

Strategic Plan for the Orthodox Church in America:

A Comprehensive Action Plan for the Next Decade

Version 5.7
May 16, 2011

INTRODUCTION

As the Body of Christ, the Orthodox Church in America is committed to bringing the Gospel to all the people of North America –embracing all languages, cultures and races. This is Christ’s commandment to “Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that [He has commanded us]” (Mt. 28:19-20).

This Strategic Plan for the Orthodox Church in America is a guide to help the Church in better fulfilling this mission in North America.

This Working Draft of a Strategic Plan is presented by the Strategic Planning Committee of the Metropolitan Council of the Orthodox Church in America. The Strategic Planning Committee was commissioned by the Metropolitan Council and the Holy Synod of Bishops to facilitate the creation of a strategic plan for the Orthodox Church in America that would capture its vision and top-level goals for the near future (taken to be the next decade). It must be emphasized that this is a draft document and that everything in it is open to discussion at all levels of the church.

To accomplish this commission, the Strategic Planning Committee has been using a conciliar process, reaching out to all levels of the Church for their input – beginning with the Metropolitan and the Holy Synod, then the Metropolitan Council and then expanding to the dioceses and parishes. Most recently ten working groups from across the Church have met and prepared proposals for concrete plans in their respect ministries. These group reports can be found in the last portion of this draft document. In the coming months we will dedicate an issue of *The Orthodox Church* magazine to this subject and culminate the discussions at the 16th All American Council to be held in Bellevue Washington in November 2011.

The feedback to date from all these inputs has been very clear. This Strategic Plan should focus on priorities for ministries in the Church and not on organizational change. This revision of the Strategic Plan attempts to do just that. It is our hope and belief that by focusing on these ministries we may continue the healing process and move forward into the future.

This revision of the Strategic Plan is intended to address all aspects of the Church’s life, ranging from internal spiritual growth to mission and outreach to all. Specifically it addresses three critical questions:

1. Who are we and where are we going?
2. What should our ministry priorities be for the coming decade?
3. How do the Central Administration, the dioceses, the deaneries, the parishes and the individual parishioners work together to establish and continue these ministry priorities?

It is important to ask and answer these questions so we are can be “that faithful and wise steward” (Lk. 12.42) called to watch over God’s household in North America.

This Strategic Plan does not reflect traditional corporate strategic plans with numbers, statistics, membership numbers or budgets. The Church is not an institution. It is a sacramental mystery that unites us to Christ to transform our lives and by our witness to transform those around us. It is this inner spiritual transformation and the resulting efforts to reach out to others that are the focus of this Plan. If we follow Christ in this, then everything will follow.

IDENTITY AND DIRECTIONS

WHO ARE WE?

The Orthodox Church in America is a local autocephalous (self governing) Church of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church established by Jesus Christ and faithfully transmitted through Her Scriptures, worship and prayer life and the teachings of the Holy Fathers. The Church makes known the Kingdom of God which, while yet to come, is already among us and which is supremely proclaimed and revealed in the Divine Liturgy. It is in this Eucharistic con-celebration that the gathering of bishops, priests, deacons and laity are transformed by the Holy Spirit into the living body of Christ. Within this Eucharistic context the Orthodox Church in America strives to be both hierarchical, with authority rooted in mutual love, and conciliar, with clergy and laity working together for the life of the world and its salvation.

The Church’s North American mission began in 1794 when the first Orthodox monks arrived in Alaska to bring the Gospel to the Native people. This mission to “Go and make disciples” must always be our mission. The Gospel is be spread throughout North America in a conciliar Church that includes bishops, priests, deacons, and laity working together to plan for the future. This conciliarity is part of the heritage the Orthodox Church in America received from its mother Church, the Russian Orthodox Church and the church council of 1917-1918. In 1970, the Russian Orthodox Church granted us self-governance (autocephaly) in a document call the Tomos of Autocephaly.

In reflecting on the intervening 40 years since we have been granted autocephaly, the Holy Synod of Bishops has affirmed the following principles:

- “1. We understand ourselves to be an indigenous, multi-ethnic, missionary Church, laboring to bring Orthodox Christianity to all citizens of this continent.
2. We affirm that our historical reality derives from the Russian Orthodox Church and that we have humbly received and faithfully maintain the inheritance of the Russian Mission of 1794, the Diocese of Kamchatka, the Kurile and Aleutian Islands in 1840; the Diocese of the Aleutians and Alaska in 1870 and its relocation to San Francisco in 1872; the Diocese of the Aleutians and North America in 1900 and its relocation to New York in 1905; and the Autocephaly of 1970.
3. As directed by the *Tomos*, we live as other self-governing Churches do: electing our own bishops and Primate, without confirmation by any other Synod, maintaining inter-Church relationships with all other Churches; and consecrating our own chrism.
4. As envisioned in the *Tomos*, we believe that the autocephaly given to us will be fully realized when the promise of Orthodox unity in North America is fulfilled, and the Orthodox Church in America together with all the Orthodox faithful in North America become one united Autocephalous Church of America, recognized by all other Orthodox Churches.
5. We commit ourselves to work within the Episcopal Assembly in order to realize the goal of unity.”

