GOOD PRACTICES OF VIBRANT ORTHODOX PARISHES
A FRAMEWORK FOR RENEWAL

JOSEPH KORMOS
PARISH DEVELOPMENT MINISTRY LEADER
DIOCESE OF MIDWEST, ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
Session Outline

- Speaker Intro
- What do you need to learn to make this conference successful for you?
- The Imperative – Vibrant Parishes
- Parish Video – make list of important qualities you see
- A Tool --Inventory Model
- What goes wrong with this tool
- Some antidotes – countering actions
Your Presenter

Joe Kormos

- Parish Development Ministry, Diocese of Midwest
- Consultant, Coach, Facilitator
- Visited 40 parishes in last five years
- Familiar: “OCA era” & “Metropolia era” parish mentality
- Past Parish Council member/leader
What Do You Need to Learn/Accomplish to Make This Conference Valuable to YOU?

☐ Tell me...
☐ ??????
What do You Need to Learn/Accomplish to Make This Conference Valuable to YOU?

- Good ideas we can use in our parish
- How to grow
- ??
- ???
- ????
- ?????
Past Attendee Expectations

- Share ideas
- How to grow?
- Ideas for enriching parish life
- How can our parish become known
- How to evangelize; neighborhood
- Keys – how to know when we’re in trouble
- How to enable laity to take ownership of efforts
- How to assess: “Where are we?”
The Imperative

“Houston, we have a problem”
Diocese of the Midwest

Number of Parishes Growing/Declining 1998-2008

- Declining: 34
- Growing: 20

Existing parishes
New Parishes or Missions
Diocese of Midwest Data

Sources of Diocesan Census Change 1998 - 2008

- 1998 Census: 6578
- Growth from Existing Parishes: 369
- Growth from New Parishes or Missions: 467
- Loss from Declining Parishes: 2036
- 2008 Census: 5378
Typical Decline Pattern

- All seems Fine
- Denial
- Assign Blame
- Attract "Replacements"
- Grab an Answer
- Jump Ship
- Turn further inward
Root Causes
Root Causes

- Unwilling to change/learn
- No competence for “intentionality”
  - Little experience setting goals/explicit actions
- Isolated & insulated
- Don’t know what people are thirsting for.
- Don’t know what to do
- Lack updated models of healthy parishes
What Does NOT Work

Attacking Decline/Plateau

- Copying
- Obsessing over growth – vs. health
- Hand wringing
- Trying everything
- Sprinting – this is a long distance race
- “Friendly” is not enough
- Silver bullets & formulas
An Exercise

Take out a piece of paper....

☐ Write down 2-5 qualities/characteristics/practices of a Vibrant Orthodox parish in America.

☐ Write 2-3 statements of what a vibrant parish does not look like.

☐ Characteristics: Vibrant
1. __________________
2. __________________
3. __________________
4. __________________
5. __________________

☐ Characteristics: Not Vibrant
1. __________________
2. __________________
3. __________________
“Not Vibrant”

Healthy Parish

About me

- Purposeless
- Denial
- Humorless
- Trusteeism
- cheap

Control Freaks

- Unwilling to receive help
- Risk Averse
- Self Satisfied
- Unadaptive (Culturally/Rubically)

Stifling Leadership

- Exclusive
- Passive
- visionless

Fear especially of Failure or change

- Insular
- Spiritually Immature
- Conformity/Rigid

One-Man Show

- Mediocrity
- Pseudo Harmony

Gate keeping

- Spiritually Immature
- Traditionalism (Prefer Orthodoxy to Christ)

Self-Righteous

- Risk Averse
- Has untouchable issues

Competitive/Turf Protectors/Clingy

- Medically Unprepared
- Liturgically Disengaged

Self-Satisfied

- Judging
- Unadapative (Culturally/Rubically)

Fear especially of Failure or change

- Unwilling to receive help

Weak Leadership

- Stifling Leadership
- Unadapative (Culturally/Rubically)

Hide bad news

- Unwilling to receive help

Maintaining Mindset

- Risk Averse
- Self Satisfied

Isolationism-Congregational

- Fear especially of Failure or change

Liturgically Unprepared

- Unadapative (Culturally/Rubically)

Liturgically Disengaged

- Fear especially of Failure or change

One-Man Show

- Unwilling to receive help

Passive

- Risk Averse
- Unadapative (Culturally/Rubically)

Pseudo Harmony

- Unwilling to receive help

Self-Satisfied

- Risk Averse
- Unadapative (Culturally/Rubically)

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- Unwilling to receive help

Competitive/Turf Protectors/Clingy

- Unadapative (Culturally/Rubically)

Takers/Consumers

- Unwilling to receive help

Traditionalism (Prefer Orthodoxy to Christ)

