

Parish Health Ministry Report 2009 Diocesan Assembly



Submitted by **Joseph Kormos**, Parish Health Facilitator

In a Diocese where more than 50% of the parishes are shrinking – some precipitously -- the Parish Health Ministry¹ is a Diocesan effort to encourage and assist parishes to take action on fundamental renewal. It is designed to stimulate parishes to take a serious look at their parish (and personal) practices, behaviors and actions and to assist them to better live a life in Christ.

The parish health ministry does not *make* parishes grow. It *helps* them, to prepare for God to bless them with an increase if he so chooses and to not be satisfied with lukewarm, tepid commitment to parish life.

The box at the right provides a review of key focus areas.

Parish Health Ministry Overview

Exploring

...models of healthy Orthodox Christian parishes in America.

Connecting

...to establish helpful relationships between parishes

Sharing & Transferring

... effective practices, methods & tools in use by clergy and lay parish leaders - and transferring these to others.

Building

...tools to address common needs.

2008/09 Efforts

The following are the key recent initiatives of this ministry.

Parish Pulse Newsletter

The Parish Pulse newsletter, which focuses on good practices for strengthening parishes, is published six times per year. It is available for anyone with a computer and is emailed to a growing list of over



¹ As of this writing a suggestion to rename this ministry as the "Parish Life and Development Ministry" is being considered. We continue to use the current name in this report.

1100 subscribers from our Diocese, other OCA Dioceses and other Orthodox jurisdictions. The newsletter is no doubt then forwarded to hundreds of others on parish mailing lists

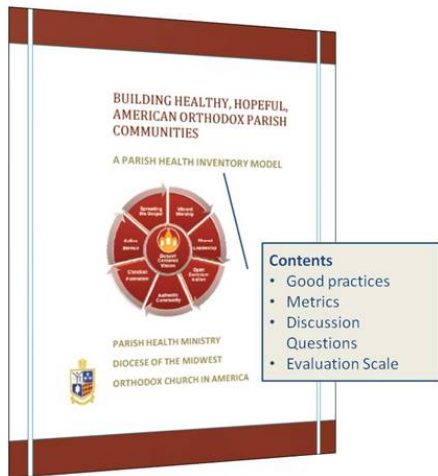
Parish Health Ministry Web Pages

Newsletters are also posted on the Parish Health section of the Diocesan website. This section of the website hosts articles announcements and various tools and templates. Sections include Parish Administration; Evangelization; Financial tools, Charitable Outreach; Communications and Youth and Education.

Parish Health Inventory Model

In the summer of 2008 the Parish Health Summit was held at St Joseph's parish in Wheaton IL. It brought together 15 Orthodox priests from 12 growing parishes.

After two days of exploring what is working and not working



when it comes to building healthy American Orthodox parishes, attendees defined a clear set of essential "focus areas" - dimensions of parish life and practice consistent with the lived experience of parishes represented at the Summit -- in hopes that this could serve as

a model for parishes to apply to their particular situation.

The "model" which attempts to describe *one view* of good parish practice offers information on good practices, behaviors and attitudes, potential metrics of progress, discussion questions and an evaluation section to rate the parish's maturity in each of eight essential focus areas.

This tool was blessed by Archbishop JOB for use in Diocesan parishes. It was mailed in 2009 to each parish with encouragement to apply the model to identify important parish initiatives. It is available for download from the Diocesan website.

We are, at this time aware of at least nine parishes that have begun using the model as an improvement tool to assess what they do and how they do it.

Feedback on the Use of the Parish Inventory – from a parish priest

1. Provided topics for future homilies and adult education that members want to learn about.
2. Instilled an understanding of continuous improvement.
3. Overcame notion that buildings and membership size are the primary/only important dimensions of parish life.
4. Demonstrated importance of both the personal & corporate aspects of the Orthodox Faith -- how each of our personal lives in Christ constitute the corporate culture & values of the parish.
5. Encouraged different "groups" in the church to share perspectives with one another --to come to a common understanding respect of the perceptions of each group; learn something of value from each perspective.
6. Generated a number of outstanding ideas to help me and the entire church improve.
7. Offered another format to teach the Faith -- distinct from teaching homilies and most adult ed. sessions.
8. Encouraged those less likely to share opinions, views, ideas, etc. to do so in a safe forum.
9. Opportunity for pastor to build rapport and trust with members that I've not had an opportunity to work with as much.
10. Doesn't allow the status quo to reign.
11. Really a lot of fun.