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

As we move into the future, we will focus on:

- Internal spiritual renewal and growth, so that we may radiate the life in Christ and be seen and known by all those around us. They will see that we live in peace, joy, and the love of the Lord;
- Reaching out to others to fulfill the Savior’s commandment to love one another as He has loved us (Jn. 13:34) as we draw near to the other who is hungry, thirsty, naked or in prison (Mt. 25); and
- Actively cooperating and participating in the formation and establishment of a fully united territorial and autocephalous Orthodox Church in North America, embracing all Orthodox Christians, with one Synod of Bishops.

In doing so, we will be guided by:

- The belief that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is lived and conveyed by the Church through the Holy Spirit. The Church is the living body of Christ and its life and Tradition continue to develop in and through the Holy Spirit.
- The belief that the Church administers itself by the irreducible principle of hierarchy/conciliarity rooted in the Holy Trinity, which involves the participation of its entire people to the highest degree possible and which manifests itself in love, obedience, trust, integrity, sacrifice, humility, and commitment.

- The belief that all men and women are created in the image of God, each with their own unique gifts to be used for the greater glory of God and the building up of His Holy Church.
- The belief that God created the world in all its goodness and that as a result of sin it has fallen. Through the incarnation of God the Word, Christ is restoring creation to its proper relation to Himself.
- The belief that its unity is expressed through the diversity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the faithful and through the participation of the faithful in the sacramental life of the Church.
- The belief that the membership of the Church is multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual and that members of Christ's Body are, as the Apostle Paul, prepared to be "all things to all men" (1 Cor. 9:22), so that "Christ can be all and in all" (Col.3:11).
- The belief that missionary and charitable works are essential to the life of the Church.
- The belief that the spiritual fruit of an ascetic life of all the faithful contributes to the building up of life in the Church.
- The belief that both monasticism and 'life in, but not of, the world' are integral parts of the life of the Church.
- The belief that the work of the Church should be conducted in an open and transparent manner in accordance with the highest ethical and moral precepts, the civil laws of the land within which it exists, and with the consent of its people.

OUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Guided by this understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ and the mission to bring the Gospel to all the people of North America, we must ask: Are we responding to this calling? How are we using our skills and talents to the greater glory of God? We need to review our strengths and our weaknesses. We need to determine what opportunities lay before us and what threats stand in the way of doing Christ's work successfully in the future. In a two-day brainstorming session, the Strategic Planning Committee identified more than 50 such strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The most important ones are summarized below.

STRENGTHS:

- Fullness of the Orthodox faith, with its scriptural, liturgical and sacramental life; the teaching of the Church fathers and the commitment, piety and holiness of our forefathers in the faith which stand as examples for us to follow;
- Focus on evangelizing the people of North America as witnessed by the Church's history in the earliest days in Alaska and active missionary outreach in its dioceses today;

- Conciliarity of its Church life with bishops, priests and laity contributing to the essential tasks of decision-making.

WEAKNESSES:

- Lack of unified, dynamic and effective leadership. Lack of leadership and management skills at all levels of the Church– resulting in isolation, disjointed work, lack of accountability, and no unified and energizing vision;
- Lack of a true culture of stewardship: e.g. caring for our priests, our needy parishioners and our established parishes; teaching and nurturing a culture of giving and tithing; cultivation of major donors and endowments; encouraging the many talented members already in our Church to use their skills and talents;
- The major reduction in the funding of Church-wide ministries such as Pastoral Life and Outreach, Education and Christian Witness and Humanitarian Aid.
- An inability to understand and effectively address how we are influenced by the non-Orthodox culture in which we live.

Lack of administrative unity amongst the Orthodox in North America

OPPORTUNITIES

- More North Americans than ever before looking for meaning and spirituality in their lives, including Orthodox immigrants, Christians from outside the Orthodox Church, as well as those looking for solutions in New Age spiritualism and elsewhere;
- Better utilization of the untapped, or underutilized resources given to us by God: re-energized clergy; male and female seminary graduates; talented, lay volunteers with a broad range of skills; and new technologies that enable more effective communications and offer distance learning possibilities;
- Historic opportunity to achieve Orthodox unity in North America, allowing us to more effectively witness to Christ and to reach out to others.

THREATS

- The secular culture that has impacted our Church life. This culture promotes a social gospel that sees no need for the ascetic life. Instead it focuses on life here on earth rather than on eternal life in the Kingdom of God. It also has a tendency to place science and religion in opposition to one another. To the extent that this secular culture is reflected in the Church, the Church risks losing its authentic voice.
- That all of us will proceed with ‘business as usual’ – not refocusing our lives on Christ – and not zealously witnessing to the Gospel in North America;
- Looking inward in our parishes and dioceses, and forgetting to witness in outreach to those around us. Allowing ourselves to be disheartened and discouraged by this otherwise a healthy review process and forgetting to repent of, our sins and failures.

TOP LEVEL GOALS AND INTERMEDIATE STEPS FOR ATTAINING THEM

Fully recognizing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as given above, what should the Orthodox Church in America's major goals be in the coming decade? Given its commitment to bringing the Gospel to all the people of North America, its overarching goal should be on witnessing to the Gospel at all levels – within the local community, in the greater Church, and in the world – and providing the resources to do so. Within that overarching goal, we have identified ten top level goals and some of the intermediate steps to attaining them. These are summarized below. A more detailed description is given in the Appendix to this plan. These top level goals and intermediate steps will be further refined based on the inputs we receive leading up to and through the 16th All American Council in November of 2011. Many of the specific action steps would be tailored to the specific needs, talents and resources of individual parishes, deaneries and dioceses.