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Weak Leadership

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- Unwilling to receive help
Parish Video – Five Minutes

How many qualities of a vibrant Orthodox parish can you identify from the video?
# Vibrant Qualities Observed in Video

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Know who you are</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Worship</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>More than Sunday</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Reverence</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Music</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Connected to larger church</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Sat lunch</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Service to others</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>See Christ in others</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Use multiple talents – space for everyone</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Accomplishment – achievement</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Fellowship</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Celebrations</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Blessings</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Food</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Annual cycle</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Bake sales</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Leaders</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>Formation children</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>College connection</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>Decoration of temple</td>
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<td>24.</td>
<td>Preaching ordination</td>
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<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Sacraments</td>
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<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Tell / share your story with others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Invite to come see</td>
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<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>A parish is not a building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Excellence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion from Parish Health Summit:
“Any parish can become more vibrant – if it wants to do so.”

Attendee
Parish Health Inventory Model

1. Gospel Centered Vision
2. Vibrant Worship
3. Shared Leadership
4. Open Communication
5. Authentic Community
6. Christian Formation
7. Active Service
8. Spreading the Gospel

Conclusion from Parish Health Summit:
“Any parish can become more vibrant – if it wants to do so.”

Clergy Attendee
Parish Health Inventory Model

2 VIBRANT WORSHIP

LITURGICAL PREPARATION

Parish Discussion Questions

Potential Metrics

Lists of Good Practices, Behaviors, & Attitudes

Evaluation Scale

Authentic Community

- Family of God, nourishing fellowship
- Sacredness of time, God-centeredness
- Quality of life, shared values

How do we rate our Parish on this focus area?
A Model

Gospel Centered Vision
- Mission/identity
- Parish self awareness
- Excellence based atmosphere
- Multiplication oriented

Parish Evangelization methods
- Personal evangelism
- Sensitivity to spiritual needs of others
- External communication

Liturgal Preparedness
- Effective preaching

Congregational Participation
- Share & delegate responsibility
- Fluency in leading change
- Functional structures
- Open financial reporting

Effective communication
- Consensus and dialogue
- Dealing with conflict
- Internal communication methods

Discernment of gifts
- Targeted, organic ministries

Orthodox spirituality
- Education
- Financial generosity

Loving atmosphere & honest fellowship
- Incorporation mechanisms
- Connectedness to larger Church
- Appropriate facilities

1. Gospel Centered Vision

2. Vibrant Worship
- Liturgical Preparedness
- Congregational Participation
- Effective preaching

3. Shared Leadership
- Share & delegate responsibility
- Fluency in leading change
- Functional structures
- Open financial reporting

4. Open Communication
- Consensus and dialogue
- Dealing with conflict
- Internal communication methods

5. Authentic Community

6. Christian Formation
- Orthodox spirituality
- Education
- Financial generosity

7. Active Service
- Loving atmosphere & honest fellowship
- Incorporation mechanisms
- Connectedness to larger Church
- Appropriate facilities

8. Spreading the Gospel
Focus Your Efforts

The Minimum Barrel

Staves equate to essential parish health focus areas
What Goes Wrong with Use of This Model

1. Expecting a quick fix
2. Priest not engaged/opposed
   - Sometimes limited mindset –DKWYDK; “allergic to methods”
3. Poor follow though
   - Actions too complicated
   - Cant execute actions – we’re just not capable of doing anything but the simplest effort
   - No/weak lay leadership
   - Trying to do too much –select one area.
4. Same old same old -- long standing and new problems often require new, tough solutions.
5. Failure to engage the parish –need to roll it out
Some Antidotes/Tools

- Face facts (see handout) -- build urgency
- A method (diagram on a slide to follow)
- One competently run project
  - a game changer – “Wow! We’re really capable of accomplishing something we set out to do.
- Outside force – facilitator
- Benchmark
- Grants
- Start with yourself
### “Face Facts” Summary Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish Name/Location</th>
<th>Founding Date (year)</th>
<th>Fill Out Date</th>
<th>As of Jan 1 this year</th>
<th>3 yr Trend (up+, down-, same =)</th>
<th>Satisfied? (Y=Yes / N=No)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People related</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Adult Membership</td>
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<td>2. Typical Attendance Sunday Liturgy</td>
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<td>3. Typical Attendance Saturday Vespers</td>
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<td>4. Typical attendance Feast day</td>
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<td>5. Median age of parishioners</td>
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<td>6. Church school enrollment</td>
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<td>7. Baptisms</td>
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<td>8. Receptions (conversions)</td>
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</table>
Applying the Model
An Approach

Stimulate
- Measure: Gather/Face Facts
- Commit?: Satisfied?
- Mesh: Clergy/Lay Coalition