Workshops and Direct Parish Assistance

The Parish Health Ministry provides direct assistance to parishes. Usually this takes the form of facilitation of retreats and in-parish workshops. Most workshops in 2008/09 were patterned after the application of the Parish Health Inventory and the identification of a key focus area for the next 6-12 month period. Other workshops have focused on transition of stewardship practices. In the past 12 months we have worked directly with the following parishes and groups:

- Greater Detroit Council of Eastern Orthodox Churches --*Parish Revitalization Conference*
- St. Theodosius Cathedral, *Cleveland OH*
- Diocese of Washington Parish Workshop, *Hagerstown MD;*
- Archangel Michael Church, *Broadview Hts. OH*
- Holy Trinity Cathedral, *Chicago IL*
- St Paul Church, *Dayton OH*
- Holy Trinity Church, *Parma OH*
- St Mark's Church *Rochester Hills MI*
- St. Mary's Basilica, *Livonia MI (Antiochian Archdiocese)*
- St. Gregory of Nyssa Church, *Columbus OH*



During the past two years between workshops, post liturgy talks and other venues we have had the opportunity to address approximately 1000 parishioners from our diocese in over 20 separate events. In most instances, other than the Hierarch's parish visit, this contact has been the only official human contact between our Diocese and parishioners.

Feedback on two of these workshops appears in appendix 1.

Parish Grants

In 2008/09 we piloted the concept of delivering cash grants to parishes to stimulate fresh thinking and new efforts to build vibrancy in parish life -- both in parishes receiving grants and in others hearing about the projects related to the grants. Other benefits of these grants are:

- Generate useful tools/capabilities that can be used by other parishes;
- Build an understanding of lessons learned -- what works and doesn't and why;
- Create connectedness between parishes; parishes to diocese
- Encourage accountability in grant receiving parishes. These parishes accept a true responsibility to the entire Diocese to execute the project and share the results.

Parish Grant Criteria

- Breadth of involvement - Did the proposal engage many or few parishioners?
- Importance and impact on the parish or mission
- Probability of effective execution --just a good idea or can it really get done?
- Transferability - Can this effort provide insight for others to use?
- Uniqueness - Is it creative or more of the same?

In 2008 six parishes received grants totaling \$9600 from funds donated by two persons and two parishes. (St Gregory of Nyssa Columbus OH and Archangel Michael Broadview Hts. OH)

2008 recipients were:

- Ss. Cyril & Methodius, Milwaukee WI (*Liturgical Arts Workshop*)
- Holy Assumption Albion MI (*MP3 Player Educational Content*)
- Holy Cross Mission Chisago City MN (*Bookstore and Information Booth*)
- St Mark Rochester MI (*Communicating the Orthodox Faith to Inquirers*)
- St Nicholas Kenosha WI (*Urban Gardens to Feed Hungry*)
- St Raphael Mission Quincy IL (*Radio Advertising*)



St. Mark's Grant Team takes pause after completing a successful six week parish training class



Each of these projects was undertaken with diligence and with good stewardship of the funds provided. You can examine the results of each of these projects at

displays at the Assembly.

The success of the 2008 grant pilot resulted in the continuation of the parish grant initiative in 2009 using funds directly from the Diocesan budget. Seven parishes applied for 2009 Grants.

Grants totaling \$ 12,100 were recently awarded by the Diocesan Parish and Mission Development committee to each of the seven parishes that applied.