WITNESSING TO THE KINGDOM – WITHIN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Goal 1: Develop Christ-centered, Healthy and Growing Parishes

It is in the parish, here in the celebration of the Eucharist that we become the Body of Christ and are equipped with all that is necessary to work out our own personal salvation, in and through Christ, and to bring this salvation to the world. Much work has already been done by the Departments of the Orthodox Church in America on making healthy parishes healthier and on renewing ailing parishes. Available Orthodox Church in America materials include handbooks, best practices, studies of past All American Councils, and the outcomes of the 2010 Orthodox Church in America Parish Ministries Conference.

Several models for parish growth and development have been developed, including the Parish Renewal model used by the Diocese of the Mid-West (<http://www.midwestdiocese.org/parishhealth.html>) and the Natural Church Development model (<http://ncdnet.blogs.com/encdine/2008/05/natural-church.html>). Both these models have criteria for evaluating the health of your parish and for identifying steps to make it healthier. Before any truly effective actions plans can be developed, a parish must be willing to undertake an honest evaluation of their current parish life and be willing to change even though this will be hard and painful. Our Church leadership must provide active support for this change, including: training

priests and laypeople in turnaround ministry; providing regional resources for coaching priests and parishes through a program of renewal and change; recognizing the need to close parishes and transfer their priests when truly necessary; and holding priests and parishes accountable in their efforts to strengthen their communities.

Some representative objectives and action steps in building healthier parishes are given below. Each parish's circumstance should dictate specific actions to be taken.

Objective 1: Commit ourselves to a Gospel-centered vision in our parishes.

- Build on the biblical studies of parish vision (13th All American Council Study by Fr. Thomas Hopko). We are the “living stones” (1Pt. 2:4-8) being built into a spiritual house to be a royal priesthood.

Objective 2: Celebrate vibrant worship.

- Educate and train people in the: “Liturgical Arts”: music, reading, rubrics, the “why” of worship.
- Develop turnaround ministry teams (clergy and laity) available to stay at parishes in severe decline and rebuild internal ministries (choir directors/cantors, etc.) or to serve as “visiting advisors”

Objective 3: Provide tools to help with parish development and revitalization.

- Dioceses and/or the Orthodox Church in America should agree on an inventory and improvement model and provide the necessary training.
- Regularly offer Parish Health Conferences similar to the Orthodox Church in America Parish Ministries Conference.
- Provide training for facilitators who can assist parishes in intentional efforts to strengthen their life in Christ; and identify a few ‘lighthouse parishes’ (examples of positive turnaround) that provide hope and confidence for others.

Objective 3: Provide opportunities for the development of lay leadership.

- Identify gifted individuals through planned lay development activities and utilize them in parish, Diocesan and Central Administration leadership roles.
- The identified individuals can prepare short videos for the Orthodox Church in America website, focusing on topics in their area of expertise or they can serve as trainers, experienced consultants and visiting advisors.

Objective 4: Develop a sense of authentic community.

- Part of a parish's self understanding is its own history. Tell the story of the parish and the Orthodox Church in America through oral histories: how those raised in the Church

have made the faith their own and how those who have converted to Orthodoxy have made their journey.

Objective 5: Support personal and family formation.

- Much of Christian formation occurs in the home, ‘the little church’ (St. John Chrysostom). Support this formation through developing appropriate materials (e.g. revised version of *The Orthodox Faith Series*, with workbook, audio-book, and vital shorts in You Tube format to be available by the end of 2012).
- Organize and sponsor local/regional Orthodox Family Formation conferences, targeting three conferences in 2012 and seven conferences in 2013.

Objective 6: Active Service to Others.

- Reach out to help those most in the need in the community: visit the sick, feed the hungry, and clothe the naked (Mt. 25).
- Many parishes are already successfully engaged in community activities. The Central Administration should inventory these efforts and develop a “best practices” set of approaches.
- Provide for/seek internal or external grants for seed money for projects.
- Partner mission parishes with older parishes.

Goal 2: Revitalize our Diocesan-Parish Relationships

The Fathers’ vision of the Church is a bishop surrounded by his clergy and his people, united in Christ, and ministering to the particular needs of a given geographical area. This assumes and requires an intimate relationship between the bishop, his clergy and the people. All too often, the ‘demands of the day’ and geographical distances, have led to less than desired interactions and parishes and their clergy can develop a sense of isolation, of being on their own. To overcome this, we recommend much more frequent interaction at all levels – clergy-to-clergy and bishop-clergy-lay – both through simple fellowship gatherings around the Altar table and through participation in diocesan level outreach ministries.

The Orthodox Church in America’s efforts in this area in the past has been mixed. Clergy brotherhood meetings have proven to be very successful in a number of dioceses, with the degree of success dependent upon the support of the Hierarch. Orthodox Church in America Departments provide support and resources to priests, but the effectiveness of these programs alone at avoiding burnout and alienation is questionable. Visits from diocesan bishops are always welcomed by parishioners – but tend to be more formal and so are met with some amount of trepidation and anxiety. Most outreach ministries appear to be initiated by the parish itself and not at the diocesan level.