Diagnose
- Explore Model: How can we be healthier?
- Choose: Focus Area
- Visit Others: Observe/learn

Prescribe
- Define: Select Actions
- Communicate: Build urgency
- Act: Modest Steps

Measure
- Review: Progress?
- Recommit: Overall Goal
- Communicate & Celebrate
- Repeat: Next Area

Repeat the cycle to continue improving.
A Facilitation Approach for Using This Model

- **Prep:** Attendees read full document ahead of time

- **Part 1 – Select a focus area**
  - Leader provides brief intro.
  - Review model – Find key focus area
    - Focus area 1 -- Read key items from each area aloud. Ask for comment; pro/con; “What don’t you understand?” Each attendee scores this area.
    - Repeat for 2-8
  - Collect scores. Identify total points for each area
  - Group discusses & selects which area to focus on further.

- **Part 2 – Detailed area review – drill down to describe The Problem**
  - Discuss each bullet point in selected area (now for second time)
  - Rate each subarea – determine if one subsection of the focus area is the key issue.
  - Attempt to identify 3-5 statements that best describe the current state of affairs.
A Facilitation Approach for Using This Model (cont’d)

Part 2 (cont’d)
- Summarize these statements into one problem statement and perhaps a list of behaviors that seem to describe us.
- Examine root causes -- Why does this happen?
- Discuss these behaviors/ problem.
- Examine if the problem is related to
  - Activities performed (Wrong? None? Poor?)
  - Ability to perform (poorly done; lack background; developmental assistance?)
  - Commitment to perform (tepid effort)
  - Something else
- Summarize

Part 3 Action
- Describe some target outcomes in specific measurable terms
  - Six - 18 month max.
- Describe actions
  - What actions, by whom; by when
- Costs
  - Valuable vs. easy
- Select some actions
Drivers of Growth are Under Your Control

1. Come to church.
2. Make people aware of your parish.
3. Engage newcomers/visitors with care & warmth.
4. Give them a reason to return – expressed and experienced.
5. Do something for others.

If the previous info is just too complicated… then just do this:
THANK YOU

7/7/2010
Parish Health Inventory Model

1. Gospel Centered Vision
2. Vibrant Worship
3. Shared Leadership
4. Open Communication
5. Authentic Community
6. Christian Formation
7. Active Service
8. Spreading the Gospel
Evaluation Scale

- **Unconsciously Incompetent**: Virtually unaware of this area as being important to building a healthy parish.
- **Consciously Incompetent**: Aware… but little progress or effort.
- **Consciously Semi Competent**: We’re working… signs of commitment and improvement.
- **Consciously Competent**: Good behaviors & practices prevail – but we need to continually remind ourselves & avoid bad habits.
- **Unconsciously Competent**: Good behaviors & practices “baked in.”
## Evaluation Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Area</th>
<th>Level 0</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>Unconsciously Incompetent</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Consciously Incompetent</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
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<td>As a parish we’re virtually unaware of this area as important to building a healthy parish</td>
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<td>We’re aware of this area -- but haven’t made much progress on improving.</td>
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<td>We’ve worked at this &amp; are showing signs of clear commitment &amp; improvement.</td>
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</table>

**Total # of marks in this column**

Multiply the total marks in this column by this number and place it below

0 x 1 x 2 x 3 x 4

**Sum: Level 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 =** [Blank]

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**Parish Priorities** -- Based on your review of the model and your own views of our parish, please list up to three priorities for our parish to embrace (focus on) in the next 1-2 years. (There are NO wrong answers!)

1. ____________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________
As a parish we clearly understand that our reason for existence is to serve the Living God and to share our love of God with others.

Our parish is NOT a club or cultural center, a museum, self absorbed or passive.

An atmosphere of striving and humbly offering our best to God pervades our parish community.

A sense of effort, energy and journey is apparent in the parish. We’re NOT just “surviving”.

Our parish vision is made concrete with a set of specific tailored ministries (formal or informal) that bring our vision to life.

Our parish budget reflects an orientation of improvement, development and excellence.

We care about delivering our light to the neighborhood/community.
Joyful, ascendant, worship is at the center of our life.

We work hard to enhance the beauty power and zeal of our humble efforts to glorify God. We keep worship fresh, contagious yet dignified, enlivening, holy, joyous, peaceful, and thankful.

We come to church – often. Not just on Sunday morning.

Worshippers assemble promptly to do the work of the people. They are attentive, active participants in liturgy.

In our parish preaching is edifying, uplifting, nourishing and challenging.

In our parish preaching enlivens the worshipper's understanding of the Gospel and Holy Tradition.

Worship is better attended than administrative, social, fund raising events.
• Delegating responsibility
• Leading and effecting change
• Functional structures
• Open financial practice

Parish lay leaders see themselves as leaders/elders of a Christian community co-responsible, under the rector’s guidance, for the health and vibrancy of the parish.

