and St. Paul predicted imposters will always be a part of our local churches – Matthew 13:24-30 and Acts 20.

Slide 13:
Are We Asking the Right Questions?
We should not ask, *"What can I do to make my church grow?"* but rather, *"What am I doing that is preventing my church from growing?"*

Slide 14:
How Does a Church Grow? St. Paul, in I Corinthians 3:6-9, showed that cooperative effort is needed: "I planted..." he said, then "Apollos watered..." but he concludes my reminding us that it is "God (Who) gave the growth." God really does want to work with us! He goes on to describe this synergy by declaring that "We are God's fellow workers" Turnaround ministry is NOT about size, it's about healthy growth. Size is not important. Health is everything. Remember that elsewhere the Lord has said, "All power has been given to ME..." and "I will build my church."

Slide 15:
The "*All by Itself*" Principle: "The Kingdom of God is like a farmer who casts seed upon the ground, and goes to bed at night and gets up day by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows – how, he himself does not know. The earth produces crops, *all by itself*, first the blade, then the head and then the mature grain in the head." – Mark 4:26-28

Slide 16:
Turnaround Ministry is not about spiritual formation, a "Theology of Ministry," programs, administrative principles, or pointing fingers and laying blame. Gene Wood, a noted church growth coach and consultant, has said, "Sheep are the *work* of the ministry, not the reward of the ministry." Further, Turnaround Ministry is not about copying what others are doing. Be careful about applying what worked in one church to another.

Slide 17:
Turnaround Ministry is all about change, about recovering the essential elements of what "church" is all about:
1). Evangelizing the lost to make them believers
2). Preach and teach so that the believers can become saints
3). Enable the saints to worship God in spirit and in truth

Slide 18:
How Do We Begin?
Turnaround ministry begins with "leadership" - bishop, chancellor, dean, priest
Strong leadership is the key element in parish revitalization. The parish priest is the functional leader of the local church, since everything God has created has one head, even in the Holy Trinity. This issue also harkens back to the issue of power struggles. If the priest is not providing strong, godly vision and leadership, someone else will.

Slide 19 & 20:
Revitalization is a Process. Be sensitive to the past, but focus on the future. Spirituality cannot be simply talked about, but has to be lived, and modeled. Some parishes, in attempting to revitalize, try to do too much; do fewer things, but whatever you do, do

them with excellence. Return to the basics of what our parishes are all about: developing disciples and saints. And, finally, as an important part of this process, let people enjoy some successes along the road.

Momentum can and will start to build along the way; don't be afraid to use it! Remember to emphasize people, not programs. Programs don't grow the church! Help and encourage people to develop and deepen personal relationships with one another. Finally, never give up! Turnaround ministry and parish revitalization can take time – God's time, not your time. But change can happen!

Slide 21 & 22:
1st Step: Diagnosis
Begins with asking the right questions: Is there resistance to change? "Small Church Mentality" – do they think smaller is better? Is there growth paralysis? Do they lack a sense of identity? Are they teachable? Are they willing to submit to authority?

Can God's will be discerned? Is parish leadership leading the church in a positive spiritual direction? Are the followers following? Is the decline quantitative or qualitative? Is there a cultural mismatch between parish and neighborhood or "outside" society in general? Has "survivalism" set in? Is there evidence of negativity? Is there a defined concept of the church's future? Is it God-centered?

Slide 23:
Evaluation and Analysis
Survey the parish! Why should a parish survey and evaluate itself? To know, quantitatively and qualitatively, where the parish is *right now*. There are several useful diagnostic tools available for doing this. Some of the ones with which I am familiar and either have used or am now using extensively are Natural Church Development; 12 Keys to an Effective Church, by Ken Callahan; and church growth coaching and consulting services offered by various professionally trained and experienced clergy throughout the church.

Slide 24:
2nd Step: Where Are We Going?
Vision – a godly picture of a desire future. Vision is based on corporate parish values, it is a picture of a glorious future, not of a glorious – and lost – past, it comes from God (i.e., we do not make it up), and it motivates the faithful. The priest is the primary vision caster in parish life.

Slide 25:
3rd Step: How We Gonna Get There?
Mission describes three basic things: First, who your ministry target group is; second, what needs you're seeking to meet in that group; and, third, how you're going to reach them (i.e., strategies, plans, programs, activities.) This describes a particular model of ministry you will use to reach – and keep – them.

Slide 26:
Mission Follows Vision
"A vision without the ability to execute (i.e., mission) *is probably an hallucination."*
(author unknown)
"Target groups" are not reached to the exclusion of others. Involves FOCUSING on those you can reach the most. It may mean saying "no" to certain forms of outreach and evangelism, but this would not be unusual: Jesus did say "no" to many things: to human requests, friends who asked for favors, demands from the crowd, common sense requests. This He did because He understood the need for His ministry to focus "on the lost sheep of the House of Israel."

Slide 27:
4th Step: Who Are We Trying to Reach?
Reaching out...to who? Remember, first, you will not – and cannot – reach everyone you may want to. You will need to focus on those you can reach (you will best reach those whom you are most like). This is best augmented with another principle of Natural Church Development: *need-oriented evangelism* – often described as preaching the gospel, "using words if necessary." Need-oriented evangelism is not merely about "preaching the gospel" so much as it's about living it by example and through love.

Slide 28:
Who are We Ministering To? We often think of "who" we minister to as "our own." However, we might think of "who" we minister to as areas of concentric circles that contain ever expanding groups and numbers of people, and, note, the number of "Orthodox" people being ministered to declines with each circle.

Slide 29:
5th Step: Equipping the Saints
What is "equipping" all about? The purpose is twofold, to glorify God and to build up the Body of Christ. This will cost time and money! Three principles of Natural Church Development will be needed here: g*ift-oriented mininstry, empowered leadership,* and *functional structures.*

Slide 30:
6th Step: Connecting & Assimilating
What are you going to do with them once you have them? Connecting and assimilating new members in the parish will be some of the most deliberate work you'll ever do. There are three areas of Natural Church Development that come into play here: *holistic small groups, loving relationships, Orthodox spirituality,* and *inspiring worship.* Keep in mind that people are a lot like LEGO blocks: the more you connect them, the longer they stay together. And, further, we are talking not about "attracting" – which describes more of a passive action of "them" coming to "us" but rather "reaching" – which a more active term of outreach that begins with "us" going out to "them."

Slide 31:

7th Step – Remember to Celebrate victories! These could take several forms: New members, goals achieved, and successful events. We are seeking here to engender an environment and a culture of joy, hope, promise, and a bright future of better things to come. And, remind them, "Even if some of you won't be around to see them in this life, you will still see them as you look down from heaven." Turnaround churches need to know there are some things they can do right! They think – and sometimes have been told – the glory days have come and gone. They need to know that every day Jesus is there is a glory day.

Slide 32:
The Revitalized Parish Life Cycle
The need is to identify a church's plateau *before it happens* and take steps to begin a new curve of outreach and upward growth.

Slide 33:
God Desires to Bless His People!
"*For I know the plans that I have for you," s*ays the Lord, *"plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope*." - Jeremiah 29:11
Dying churches reek of despair, of hopelessness and frustration. They can be depressing places to be in, let alone minister in. The Church needs to create a new mindset in the declining parish that God *does* love us, God *does* care about them, and God *does* want their parish to grow! We, from the National Church on down, need to give them hope, not a false hope, a false sense of good things to come that never will, but of a Godly hope that can and will result in the rebirth of the parish

Slide 34:
A Parting Thought:
"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." - Joshua 1:9

Slide 35:
Questions & Discussion