Some key objectives and action steps that might further contribute to revitalize diocesan-parish relationships include:

Objective 1: Re-energize the clergy brotherhood. (*Holy Synod of Bishops and individual diocesan hierarch, 2012 and ongoing*)

- Establish the need for ongoing face to face gathering of clergy (beyond the formal meetings) as a fundamental principle of diocesan life. Every effort should be made to make these gatherings a joy to attend.
- Include clergy wives and families in social gatherings and retreats.
- Have diocesan chancellors and deans formalize a clergy mentoring network of individuals with special counseling skills.
- Begin ‘twinning’ parishes with similar issues and opportunities, as well as twinning new parishes with mature parishes.
- Establish a mutually supportive environment in which clergy are eager to help each other.

Objective 2: Improve bishop-clergy-laity relationships. (*Diocesan hierarchs in cooperation with deans, rectors and parish council presidents, 2012 and on-going*).

- Establish the development of a closer relationship of trust between bishop, clergy and laity as a fundamental principle of diocesan life.
- Diocesan hierarchs should consider less formal hierarchical parish visitations, spending a weekend or a few days mid-week with a parish, without extensive preparations and fanfare, including family picnics during the summer.
- Meetings that deal with normal administrative concerns (e.g. Diocesan Assembly or Diocesan Council meetings) should not count as substitutes for spiritual and human gatherings of clergy.
- There is a need to break down the barriers with mutual exchange of churchly concerns. These relationships can be further strengthened through joint service projects and through deanery/diocesan gatherings of special ministries.

Objective 3: Develop diocesan-level outreach ministries. (*Parish priests in collaboration with the Department of Institutional Ministry, Office of Chaplains, and Department of Christian Service and Humanitarian Aid, 2012 and ongoing*)

- Seek to incorporate lay people into pastoral visitations (e.g. homes, hospitals, hospices, end-of-life vigil, etc.). The parish priest plays a central role in this – but can be aided by the Compassion-in-Action ministry model being developed by the Central Administration and by the experience of our institutional and military chaplains. Clergy and lay working together to personally reach out on an individual basis to those in need will both strengthen the clergy-lay bond and transform both the care-giver and receiver.

- In parallel, diocese may want to consider establishing one or more ‘grass-roots’ diocesan ministry networks to: (1) grow grass-roots projects, starting with small simple ministries and building upon success to address more complex ministries and (2) to consider establishing a major pioneer project as a model for others (e.g., housing for the elderly using federal grant funds). To aid in these matters, the Department of Christian Service and Humanitarian Aid should update and re-publicize the Orthodox Church in America’s Resource Handbook with a target re-release date of Spring 2012.

Goal # 3: More Fully Involve Our High School and College Age Members in the Life of the Church

If we want our young people to continue to grow in their faith, then we have to do a better job in connecting Christ and His Church to all aspects of their lives. They need a place where they can experience community and be with somebody who loves them. The Church needs to better address the contemporary cultural and moral issues they encounter, to challenge them to change the world in the name of Christ and to provide opportunities for them to socialize and bond with Orthodox of their own age.

In accomplishing this, our model should be one of building relationships between the youth and our Lord, the Church (including the Saints and the clergy and laity in their own parishes), other Orthodox youth, and their ‘neighbors’ as Christ defines them. These relationships are built through worship/prayer, fellowship, education and service. It is these four elements that lead to true Christian witness. Events are held (and need to be held) to develop these relationships. They need to be held regularly and they need to allow adequate time for people to interact so that these relationships can develop and deepen as time goes by.

From 1994-2005, the Orthodox Church in America had a full time Youth Minister, developed age appropriate discussion guides on a variety of topics, and had plans to bring youth together through regional, diocesan and Church-wide gatherings. Currently, the Department of Youth, Young Adults and Campus Ministries is headed by a part-time Youth Minister. Many important resources already exist, including a good selection of pan-Orthodox study materials, a number of successful Orthodox summer camps, and the expansion of OCF campus ministries to more than 300 campuses. The single biggest remaining need is the engagement and training of youth workers in creating youth welcoming environments and in talking with and relating to our youth in terms and context they understand. We also need to do a better job of identifying the real needs of our youth and not just projecting what they need. Once identified, these needs should be matched against available resources and any gaps filled. We also need to reinstitute national

and/or regional youth gatherings. Accomplishing all of these objectives will require a full time Youth Minister.

Some goals that can help us more fully integrate our high school and college age members into the life of the Church include:

Objective 1: Better engagement and training of youth workers. *(Training materials will be developed at the central administration level - Department of Youth, Young Adult and Campus Ministry – with inputs from diocesan youth leaders; dioceses will customize, deploy and apply this training locally, 2012-2014)*

- Develop training in creating age appropriate environments and communications, including role playing exercises.
- Make this training available through a variety of means (web-postings, You-Tube videos, and webinars) for dioceses to customize to their own use.
- Develop a Youth Workers Coaching Team.
- Develop the written training materials by Dec. 2012; develop and pilot test videos, webinars, etc. it at least two dioceses by Jun. 2013; deploy these to/with/through all dioceses by Jun 2014.