Our parish works to develop a sense of personal accountability of leaders. Those accepting a job/role attempt to execute the job with a sense of duty and excellence.

Parish leaders do NOT see themselves as the parish business managers, owners, disinterested commentators and/or critics.

The priest and parishioners trust and learn from one another.

Leaders lead. Parish leaders model good Christian behavior.

The level of structure in our parish is appropriate for today and the parish we can’t to become. We don’t miss opportunities and we don’t waste time because of too much or excessively lax structure.

We have appropriate staff for the size we are/desire to be.

We equip parish leaders through appropriate training and continuing education.
We work to develop a culture of consensus about matters important to parish life. We find solutions best for the body NOT for us personally.

We explore multiple options and seek out marginal views. We are continually striving to see things from the point of view of others.

Important decisions in the life of the parish are communicated clearly and appropriately.

Persons who disagree with decisions or methods are encouraged to speak up, they are listened to and their ideas are used to improve decisions.

Mature criticism is possible and welcomed.

In our parish people are treated with respect & dignity.

People are kept well informed about what is going on in our parish.
Christ is recognized in our midst. Anyone who enters can see the hallmarks of Christian community: love, selfless giving, mutual encouragement, forgiveness, kindness, patience, personal initiative and responsibility and compassion.

It is clear that as a parish we are differentiated from a club or a service organization. We live and express our faith.

We encourage, exhort and nurture one another.

There is lots of laughter in our parish.

Correction is possible. Parishioners are taught and, when necessary, corrected.

We welcome newcomers readily. We are NOT a closed community available by birth, kinship or ethnicity.

Our parish offers a variety of events and entry points where new relationships can happen. We have assimilation paths for people of different ages, genders, marital status and life stages.

Parish youth are treated as valid important members of our community. We expend serious effort to help them find a role, to be heard, and to be appreciated.

We do NOT see ourselves as an independent “congregation”. We are interdependent with other parishes in our deanery/Diocese/OCA as well as other Orthodox jurisdictions.

We consider the larger Church. Our attitude is NOT “our parish first.”
We have a commitment to lifelong learning and personal spiritual growth.

This is supported by an appropriately comprehensive parish wide education effort.

The education activities of our parish are NOT limited to children only but also provide adult, age appropriate opportunities for learning.

Lenten seasons are kept in a meaningful manner - personally and as a community.

As a parish and as persons we practice personal charity.

We teach people that stewardship (financial and otherwise) is a foundational quality of being an Orthodox Christian; that every asset financial, human etc they have is a gift from God to be managed as a steward on the Master’s behalf.

Proportional giving is a basic tenet of our parish stewardship efforts.

Children are taught clearly and directly about stewardship and generosity in Church school.

Achieving our annual budget is not dependent on fund raising or alternative sources of income.

We make it unashamedly clear to new members (and old members) that they are expected to provide generous, proportional and grateful financial support to the parish.
Our parish is a place where members are regularly and actively encouraged to discover their gifts and to use them for God’s glory.

We encourage members to ask and answer: “What has God called me to do here?”

Most people have an active role in the parish.

Most people are contributing in their areas of giftedness and are not awkwardly operating in areas in which they don’t have useful skills.

We have a clear set of internally AND externally focused ministries.

Our collection of external ministries demonstrates appropriate balance between local, national and international causes; Orthodox and non-Orthodox causes.

Each of our ministries in our has a clear purpose that befits a Christian community.
We do NOT see ourselves as a closed community. We have a personal responsibility to share the Good News.

In seeking new members we understand the requirement to accept them fully into the community.

We try to discern how God has worked in our life and we are able to confidently express that hope to others when useful and appropriate.

We avoid evangelization approaches that are intrusive or manipulative.

Our evangelization activities are oriented to seeing and connecting with a human person who has spiritual needs and a personal history.

We welcome visitors/inquirers warmly, genuinely, sincerely, honestly and with empathy-- and without being intrusive.

We make our parish known in the community.
A Model

Gospel Centered Vision
- Mission/identity
- Parish self awareness
- Excellence based atmosphere
- Multiplication oriented

Parish Evangelization methods
- Personal evangelism
- Sensitivity to spiritual needs of others
- External communication

Liturgical Preparedness
- Congregational Participation
- Effective preaching

Share & delegate responsibility
- Fluency in leading change
- Functional structures
- Open financial reporting

Disernment of gifts
- Targeted, organic ministries

Consensus and dialogue
- Dealing with conflict
- Internal communication methods

Orthodox spirituality
- Education
- Financial generosity

Loving atmosphere & honest fellowship
- Incorporation mechanisms
- Connectedness to larger Church
- Appropriate facilities

Healthy Parish Focus Areas