

Parish Health Ministry Report For 2007 Diocesan Assembly



By **Joseph Kormos**, *Parish Health Facilitator*

Summary

The Diocese of the Midwest has been shrinking for at least twenty years. Fifty-one percent of our parishes are at least 15% smaller than in 1998.

Over that time our budget has grown to be \$588,000 in 2007. Prior to 2007, the only budgetary investment aimed at parish communities was the \$60,000 that is spent on grants for mission parishes. Virtually zero dollars was spent on strengthening *existing* parishes.

In 2007, using surpluses from previous budget cycles¹ approximately \$60,000² was spent on a new activity – the Parish Health Ministry.

The Parish Health Ministry position was clearly an experiment -- a work in progress so to speak. A conceptual summary of the ministry is shown in the box at the right.

Hopefully this ministry has been able to make a difference. Regardless a hearty thank you is owed to Archbishop JOB and Fr. John Zdinak, Chancellor for their encouragement, to Fr. Deacon Joseph Matusiak for his support, and to the many project volunteers who have assisted with projects. We should also thank those persons, known and unknown, who have provided suggestions, encouragement and prayer. (At least 80 persons by our count.)

Parish Health Ministry Overview

The motivation of the parish Health Ministry is clear - to help parishes to become more vibrant and healthy and to truly live a life in Christ.

The specific focus of efforts has been:

Exploring

Defining and communicating a useful model of healthy Orthodox Christian parishes in America.

Connecting

Forging helpful relationships between parishes. Increased inter-parish communication equates to less isolation and strengthening of the Diocese.

Sharing & Learning

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

Building

Identifying needs common to multiple parishes and organizing efforts to take action.

¹ These costs were not included in the \$588K budget number mentioned above.

² This is in addition to 60,000 on Missions. These figures are covered in somewhat greater depth later in this report. Official data is shown in budget documents. The dollar figure cited includes the salary and benefits stipend for the Parish Health Facilitator, travel costs, and ongoing costs for various on-line computer tools.

Results

The roles of “exploring”, “connecting”, “sharing”, “learning” and “building” have been an active part of this ministry for 2007. However, the word that may be most accurate in describing the role might be “stimulator”. The Parish Health Ministry by itself does not make parishes healthier and it certainly does not cause them to grow. It doesn’t make existing diocesan departments and committees function more effectively or deliver greater or better results.

The Ministry does stimulate.

The newsletters, articles workshops and parish tools created as a result of the ministry have hopefully provided some *stimulation* to parishes. Likewise, the activities of other Diocesan departments and committees have been *stimulated* by this ministry.

A detailed accounting of output and outcomes is shown in Appendix A and is summarized in the box at the right.

Reactions to the Parish Health Ministry

To our knowledge reaction has been almost universally positive – though we might be last in line to hear of dissatisfaction or disdain. “A breath of fresh air”, “a fine resource” and “the web based tools are a big help” have been common words of encouragement. Thank you.

Other Dioceses have shown interest in modeling after this Ministry.

In addition to making a contribution to people and parishes of the Diocese this ministry also seems to have demonstrated that the work of the Church is actively continuing in the Diocese of the Midwest.

What Did We Learn

Anytime you undertake a new endeavor it is good to reflect on what worked, what didn’t and what we learned. We explore this topic in Appendix B.

Quick Summary -2007

A detailed accounting of activities completed and in progress is shown in Appendix A. Briefly, in 2007 the following projects have been done or are expected to be done by Oct 2007¹ (much via the assistance of others).

- Eight Parish Pulse newsletters
- Eight parish health related articles
- Thirty new web pages in an entirely new website;
- Four deanery workshops (some in planning stages)
- Four parish workshops
- An inquirers PowerPoint slide presentation
- A plan for updating evangelization materials
- Definition of lay catechist position and updated late vocations materials planning with one part of one course completed;
- an updated Clergy compensation policy
- an Audit manual
- A parish Misconduct manual and implementation checklist
- An online method for submitting census data

Cost

Having discussed what was accomplished, it is useful to explore costs.