Objective 2: Make available the needed subject material resources. *(Department of Youth, Young Adult and Campus Ministry will lead the development of the resources; dioceses and local parishes will tailor the model curricula to their particular needs, 2012-2013)*

- Identify the real needs of youth by asking them directly through inputs from parish youth groups and through the Orthodox Church in America Facebook page (2012).
- Develop, pilot test, and make available model curricula for addressing these needs (2013).

Objective 3: Implement periodic Church-wide youth gathering. *(Department of Youth, Young Adult and Campus Ministr, 2012 and on-going)*

- Target the first such gathering for the summer of 2012, while taking care to deconflict this with summer camps and other activities.
- The periodicity of follow-on gatherings is yet to be worked out.

Objective 4: Encourage ministering to college student. *(All levels, 2012 and on going)*

- The Central Administration should actively support the Orthodox Christian Fellowship, providing its share of the financial costs.
- Diocesan bishops should encourage their priests to participate in, or establish, Orthodox Christian Fellowships.
- Priests should help their college-bound students ‘plug into’ a parish near their college and should reach out to college students in their area.

Objective 5: Reinstitute a full-time, paid, Orthodox Church in America Youth Director.

(Central Administration, 2012)

- Provide funding for a full time Orthodox Church in America Youth Director to work closely with diocesan youth directors in meeting the above needs.
- Provide travel funding for the diocesan Youth Directors to bring them together in meeting at least once per year.

WITNESS TO THE KINGDOM – IN THE ‘GREATER’ CHURCH

Goal # 4: Improve the leadership and management skills at all levels in the Church

Leadership and management skills are critical to the good stewardship of the household of the Church be it a bishop leading his diocese, a priest his parish, or a lay person his or her particular ministry. While some individuals may possess these skills in both innate and learned capacities, most would benefit from access to various processes, tools, and training materials.

There actually exists a wealth of leadership and management training materials, courses and efforts within the Chancery, its dioceses and seminaries – as well as in other Orthodox jurisdictions and other Christian and non-Christian institutions. However there is no consistency in the offerings of training and resources across the Orthodox Church in America. In addition, criticism of past efforts have included phrases like “too much theory, too little praxis”, “too corporate, we’re not a business”, “out of date fads”, and that these “practices are not modeled by those in authority”. There has also been positive feedback on certain aspects of leadership and management skills training in the Orthodox Church in America that we should capitalize on. These include: peer mentoring (e.g. between bishops, between priests, between lay leaders); parish assignments and internships for seminarians and the suggestion to offer similar ‘training experiences’ to future potential bishops, chancellors, abbots, deans, etc.; the desire for seminaries to be more regularly involved in the continuing education of *current* bishops, chancellors, priests, lay leaders, etc. and the desire to use existing gatherings of clergy and laity (e.g. deanery meetings, diocesan assemblies, All American Councils) for continuing education and training of clergy and laity.

After considering all these inputs, we propose the following objectives to improve leadership and management skills at all levels of the Church. We believe they will assist our leaders, from

bishops to lay leaders, in guiding our members, managing our Church life and presenting and realizing a unified and energized vision. The objectives as laid out are intended to be performed in a sequential order so that the information gathered at each step will lay the foundation for the steps that follow.

Objective 1: Define “leadership” and “management” terms within an Orthodox Christian context.

- Review the various definitions of leadership and management that exist, adopt one for each for our use so as to promote a common vocabulary.
- Adopt a list of skills that fall within each term of “leadership” and “management” that would be relevant to the Church life at each level, (i.e. Chancery, diocese, parish, hierarchs, clergy, and laity).

Objective 2: Assemble existing leadership and management skills training resources.

- Gather relevant training materials, exemplar processes and best practices from throughout the Orthodox Church in America, other Orthodox jurisdictions, other Christian institutions and universities, as appropriate.
- Compare these against the skill sets identified in Objective 1 and perform a gap analysis to determine if any additional materials need to be researched or developed.

Objective 3: Present a summary report to the Holy Synod for their approval and direction.

Objective 4: Develop an Orthodox Church in America leadership and management skills training plan.

- Select the most appropriate training materials, exemplar processes and best practices to be offered throughout the Orthodox Church in America.
- Develop materials where they are lacking.
- Determine appropriate delivery methods (e.g. in person training classes, online webinars or seminars) balancing cost effectiveness and educational benefit.
- Develop an assessment tool to help determine individual and group training needs and to assist in selection of appropriate training materials and methods.
- Create evaluation tools to gather feedback on the training and to assess skill level growth so as to assess the effectiveness of the program.
- Create a communication plan for sharing this throughout the Orthodox Church in America.

Objective 5: Seek the approval and direction of the Holy Synod.

Objective 6: Communicate and disseminate the training plan.

Goal 5: Establish a Common Vision for Theological Education for the Orthodox Church in America

Among the pressing concerns of our Church is the need to further the work of our theological seminaries. For our Church to face the challenges of preaching the Gospel in the lands of North America it must possess the guidance of excellent pastors and leaders who provide their leadership as wise and faithful stewards of Christ's holy flock. Our Church's seminary communities are given the honored task of training and forming those who dedicate their lives in this service. As we move through the next decade we can focus on several objectives that will help strengthen the lives of our Church's three seminary communities.