"This (grant) project really opened my eyes. I would not have believed how hard my fellow parishioners would work on this. The participation was amazing."
Parishioner at a grant receiving parish

2009 Grant receiving parishes are:

Table 1 2009 Parish Grants

Parish Name and Location	Project Name
Christ the Savior Chicago IL	Community Outreach Ministry
St Gregory of Nyssa, Columbus, OH	Training and Defining an In Parish Lay Ministry of Mercy
Holy Trinity Cathedral, Chicago IL	Capturing Stories of Parish Heritage
St Innocent, Olmsted Falls OH	Small Group Ministry Pilot Project
St John the Baptist, Warren OH	Orthodox Exposure- The Mission and Message of the Church: Mall Kiosk
St Mark, Rochester Hills MI	Teens to Teens: Project Mexico Follow Up
St Nicholas, Mogadore OH	Pilgrim's Guide Newsletter

Webinar Pilot Project

We all know that modern information technology is a double edged sword – numerous positives and negatives. One of the positives is the ability to conduct training classes and collaborative discussions (webinars: **web** based seminars) via the internet by “pushing” course content – visuals and audio -- to attendee’s desktops for an extremely small cost. While lectures can be archived for future viewing, those attending the live broadcast participate in polls and live QA sessions. Attendees save significant travel time and cost. In addition the format allows subject matter experts from far away to provide their insights.



In 2009 we piloted three webinars with great success and virtually universal praise. Speakers and Topics included Fr. Gregory Jensen the “Psychology of Leadership” and the “Application of Leadership Research to Parish Practice” and Fr. Basil Aden “Recent Changes in the American Religious Landscape – How Should the Orthodox Respond?”

The archive of these webinars and the associated slides can be accessed from the Diocesan website.

Urban Parish Summit

While internet collaboration is valuable and useful it never replaces face to face contact. Following up on the useful discourse at the 2008 Parish Health Summit, in July of 2009 the diocese hosted an Urban Parish Summit in Cleveland OH. Fifty-five clergy and laity from sixteen urban parishes in the Diocese converged for a two day session to explore the role of the Orthodox Urban parish

“Thank you for not only informing us, but for inspiring us to dream new dreams for our parish and for the good work God has begun in us through this special event. We found ourselves dreaming new dreams of what are some distinctly Orthodox ways we can put our holy faith into sustainable, concrete action for the sake of witness, service, and radical hospitality.”

Clergy attendee at Urban Parish Summit

in the 21st century, the agenda included presentations from Orthodox and non-Orthodox contributors, roundtable sessions, case studies, relevant workshops, and fellowship opportunities. Among the highly rated contributors were Fr Justin Mathews, Director of Focus North America – a newly created Orthodox Charitable and development organization focused on urban ministry, Sister Rita Mary Harwood



Attendees at Urban Parish Summit;
St Theodosius Cathedral Cleveland OH July 2009

from the Cleveland Catholic Diocese and Charles Robbins of St Gregory of Nyssa parish. Participants received valuable insights, content for further exploration, and possible solutions to share with their parish councils and congregation.

Parishes requesting financial assistance to cover travel costs to attend the Urban Summit received travel grants. All materials from the Urban Summit are available on the diocesan web page.

Diocesan Strategic Plan

While not an actual part of the Parish Health Ministry we were asked by Archbishop JOB and the Chancellor, Fr John Zdinak, to support the Diocesan Council's expressed desire to develop a strategic plan for the Diocese. Facilitation of planning meetings and summarization of these discussions has taken a reasonable portion of our time for the past few months.

Progress on this effort will be shared with delegates at the Diocesan Assembly.

Administrative Matters

Oversight for Parish Health Ministry

At our request this year the Diocesan Council redefined the previous "Mission Development Committee" (comprised of members of the Diocesan and Bishop's Council) to become the "Parish and Mission Development Committee". This group now not only reviews progress of Mission communities and decides upon Mission grants, it also decides on parish grants and provides direction, oversight, ideas and support for the Parish Health Ministry.

Parish Health and Mission Program Budget

The combining of the mission and parish development efforts of the diocese, refocused the previous "mission budget" to be applied to the needs of both missions and parishes. The budget was used (approximately) as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Parish and Mission Program Expenditures	
Category	\$ Amount (unofficial estimates)
Mission grants	\$31,600
Parish Grants	\$12,100
Urban Summit Travel Grants and meals	\$6300
Other program expenses (<i>newsletter expenses, webinar expenses, PHF travel, misc.</i>)	\$6,000
Total	~\$56,000 <i>(~90% of these expenditures were paid back to parishes or missions.)</i>

Stipend and Ministry Effort

Over the past two years the Parish Health Ministry has become close to a full time job. The time expended on this ministry for the 12 months from September 2008 through August 2009 is conservatively 1570 hours. (Just short of 200 person days per year.)