- The total cost of this activity for 2007 will be approximately \$60,000. Some of this cost is covered by the Missions budget since the Parish Facilitator also handles coordination for the Mission Department.
- Travel expenses and miscellaneous costs for software and hardware needed to execute various projects make up about \$6-8,000 of that total.
- Most of the costs are for the stipend for the Facilitator. Actual cost to the Diocese for the labor in this effort is a fixed stipend of \$4400 per month. This was designed to cover a minimum of eight days work. This equates to an effective hourly rate of just under \$70 per hour. Actual time invested since June 2006 has been more like eleven days per month. The actual effective labor rate since the start of the facilitator position has been \$49 per hour.
- The stipend is paid as "1099" for an outside contractor. This means the Diocese does not incur any additional costs for FICA, pension, medical and disability benefits and holidays and vacation, and office expenses.
- Since some costs would continue in the Mission budget, eliminating this ministry would save the Diocese approximately \$55,000 per year.

Evaluating the Parish Health Ministry

At the inception of the Parish health Ministry it was known that funding was available through the end of 2007. A decision would be required at the 2007 Assembly.

How will we make that decision? What criteria and standards will we use? In October of 2006 we proposed these standards.

You be the judge.

1. Are we able to do what we say we are going to do? (I.e. a reasonable batting average on getting things done?) Or, is it mostly talk but few tangible outputs/outcomes?
2. Are the things we get done actually valuable to parishes? Does it help them to live a life in Christ by saving time, doing new things, educating parishioners, identifying key obstacles to parish health?
3. Are parishes beginning to look to the diocese as a source of information, training, encouragement, expertise and timely, useful assistance?
4. Have parishes – clergy and laity – developed a feeling of connectedness to one another and to the Diocese as a whole? Is that worthwhile? Is that an inherent part of being a Christian?
5. Are people participating? How many persons/parishes have made some form of contribution to the body of effort in this ministry? Is that contribution likely to be sustainable or to grow? Or, do they feel their efforts are not being utilized or making an impact? Is momentum building or waning?
6. Are the funds that would be needed to support this ministry better spent somewhere else? On some other need? Like what?
7. Can this ministry make a difference in proportion to its cost?

The decisions to continue this ministry or not will rightly belong to the Diocesan Assembly –balancing the cost savings with the outcomes described in Appendix A.

Can We Do This for Less Money?

A reasonable question one might ask is “OK, sounds good but can we do this for less money somehow?”

Here is our (not unbiased) analysis.

Seek Grants

This continues to be an area of possibility. An exploration of the potential for grants from the Lilly Endowment as part of their *Parish Health* and *Sustaining Pastoral Excellence* programs was undertaken in January '07. We were unable to find a “budding” situation or a partnering opportunity that seemed to exhibit a high probability of success.

As a result of this exploration we decided not to mount a major effort to pursue a grant at that time since that would have likely taken significant time away from doing the projects of the Ministry.

How about Volunteers?

Achieving results for this investment is dependent on a lot of unpaid volunteer assistance already. Hoping for an additional large chunk of volunteer labor to drive the effort is unrealistic. There is too much work to expect this ministry to be handled by one person as a volunteer activity. Dividing among many persons would dramatically increase coordination effort resulting in even less getting done and likely lower quality. Eventually the “extra effort volunteering” would cease.

If it's important -- pay for it. If not, don't do it.

Shared Across Dioceses?

Sharing costs with another Diocese would be difficult due to the burden of coordination. The current single Diocese ministry works, in part, because there is one hierarchy, one Diocesan administration and many fewer “grapevines” to keep satisfied than would be the case for a multi-diocesan effort.

Inevitably one Diocese or the other would feel cheated. Geography would be more difficult. Even now in trying to serve only one Diocese the deaneries furthest away seemed to receive a significantly smaller portion of the energy and effort.

Reduce Costs by Reducing Hours

When first conceived the Parish Health Ministry was thought to be liberally staffed at eight days per month. Actual effort has been more like eleven days per month. While some efficiency can be expected in subsequent years a smaller effort probably cannot achieve enough critical mass to make a difference.

Stop

The most dramatic way to save money on this activity would, of course, be to simply not do it. The impact of that would be open to some debate. However, recall that this would return us to an approach where 90% of the Diocesan budget would go toward administrative salaries, travel, housing and facilities. Ten percent would be going toward grants for Missions and virtually 0% would be spent on developmental activities for existing parishes.