Objective 1: Develop a common vision of theological education for the Orthodox Church in America. (*Board of Theological Education, 2012*)

- Produce a working paper on a Common Vision for Theological Education for the Orthodox Church in America by January 2012 to be distributed to Members of the Holy Synod of Bishops and Administrators and Faculty of St. Tikhon's, St. Vladimir's, and St. Herman's Theological Seminaries.
- Organize and sponsor a conference of Hierarchs, Seminary Administrators, Trustees and Faculty to be held in March 2012 at (St. Tikhon's / St. Vladimir's) to discuss the subject of a common vision for theological education for the Orthodox Church in America.
- From the discussions of the conference, produce an initial draft of a Common Vision for Theological Education by May 2012.
- Distribute the initial draft of the common vision statement to Members of the Holy Synod and the Church's three seminary communities for comment, review and discussion by mid-May 2012.
- Having received feedback from all solicited bodies, produce a final draft of the vision statement by August 2012.
- Present the final draft of the vision statement to the Holy Synod of Bishops for consideration and approval at their Fall meeting in October 2012.
- Upon approval of Holy Synod of Bishops, in November 2012 publish and distribute to the broader Church the common vision statement.

Objective 2: Establish a set of hallmarks (i.e. foundational institutional characteristics) to be embodied in the seminary communities of the Orthodox Church in America, as well as a set of core competencies (i.e. a proficient ability or expertise in completing a task or serving

a particular function) to be embodied in our Church's seminary graduates. (*Board of Theological Education, 2013*)

- Develop a survey instrument by February 2013 focused on collecting data concerning the pastoral needs of dioceses and parishes of the Orthodox Church in America.
- Distribute the survey to dioceses and parishes by March 2013, and receive survey results by the end of May 2013.
- Develop a draft document of Seminary Hallmarks by June 2013 to be submitted to the Holy Synod of Bishops and the administrations of St. Tikhon's, St. Vladimir's, and St. Herman's Theological Seminaries for review, comment, and revision.
- Develop a draft document of Core Competencies by July 2013 to be submitted to the Holy Synod of Bishops and the administrations of St. Tikhon's, St. Vladimir's, and St. Herman's Seminaries for review, comment, and revision.
- Obtain revisions made by the Holy Synod of Bishops and suggestions and comments made by seminary communities by Sept 2013.
- Compose final drafts of Hallmarks of Seminary Communities and Core Competencies and submit them to the Holy Synod of Bishops for approval by Fall 2013.

Objective 3: In light of the common vision, hallmarks and competencies establish a comprehensive approach for seminary recruitment, funding and placement. (*Board of Theological Education, 2014*)

- By Jan 2014, establish a committee chaired by a member of the Holy Synod and composed of Seminary Deans and Development and Recruitment officers charged with developing a comprehensive plan for recruitment, funding, and placement.
- By June 2014, establish a comprehensive plan for recruitment, placement, and development.

Objective 4: Develop a fully supported seminary internship program for the Orthodox Church in America. (*Board of Theological Education, Metropolitan, and Central Administration, 2012-2014*)

- Propose a seminary internship program as a Church-wide Initiative at the All-American Council in November 2011. (*Board of Theological Education*)
- Delegate by January 2012 a member of the Central Administration to oversee the initial development of the seminary internship program. (*Metropolitan*)
- Develop a funding drive by February 2012 focused on gathering wide-spread support for the seminary internship program. (*Central Administration*)
- Develop by May 2012 clear guidelines for the operation of the seminary internship program as well as guidelines for internship integration and assessment. (*Board of Theological Education*)
- Commence with the seminary internship program in June of 2012. (*Central Administration*)

- Develop a public relations campaign in the Fall of 2012 focused on reporting the experiences and contributions of internship participants to various parish communities throughout the Orthodox Church in America. (*Central Administration*)
- Develop a second funding campaign by January 2013 focused on increasing support for the internship program. (*Central Administration*)
- Continue the yearly process described above for 2013 and 2014.

Goal # 6: Provide for Continuing Education of Clergy and Laity

Require and enable continuing education of our clergy: Our clergy would benefit greatly from the opportunity for continued spiritual growth and renewal and the chances to extend their pastoral skills. With the exception of military and institutional chaplains, present and past continuing education efforts are mostly ad-hoc in nature and depend upon the passion, will and continuing dedication of individuals. Unless this continuing education is required, it may get deferred by the many urgent daily cares. Curricula, courses and resources need to be developed or identified.

Some possible objectives that would enable this are:

Objective 1: Obtain a clear mandate from the Holy Synod to require and enable their clergy's continuing education. (*Holy Synod, Winter 2011 and ongoing*)

- Assess the pastoral characteristics that make a "Good Pastor".
- Assess educational and support needs of clergy during the "clergy life cycle".
- Include funding for continuing education in clergy compensation.
- Work to remove a culture of fear that often inhibits clergy from recognizing and expressing their own weaknesses and needs for continuing education and growth.

Objective 2: Create and fund an Office of Continuing Education that reports to the Holy Synod. (*Holy Synod, Winter of 2011 and on-going*)

- Develop continuing education programs for pastoral ministry at both the academic and practical levels.
- Evaluate existing and past local programs as possible models; develop new programs as needed/
- Work with seminaries on continuing education programs, especially distance education.
- Take the initiative in working with member Churches of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops for cost-effective sharing of resources.

