Understanding Parish Revitalization

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“Continuing the Mission of the North American Saints”

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What They’ve Known...

• For 10, 20 years or more...
• 500 members, now 200...or less...
• 100 children in church school, now 15...
• “Nobody” lives in the neighborhood anymore...
• Fewer people to do the work...
• Fewer people to pay the bills...
The OCA in the continental US has been declining between 6 and 9% for nearly 20 years.


Note: This is just the continental U.S.!
In the last 10 years:

177 have declined in membership or have had flat (i.e., no) growth; of this, 148 in double digits (DGR)

Loss = 6,129 people (declining churches)
Gain = 2,960 people (growing churches)
We are not Reaching America

From 1990 - 2000 in America

11% population

13% census
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
- **60,000** churches did not report a single convert last year (almost **16%**)
The Parish Life Cycle

Birth

Ministry

Growth

Structure

Maturity

Nostalgia

Organization

Goals

Leadership

Polarization

Dreams

Conflict

Ethos

Questioning

Control

Leadership Conflict

Maintenance

Organization

Decline

Control

Leaves

Death

Plateau

Decline

Death
The Parish Life Cycle

- Birth
- Growth
- Maturity
- Ministry
- Plateau
- Maintenance
- Decline
- Death

Vision or refocusing needed here!

Much prayer and hard decisions needed here!
The Parish Life Cycle

Parish revitalization (or redevelopment) MUST take place here

Parish intervention is required and MUST take place here

Parish restart needed
Symptoms of Decline

- External factors (crime, demographics)
- Inadequate leadership
- Poor management
- Old blood
- Building campaigns
- The “Ingrown Family”
- Resistance to change
- Poor spiritual health – mere existence
Symptoms of Decline (cont.)

- Extreme member dissatisfaction
- Low morale
- Declining bottom lines
- Consistent rewarding of activities unrelated to the main thing
- Activities do not follow church’s purpose
- Power struggles
A Word @ Power Struggles

Result from two unresolved questions:

1. Where is our church headed?
2. Who determines that direction?
Are We Asking the Right Questions?

NOT:

“What can I do to make my church grow?”

BUT RATHER:

“What am I doing that is preventing my church from growing?”
How Does a Church Grow?

“I planted…”
“Apollos watered…”
“But GOD gave the growth.”
“We are God’s fellow workers”

We have to do our part

So God can do His
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
Turnaround Ministry is NOT:

- Spiritual formation
- "Theology of Ministry"
- Using programs
- Administrative principles
- Pointing fingers and laying blame

→ "Sheep are the work of the ministry, not the reward of the ministry" – G. Wood
Turnaround Ministry IS:

All about *change*:

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
How Do We Begin?

Turnaround ministry begins with “leadership” - bishop, chancellor, dean, priest

Strong leadership is the key element in parish revitalization
Revitalization is a Process

- Be “past” sensitive but “future” focused
- Spirituality has to be modeled and lived
- Do few things, but do them excellently
- Return to the basics
- Let people enjoy some successes
Revitalization is a Process

• Build the “Big Mo”
• Emphasize people, not programs
• Help and encourage people to develop and deepen personal relationships with one another
• Never let up!
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?
1st Step: Diagnosis

- Can God’s will be discerned?
- Is parish leadership leading the church in a positive spiritual direction?
- Are the followers following?
- Quantitative or qualitative decline?
- Cultural mismatch?
- Has “survivalism” set in?
- Is there evidence of negativity?
- Is there a defined concept of the church’s future? Is it God-centered?
Evaluation and Analysis

Survey the parish:
- Natural Church Development
- 12 Keys to an Effective Church
- Coaching and consulting

Why?

→ To know, quantitatively and qualitatively, where the parish is Right Now.
2nd Step: Where Are We Going?

Vision – a godly picture of a desire future

• Based on corporate parish values
• Based on the future, not the past
• Comes from God
• Motivates the faithful
• Priest is primary vision caster
3rd Step: How We Gonna Get There?

**Mission describes:**

- Who is your ministry target group
- What needs you’re seeking to meet
- 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.
“A vision without the ability to execute (i.e., mission) is probably an hallucination.”

- unknown
4th Step: Who Are We Trying to Reach?

**Reaching out...to who?**

- You will not – and cannot – reach everyone
- Focus on those you can reach (you will best reach those whom you are most like)
- *Need-oriented evangelism* – preaching the gospel, using words if necessary
Who are We Ministering To?

- Congregation
- Committed
- Core
- Community
5th Step: Equipping the Saints

To glorify God, to build up the Body of Christ

• This will cost time and money!
• *Gift-oriented ministry*
• *Empowered leadership*
• *Functional structures*
6th Step: Connecting & Assimilating

What are you going to do with them once you have them?

- Intentional and deliberate
- **Holistic small groups**
- **Loving relationships**
- **Orthodox spirituality**
- **Inspiring worship**
7th Step – Remember to Celebrate!

- Celebrate victories!
  - New members
  - Goals achieved
  - Successful events
- Engender an environment and a culture of joy, hope, promise, and a bright future of better things to come
The Revitalized Parish Life Cycle

- Birth
- Growth
- Maturity
- Ministry
- Goals
- Ethos & values
- Dreams
- Renewal
- Growth & multiplication
- Deepening commitment & spirituality

Re-Focus w/new vision and mission
God Desires to Bless His People!

“For I know the plans that I have for you,” says the Lord,

“plans for good and not for evil,
to give you a future and a hope.”

- Jeremiah 29:11
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
Questions & Discussion