It would almost certainly result in:

- The Parish Health portion of the Web site becoming out of date and falling into disrepair
- The Parish Pulse newsletter becoming extinct
- No/little practices info sharing among parishes
- Programs begun in 2007 will not be finished
- New projects will not be identified or begun.
- Any momentum will be lost

And more importantly... the Diocese will still be →→shrinking←←. And, there will still be no answer to the question “what are we doing about this?”

If we choose not to continue to fund this activity, and we choose NOT to at least try something else we are making a choice in favor of the approach that has delivered consistent decline in the past.

Do we believe this past approach – essentially that parishes ‘go it alone’ with little or no assistance in sharing what works and what doesn’t -- will now deliver different results? If so why?

Appendix A

Results – What Was Accomplished Since the 2007 Assembly.

What did we as a Diocese receive from this ministry effort? Here is a summary:

Communication Activities

Newsletter

A newsletter “Parish Pulse” was designed to *stimulate* a broader Diocesan conversation on the issues surrounding building more vibrant parishes. Published 7-8 times

between November ’06 and September 07, Parish Pulse has achieved a circulation of approximately 370 persons.

Increased circulation would help achieve a broader footprint/impact for this communication vehicle.

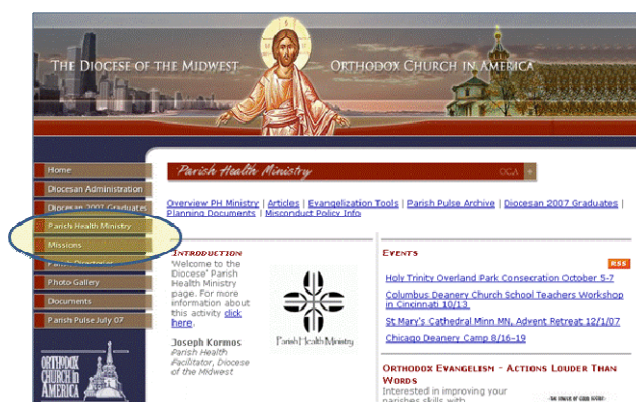


Website

An entirely new Diocesan website was created. The effort to build and maintain this as a living resource cannot be under estimated.

Approximately 70+% of the content on the Diocesan site was created by the Parish Health Facilitator. Easily 25% of the 2007 effort was related to initial planning and developing the site. This activity should therefore require significantly less investment in 2008.

As part of the website activity a list of Diocesan graduates was compiled.



Articles

Numerous articles dealing with the topic of healthy parishes were written –some contributed by the parish health facilitator others by persons in this or other OCA Dioceses.

Three articles were written on the topic of healthy parishes (Anne Marie Mecera, St Gregory’s Columbus; Vicki Jones, Holy Trinity Overland PK, St Alexis Parish Council, Clinton CT



Numerous articles on practical parish issues have been written or are under development.

Other articles include:

- *Toward Better Parish Websites* (Kormos)
- *Website Do's and Don'ts* – Fr. John Parsells
- *You've Written It -- Will They Read It?* Mat. Magdalena Berry
- *Checklist for Better Meetings* (reprinted from elsewhere)
- *Five Practical Suggestions for Parishes* (Kormos)

Others are under development.

Workshops

Deanery Workshops

Our goal was to *stimulate* at least two deanery workshops in 2007.

One has been completed:

- Cleveland "*Breaking Our Insularity*" May 5, 2007. This was developed and conducted by the Parish Health Facilitator at no cost to the deanery except travel costs.

One workshop has been firmly scheduled but not completed:

- Cincinnati – Church School Teachers Workshop for Columbus Deanery, October 13, 2007.

Others are in the planning stages:

- Dayton Choir workshop in date TBD
- Cleveland Choir Workshop – December 1, 2007.

Parish Workshops

As we planned the year's activities we did not necessarily envision delivering workshops or facilitating specific discussion *within parishes*. However, the focus on parish health has *stimulated* interest in parish specific events. Planning, managing and facilitating events has emerged as an important role for the facilitator position. It provides concentrated, personalized assistance to parishes and helps the parish facilitator to gain a clearer understanding of the issues facing parishes.

The following are workshops that have been completed or are scheduled:



Clergy and lay participants summarize actions planned to help their parish break their insularity in Cleveland on May 7. Forty participants passed a beautiful spring Saturday to discuss strengthening their parishes.