Objective 3: Draw upon the experience of present and retired military chaplains in the area of pastoral ministry and continuing education thereof. (*Office of Continuing Education and Department of Military/VA Chaplaincies plus coordination with Institutional Chaplaincies, Spring, 2012*)

- Develop a data base of training qualifications that Chaplains have and link to various departments as needs for those skills arise.
- Encourage use of Chaplains to “train the trainers” on suicide prevention, alcohol and drug counseling and to conduct workshops on response to needs of military families and those affected by war (both military and non-military).

Objective 4: Draw upon the experience of other professions in the areas of design and delivery of professional continuing education. (*Office of Continuing Education, Spring 2012 and on-going*)

Equip lay people for ministries: The Church is full of untapped talent just waiting to be called to perform the work of Christ. We need to recognize that talent, define the job, provide the training, and empower the person to do the job. While the Orthodox Church in America Departments have significant information and training available in this area, they have been hampered by a lack of funding. Various conferences, retreats, and courses have been held, but no formal program exists to address these in an intentional way. Some possible objectives for better equipping our lay ministries include:

Objective 5: Establish diocesan-based ministry boards that would facilitate and support vital lay ministry work at all levels of Church life. (*Dioceses, on-going*)

Objective 6: Establish a formal system of networking among laity who have special qualifications. (*Department of Christian Witness and Humanitarian Aid and Diocesan Lay Ministry Boards, ongoing*)

Objective 7: Develop a syllabus for continuing education of laity which draws on the experiences contained in the Resource Handbook and the Ministry Conferences. (*Office of Continuing Education, Spring 2012*)

Provide cross-cultural training for all: We live in a land and times of many cultures: not just ethnic, but young and old, poor and rich. Before we can effectively minister to them, we need to understand them ‘where they are’ and be sympathetic and responsive to their issues and problems, just as our early missionaries did with native Alaskans. Possible objectives include:

Objective 8: Develop a general, introductory, cross training workshop. (*Office of Continuing Education, Fall 2012*)

Objective 9: Encourage “pioneer” efforts at understanding and ministering to different cultures (e.g. youth, Hispanics, African-American, elderly). (*Office of Continuing Education in conjunction with other Departments, on-going*).

- Work with existing pioneers, e.g. OCF, Mexico, Fr. Berry, Fr. Oleksa, et. al.
- Develop necessary infrastructure: literature, translations, guides to cross cultural understanding.

Goal #7: Nurture strong inter-Orthodox relations

STILL UNDER DEVELOPMENT

Goal # 8: Transition to a sounder way of funding the Church

The growth of the Church at all levels can only happen with adequate funding. Adequate funding can only be possible through continued prayer and effort for the development of tithing and proportional giving. The underlying biblical principle is clear: those who have been blessed with more should give more. The Church’s ideal model still remains the ‘widow’s mite’ (Mk. X12.42). The Orthodox Church in America has been working on this transition for more than a decade now, with three All American Councils – the 12th (Pittsburgh, 1999), the 13th (Orlando, 2002) and the 14th (Toronto, 2005) – devoting a significant part of their time to taking the first major step on the road to proportionate giving – so called ‘fair share’ giving in which each diocese is responsible for a pro-rated portion of the central Church’s budget. As part of this transition, the Orthodox Church in America has committed to keeping its core budget level for the near future approximately constant at about \$2.7M per year. Most of this core budget is spent on administrative expenses: salaries of the Metropolitan, officers and staff; upkeep of property; legal and other administrative expenses; external affairs and travel. Less than 10% is spent on the outreach ministries of the Church. Until recently, a significant portion of the budget for outreach ministries has come from the Fellowship of Orthodox Stewards (FOS), which was started in 1980 explicitly to fund outreach ministries. By the year 2000, FOS was providing

roughly \$300,000 per year to support these ministries – but with the recent financial troubles, this figure has fallen dramatically.

Therefore if we are to reach out even more in bringing Orthodoxy to all of North America and in caring for our needy brothers and sisters, we need to continue on the path toward sounder ways of providing adequate funding for the Church. To that end, we recommend two major objectives:

Objective 1: Continue the transition towards tithing and proportional giving at all levels of the Church. (*Ad-hoc Committee on Finance in coordination with diocesan officers; 2012-20XX*)

The majority of diocesan leaders appear supportive of this transition in principle – but each diocese finds itself in a different set of circumstances and has a different timescale for making the transition. Some recommended actions are:

- Have diocesan hierarchs affirm a transition to proportionate giving as a goal and to develop a plan and timescale for their particular diocese to make that transition.
- Freeze the diocesan contributions to the central administration budget at their current levels for XX years, so as to allow each diocese to make the transition over to proportionate giving on their own timescale but no later than 20XX.

