

Ss. Constantine & Helen Greek Orthodox Church
Annapolis, Maryland



Ss. Constantine & Helen Greek Orthodox Church
Special Study

Improving Parishioner Engagement
in Our Parish Ministries & Activities

Progress Report to Parish
December 29, 2019

Introduction

Serenity Prayer

Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot
change,
the courage to change the things I can
and the wisdom to know the difference

American Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr

Background

At Fall 2018 General Assembly meeting, parishioners approved the undertaking of a research project

Goals

1. Examine all aspects of parishioner engagement by identifying the root causes for the less than desired rate of participation in the ministries that comprise stewardship and make recommendations for improvement;
2. Make recommendations for increasing participation and volunteerism in parish activities, including fund raising events;
3. Provide a roadmap for stabilizing the parish's future; a new window of opportunity for the parish community to improve engagement with the Church, and increase involvement in church activities.

Study Methodology

- Environmental Analysis
 - Internal environment within Parish
 - External environment within Parish's geographic area
 - Critical issues
- Draft Assumptions
- Develop Research Themes
- Additional Research
 - Selected Greek Orthodox Parishes
 - Selected Archdiocese Ministries/Departments
 - Other Christian Churches
 - Publications & Documents

Study Methodology (cont'd)

- Develop & Initiate Questionnaires
- Develop conclusions
- Develop recommendations
- Final report & other summary documents
- Develop communications/marketing plan
- Integrate into a Parish Strategic Plan

Draft Assumption 1

Many parishioners believe that by definition, stewardship is limited to the collection of membership dues and other special collections. This belief may limit parishioners' active participation in other stewardship ministries and possibly diminish their engagement in the parish. Holding that belief impacts the overall financial health of the parish.

Draft Assumption 2

There are number of misunderstandings/misconceptions about the functions, responsibilities, operations of the Parish Council & General Assembly, particularly regarding the budget and financial state of our Parish.

- May be the result of inaccurate communications between parishioners and/or less than adequate communications between the Parish Council and parishioners
- May have led to a decline in parishioner interest as demonstrated by the decline in attendance at General Assembly meetings.

Reasons for this may include:

- Need to review any existing Ss. Constantine & Helen Parish By-laws outlining parish administrative/operational functions, and update if needed to reflect today's parish operations
- Insufficient guidelines for Parish Council members' roles and responsibilities;
- Insufficient communications processes that would enable more frequent dialogue between church leadership and parishioners other than the twice yearly General Assembly meetings (e.g., a quarterly forum for in-person dialogue, expanded posting on the parish's web site of internal regulations, policies, procedures, etc.

Draft Assumption 3

Our parish is not taking advantage of available communications technology, particularly social media, as it relates to improving parishioner engagement, participation in our ministries, and the overall growth of our parish.

Draft Assumption 4

Our high level of reliance on profits from fund raising events such as the annual festival (about 1/3 of our “ordinary” and “other” annual income) coupled with its unpredictability as a funding source, makes fiscal planning critical in order to support the short and long-term capital expenditures needed to maintain the assets of the Church.

Planning for these expenditures is vital to the enduring success, in particular, of our Church infrastructure and grounds, and our growing profit centers such as the Byzantium Hall, the SS C&H School and our real estate holdings, as those profit centers directly impact the viability of this Church to meet its needs and programs.

Draft Assumption 5

Operational/management succession plans should be created for major fundraising activities for their planning, implementation and management, such as for example the annual festival which is a key source of funding our budget.

Draft Assumption 6

Considering the changing personality traits of younger generations of Parish members/potential members, in order to attract and retain them, new approaches to communicate issues of Church doctrine, dogma, positions and beliefs should be explored in a manner that better connects with them. There are areas of distinction between the older and younger generations:

- The desire to attend church services, participate in ministries
- Less fluency and understanding of the Greek language used in Church services
- Constant exposure to a more secular social and political environment
- A view by some that the manner in which the Church communicates doctrine/dogma and teachings on social issues is not inviting & encouraging according to their sensibilities

Draft Assumption 7

With the diminishing numbers of older generation parishioners who originally migrated here, who have established and been the foundation of our parish; the diminishing numbers of Greeks who continue to migrate here; the diminishing participation of younger generations of parishioners; and the increasing numbers of marriages that include non-Greek, non-Orthodox spouses; the future of our Parish as it exists today may be in doubt.