Spirited discussions on how to make our parish more *Alive in Christ* are an important aspect of parish health and vision workshops.

- 12/17/07 St Michael's St Louis; post liturgy discussion concerning the potential merger of two parishes.
- March 9-10, St. John the Forerunner, Indianapolis IN, *Parish Vision Workshop*
- July 7, Holy Trinity Cathedral, Chicago, *Parish Vision Workshop*
- September; Holy Assumption Canton; *Parish Health Workshop*; in early discussion stages; no date as yet.
- November 2-3; St Luke's, Palos Hills IL; *Parish Vision Workshop*

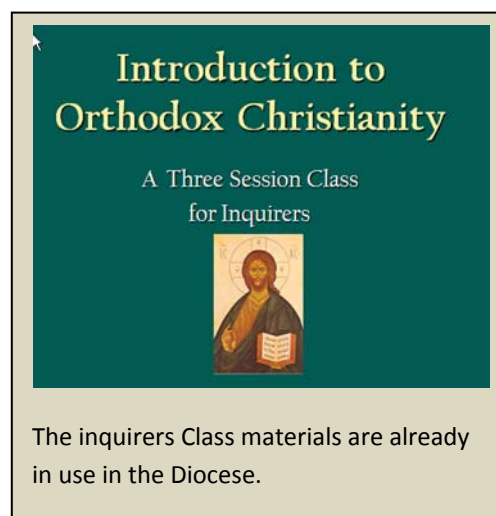
All parish workshops have been provided to parishes without stipend. Parishes cover travel costs.

Parish Tools

In addition to face to face workshops and communication through websites articles and newsletters we also focused on building some tools that can be valuable to parishes.

Inquirers Class

With help from Fr John Matusiak, a three session "Introduction to Orthodoxy" Class was developed and distributed via the web. Designed to be used by clergy and lay catechists as a pre-catechism foundation and level setting session, we are currently building a script and plan to capture a voice over narration to serve as an example of one way to effectively deliver the slides. This may be made available at the Diocesan Assembly.



Evangelization Education Initiative

At a recent workshop three attendees mentioned the need for updated materials and training on evangelization. We are working with Fr. John Matusiak to define a set of short videos, webinars, web pages, booklets, parish discussions and parish action projects to deliver, in a 2008 style, much of the content of the previously successful "Evangelization: The Basis and Basics" (the "purple book") and the companion "Heating Up a Lukewarm Church" workshops of the early 80's.

We hope to offer examples at the Diocesan Assembly.

Audit Manual

A handbook instructing parishes on how to conduct an annual audit of financial books is currently under pro bono development by the Cincinnati office of Grant Thornton LLP a leading Public Accounting firm. The handbook should be available for delivery at the Diocesan Assembly.

Misconduct Manual

With assistance from Michael Herzak of the Diocesan Council and St Gregory parish in Columbus OH updated materials are under development for assisting parishes to implement consistent effective approaches to reduce the risk of sexual misconduct events. The materials will be available for distribution at the Diocesan Assembly and will include:

- A summary of Frequently Asked Questions
- A template for a parish specific Misconduct Avoidance manual
- A Checklist for monitoring up to date status of misconduct policy implementation
- Application Forms and “Personnel” File Checklist

The materials will hopefully *stimulate* stronger more effective parish implementation.

Clergy Compensation Policy

In May of 2004 a committee was formed from the Diocesan and Bishop’s Council to explore necessary improvements and updates to the Clergy compensation policy. After one meeting the committee fell dormant – a casualty of an overly full plate for Diocesan administration.

In 2007 we *stimulated* reformulation of the committee, built a thorough clergy compensation survey and oversaw the execution of the survey. We facilitated meetings of the reconstituted compensation committee. The committee is using the results of the survey to develop recommendations which will be present at the Diocesan Assembly.

Late Vocations/Lay Catechist

Another project *stimulated* by the Parish Health Ministry was the definition of a certified lay catechist position within the Diocese. This effort was undertaken in collaboration with Fr. Michael Butler, Director of Late Vocations. Fr. Butler will deliver a proposed definition for the lay catechist position and certification for same at the Diocesan assembly.

