



Parish Health Ministry

Growing Parishes are Not All the Same

The recently held OCA Diocese of the Midwest Parish Health Summit was one of the few structured Diocesan gatherings in recent memory where priests came together to openly discuss parish life. The environment and agenda was vastly different from Diocesan Assemblies and Clergy Convocations. Summit attendees participated in workshops and exercises designed to openly and fairly describe the strengths and challenges of their parishes.

After hearing from one another, attendees attempted to summarize what was learned. One of the key observations centered on the clear diversity of local environments, parish backgrounds and parish practices among these growing parishes.

Some common myths about growing parishes were quickly dispelled.



Some growing parishes are in the city with buildings adapted from previous use



Other growing parishes are in new buildings in the suburbs

For example:

"You can only grow in the 'burbs'"

Some parishes represented suburban locations -- however many invited parishes serve inner city locations.

"It's all about buildings"

Some had gleaming new buildings while many worship in old churches and even structures that had been converted from previous non-church use.

"Only 'new' parishes grow"

While many attendees represented parishes that were founded after 1970 -- others offered a heritage back to the early 20th century.



Heritage parishes can grow

"Only parishes that are the only (Orthodox) 'game in town' can grow"

It is true that some growing parishes clearly benefit from being the only non-ethnic Orthodox parish in their town -- but others are growing in an environment where members have many nearby choices of Orthodox parishes.

Worship Style Varies

While all participant parishes had long ago adopted English as the standard language of worship -- participant parishes exhibited a spectrum of worship styles: choir vs. congregational and various chant styles.



Growing parishes exhibit varying worship styles

Administrative Structure

Attendees demonstrated that there is no "one way" to administer a parish. Attendees expressed varying views on issues such as the degree of structure necessary in parish administration and clergy leadership styles. Some saw it as important to embed a culture of active effort -- consistently striving and driving for excellence, engagement and improvement in the parish. Others try to maintain a quiet, tranquil "equilibrium" in parish life.

Mission Statements

Some saw written mission and vision statements as being valuable to keeping the parish on the same page. Others completely disagreed.

Based on the clear diversity of practice an important conclusion emerged. If it truly desires to do so *and will put forth the effort* -- **any parish can become more vibrant and healthy!**