Draft Assumption 8

Our parish does not have a strategic plan that includes ongoing critical analyses of the fiscal, operational, social and other issues critical to the parish's operation and long-term viability. Such a plan, updated annually would:

- Include the Parish's vision, identity and plan for future growth;
- Assess the environment in which the parish exists;
- Identify the most critical issues confronting the parish;
- Develop goals and strategies resulting from such analyses, particularly those directly supporting its ministries;
- Facilitate the implementation of those goals and strategies.

Draft Assumption 9

Our Parish does not currently have an organized approach for engaging visitors to the church who may be interested in attending services and/or learning more about Orthodoxy and the ministries in our parish.

Nor do we have a formalized outreach program that invites people, particularly the younger generations to attend services. Developing these efforts are important if we hope to expand our parishioner base.

Draft Assumption 10

The newer generations of youth and young adults have grown up in an ever increasing secular environment:

Different lifestyle priorities as compared to earlier generations;

- Heavily influenced by and dependent on information technology, particularly social media applications;
- Tend to be independent and somewhat skeptical of organized social organizations including organized religions

If the church is to be successful in keeping younger members of the church as they grown into adulthood, and in inviting new members, it needs to consider new, creative and innovative strategies that acknowledge these factors.

Draft Assumption 11

If we are to expect the younger generation of parishioners to eventually manage the affairs of our Parish, they must be encouraged from now to become more engaged in the Church and its ministries, and involved in parish affairs and operations.

There is a view that the Church and its ministries/organizations are run by older generations at the exclusion of the younger generations, and because of this, consideration of newer generational values and ideas is lost.

Strategies need to be developed that expand current efforts and/or create new approaches to involving the younger generations in the Church and our Parish.

Research Themes

- **Church Identity, Vision & Growth** (Includes Greek Orthodox & Other Orthodox Churches; Attendance & Engagement; Outreach to the community; Potential Parishioners)
- **Youth & Young Adults**
- **Stewardship & Ministries** (Includes Clergy, Volunteerism & Community Service; Converts to Orthodoxy)
- **Church Events** (Includes Byzantium)
- **Financial Analysis**
- **Risk Management, Security & Safety**

Ministry & Other Meetings

- GOYA introductory meeting (November 8, 2019)
- Project status meeting scheduled for December 29
- Philoptochos, planning conversation with Connie Karides (TBD)
- Pre-School (TBD)
- Sunday School (TBD)
- PTA-Greek School (TBD)
- Greek Dancing/Folk Dance Festival (TBD)
- Byzantium (TBD)
- Father Kosmas (TBD)
- Parish Council (TBD)

Churches Visited (As of November 6, 2019)

- Saint Martin's Lutheran Church of Annapolis, MD
- Holy Family Catholic Church, Davidsonville, MD
- Eastern Orthodox Mission, Easton, MD
- Saint Vasilios Greek Orthodox Church, Peabody, MA (October 30, 2019)
- First Congregation Church, Rockport, MA (November 1, 2019)

Churches to be Visited

- Saint Theodore Greek Orthodox Church, Lanham, MD (TBD)
- Holy Cross Antiochian Orthodox Church, Linthicum, MD (TBD)
- Holy Archangels Orthodox Church (OCA), Annapolis, MD (TBD)
- Riva Trace Baptist Church, Davidsonville, MD (TBD)

Next Steps

Study Release – Part 1 (date TBD)

- **Research Theme: Church Identity Vision & Growth** (Includes Greek Orthodox & Other Orthodox Churches; Attendance & Engagement; Outreach to community; Potential Parishioners)

Study Release – Part 2 (Date TBD)

- **Research Theme: Youth & Young Adults** (Various Youth Ministries)

Study Release – Part3 (Date TBD)

- **Research Theme: Stewardship & Ministries** (Includes Clergy, Volunteerism & Community Service; Converts to Orthodoxy)

Study Release – Part 4 (Date TBD)

- **Research Themes: Church Events** (Includes Byzantium); Financial Analysis
Risk Management, Security & Safety