In turn, the discussions on Lay Catechists *stimulated* further discussions on an integrated approach for training in other ministries. (Diaconal, Church School, Readers, and Choir



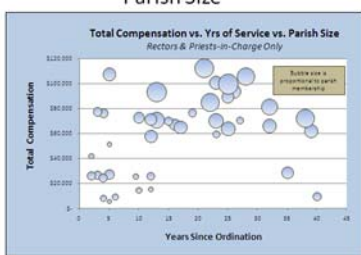
Diocese of the Midwest, Orthodox Church in America

Sexual Misconduct Risk Manual


Your Parish Name
Your Address,
Your Parish City, State

Materials to assist parishes in consistent compliance with misconduct polices are nearing completion.

Total Compensation vs. Yrs of Service vs. Parish Size



Data from the Clergy Compensation survey was used by a Diocesan Compensation Committee to propose updated compensation policies.



This Presentation

- Key features of our online education program.
- Demonstrate the technology used to deliver our online classes.

Institute for Biblical Studies & Pastoral Ministry
Introduction
This Presentation
Online Masters Degree
Online Masters Degree
Online Masters Degree
Online Masters Degree
Other studies
How it works...

Discussions about the role and preparation for lay catechists stimulated planning for an integrated late vocations curriculum and how to deliver lecture /training materials via the web.

Directors) This is turn resulted in exploration of methods to deliver course content efficiently via the web. Inexpensive software for production of training materials has been acquired and will be demonstrated at the Diocesan Assembly.

Appendix B

What Did We Learn

The following is a summary of key insights about parishes and about operating this ministry.

About the Ministry

With respect to what was done and how it was done there is relatively little we would have done differently. However, a few thoughts come to mind.

Too Many Projects for One Year

At this time last year we proposed eleven projects to be undertaken. We realized some would not get completed. Four of them (parish assessment framework, an urban ministries working group, a parish ministries conference and a Diocesan yellow pages had no material progress as of this writing. They still remain viable future activities.

The other seven of the eleven projects all are substantially moving forward if not completed.

“Coordinating” vs. “Doing”

As we began this effort one key question was the extent to which the facilitator needed to be the executer of projects vs. being the coordinator of the work of others. The answer is now clear. Yes - to both. However as expected the marshalling of effort from volunteers is understandably slow, difficult and cannot be made to fit a schedule.

Probably the key learning is that the Facilitator must be capable of “producing” as well as coordinating.

THE Only “Outbox” Effort Aimed at Parishes

This is virtually the only outbox effort in the Diocese. The Archbishop, the Chancellor the secretary/deacon simply do not have the time to do this job. Urgent, often reactive “In box” tasks encroach on their time.

Technology the Great Equalizer

We continue to be fascinated with the truly amazing opportunities that modern information technology provides to a small religious body like ours. It saves money, improves communication across broad distances and allows us to deliver an impact that is disproportionate to our actual size.

Need Multi Faceted Approach

This ministry needs a variety of activities and approaches. (“Tactics” if you will). The Newsletter keeps the ministry in front of people. Face to face workshops in parishes and deaneries supplemented by videos make an impact that documents and websites cannot. Web content and various ministry/parish tools help save time and *stimulate* new parish efforts.

Everything Takes Forever

We're getting used to that.

About Parishes

The activities of this year allowed us to gain a much broader understanding of the spectrum of life in parishes in different areas and of different sizes and backgrounds. Some conclusions from these experiences are:

Reminding vs. Instructing

C.S. Lewis said that "people need to be reminded more than they need to be instructed". This is true in parishes. Different parishes need to be reminded of different things. Among them:

- Parishes die. This can happen to you.
- Many parishes are growing. More are shrinking.
- We have a hard time being convinced that parishes that are shrinking, regardless of their parishioner age profile, are truly healthy.

Insularity

In a word we see insularity as a key issue facing many parishes. We speak of insularity from:

- Other parishes
- New ideas and approaches
- Neighbors –those in need of our Good news and those in need of our help.

Same Old

Beyond insularity, "getting out of ruts" may be a close second. Many parishes are treading water and need some fresh ideas, and energy. Don't chase fads, but if what you are doing is not working it might be a good idea to try something different. Interestingly, virtually every parish we've encountered has enough "spark" to materially increase its vibrancy. No, it is not easy and it does not happen quickly.

Encouraging

Even more than reminding, what people –laity and clergy- need is encouragement.

"(Positive) Stimulation".