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The cost to the Diocese for the Parish Health ministry position is \$4,400 per month. (\$52,800 per year) This includes salary, and a stipend for benefits and overhead. (FICA, pension, health care, office costs etc. are all included in this amount.²) The effective cost to the Diocese in the past 12 months was \$34/hr.

The two year special assessment covering the cost of the Parish Health Ministry position will end after December 2009. If continued funding can be provided from the Diocesan budget to continue this ministry we would be honored to do so.

As with most anything a variety of perspectives on the importance and effectiveness of this effort no doubt exist. In my experience *when people seriously look into it*, they find here a ministry that is offering useful assistance, prodding and stimulation to help get parishes out of bad ruts. For people who want their church to thrive this is perhaps the best money we spend as a Diocese.

Thank You

I want to thank Archbishop JOB, Fr. John Zdinak, the Diocesan Chancellor, and Protodeacon Joseph Matusiak, the Bishop's aide, for their continual support and advice. This ministry creates significant extra work for them and they are always available to help. In addition I would be remiss in not thanking our District Deans, who offer mentoring and important insight on the needs of parishes in their deaneries, and the many clergy and lay persons in the Diocese who have provided suggestions, thoughts, help and universal, continual encouragement in helping to develop this ministry.

Respectfully,

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² In other words a person on the Diocesan (or any other) payroll whose total employment cost was \$53,000/yr. would, after adjustment for healthcare, pension, payroll taxes etc., be receiving a before tax salary of approximately \$30,000/yr.

Appendix 1

Feedback from a Parish Workshop

We are often asked what occurs during a parish workshop. Obviously the agenda varies considerably depending upon the situation. The following are unsolicited reactions from parish priests in our Diocese that may shed light on how these sessions can impact a parish.

Feedback 1

"I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with our Parish Council and parish leaders today.

Personally I found the meeting to be very helpful as our parish begins its own strategic planning and vision process. The Parish Health materials which you sent out in advance were a very helpful place for us to begin evaluating our own parish. It was a good thing to think first about who and what we are before launching into what we want to become.

I found going through the materials and reflecting on the parish from the point of view of the Parish Health Model to give me a different perspective on the parish. I was seeing the parish through another set of eyes, looking at the parish in terms of health, but not just how I evaluate parish health, but through the collective wisdom of those who worked on the Parish Health Model. I cannot deny it was painful in some ways to consider things that we do not do well, or don't do at all. Yet when we met as a group with you, I did not at all feel that looking at ourselves and our much needed growth areas was a negative thing. In fact I thought it generated some energy among those present to think about these things and to want to improve the parish. I think meeting with you also afforded opportunity to some in the parish to step forward and offer themselves in leadership roles - not just filling old roles but wanting to create some new ones as well. The event afforded us the opportunity to talk about some things and in such a way as to interact with each other on a level we have not done in the past.

As I watched the meeting, I had a growing sense (and it was a very positive sense to me) that those present were behaving like parish leaders. They were not dependent on me for their relationship to the Church or to Christ - the parish was indeed something more than just what I do. They wanted to meet with each other and explore ideas with each other. This seems to me to be an important step in parish growth - for in as much as they take ownership of the parish, and don't limit the parish to what I am willing to involve myself in - they move beyond the small parish/family model into a bigger church model which will enable further growth to take place.

I do believe meeting with you with helped us be honest with each other, even about things we don't like to acknowledge.

So thank you for your help."

Parish Priest



Feedback 2

I'm so thankful to you for sharing your expertise and concern for ____ Church when you were with us recently.I really wanted a dialogue between our major players and with you and your visit achieved just that.

...What you did point out is significant and well worth our exploration. About your suggestion as to ____ (local issue)____ I have asked a committee to do just that.

I'm so pleased that you did not encourage us to (another local issue). We had tried [something similar] in our early years at least once, as I recall, and it was not [successful]. Always there are those who come up with immediate solutions, but I feel as Orthodox Christians we should come of age and get beyond that. Hence, your proposal for a tithing program initiated by the church council has merit.

I can't think of much else other than to thank you once again for your concern and your sound professional advice.

Parish Priest