Objective 2: Pursue other sources of funding for more fully funding the outreach ministries of the Church and other Church needs. (*Financial Development Committee, 2012 and on-going*)

- Articulate a compelling vision and plan for outreach ministries of which hopefully this Strategic Plan is a major step. (*Strategic Planning Committee with Church-wide input*)
- Seek a resolution from the 16th All American Council calling on the Orthodox Church in America to actively pursue additional funding sources for supporting these ministries. Possible funding sources include a reinvigorated Fellowship of Orthodox Stewards program, a major donors program and the creation and funding of a matching grants program – that might provide ‘matching fund’ for particularly compelling parish and diocesan outreach efforts. (*16th All American Council, Nov., 2011*)
- Develop and implement a plan to pursue these new funding sources. (*Financial Development Committee*)

WITNESSING TO THE KINGDOM – IN THE WORLD

Goal # 9: Better equip our Church for the ministry of Evangelization

In His Great Commission, Christ directs us to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:19-20). The Orthodox Church stands at an unprecedented opportunity for doing such evangelization. After centuries of oppression, persecution, and destruction from non-Orthodox ideologies, the Orthodox Church has struggled and survived as one church worldwide to continue as a viable Christian witness in the world today. In fact, Protestants/Evangelicals are publishing articles asking “Will the 21st century be the Orthodox Century?” (Christianity Today 12/2006).

But are we prepared to carry out this mission? From 1980 to 2000 the Orthodox Church in America’s population declined 6-9%, while the U.S. population increased by 24%. From 2000 to now, the Orthodox Church in America has experienced growth from Protestant and Catholic converts – so that in 2006 the majority of the students at St. Tikhon’s were converts to Orthodoxy. There is growth in the Church, but it is mainly of believers from other traditions and as a result of the sovereign work of God, without much Orthodox effort. What can we do to better equip the Orthodox Church in America in order that we can be faithful to our sacred evangelistic tradition of bringing Christ to all?

Some objectives for better equipping the clergy and the faithful for the work of evangelization are:

Objective 1: Make evangelization a priority.

- Seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit.
- Church leaders should identify those with an evangelistic calling and gift and use them to empower and equip others.
- Include evangelism training in the seminaries.
- Identify and train the laity for witness and evangelization.

Objective 2: Hold annual Holy Spirit Orthodox Conferences (Evangelism):

- Since the Holy Spirit is key to evangelism, hold an annual conference in each diocese of the Orthodox Church in America with various speakers emphasizing inspiration, information, individual prayer and ministry.

Objective 3: Hold evangelism/mission seminars in seminaries.

- Host annual/bi-annual seminars at each Orthodox seminary for students and clergy with both Orthodox and non-Orthodox specialists in evangelism and missionary outreach.

Objective 4: Actively participate in the missionary activities of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center.

- Encourage teams of clergy and laity to travel to foreign and domestic places to attend evangelism conferences and to participate in actual hands-on mission outreach.

One important element of this call for evangelization is the planting of new missions and communities in North America. Numerous past All American Councils have addressed The Church as Mission (1975), Church Growth (1983), Evangelization (1986), The Parish Community (2002) and part of “Our Future and Church” (2005) focused on the “Evangelizing of North America”. Between 1990 and 2000 the Orthodox Church in America opened 44 new missions. From 2000 to 2010 it opened over 50 additional new missions. One of the most successful programs within the Orthodox Church in America over the past 15 years has been the Church Planting Grant program. Many of these missions and parishes are among the more vibrant and flourishing churches within the Orthodox Church in America. In its earliest years the program funded as many as 5 or 6 new mission plants at a time. With recent events within the Church and the subsequent lack of funding this has decreased to a low of one mission in 2010. Presently four missions are being funded. But perhaps even more important than this lack of funding, is a lack of Episcopal oversight and local involvement, whether from the local dean, an assigned mentor, or local established parishes sponsoring new missions.

Some possible objectives for achieving a more robust and vibrant mission planting effort are:

Objective 5: The dioceses and/or Orthodox Church in America need to make a commitment.

- Establish clear cut goals, e.g. the establishment of mission and parish churches in all metropolitan areas of 300,000 or more in the U.S. and Canada.
- Provide a budget over the next ten years to address this that includes increasing Church Planting Grants to a minimum of 10 per year.
- In conjunction with the seminaries, provide regular training and oversight for grant recipients.

Objective 6: Reorganize Mission Planting within the Orthodox Church in America's Department of Evangelization.

- Identify proven mission planters from each diocese to work with the department to share information, experience, and organize mission plants.

Objective 7: Identify the top 100 prospective new locations.

- Help those responsible for missions at the diocesan level to identify the top 100 prospective new locations for missions and develop plans to reach them.

Objective 8: Rethink policies for forming and funding mission plants.

- As long as organization and funding comes mainly from the Orthodox Church in America's central administration, there will not be an effective and cohesive church planting effort throughout the Orthodox Church in America. Emphasis needs to be put on local organizations and funding. With local funding comes accountability.

Objective 9: Work with the seminaries to identify promising mission planters.

- Shift emphasis from mission priests to mission planting teams including priests, choir directors, catechists, etc.
- Coordinate amongst the seminaries and the dioceses to find the best placement for these mission planters.
- establish a mission planting program which would provide on-going and continuing education for mission planters.

Goal #10: Address contemporary cultural/moral/social issues:

As Orthodox Christians, we are called to reflect our life in Christ in how we reach out to the world around us. The society around us is confronted by a multitude of issues including beginning and end of life issues; social justice issues involving poverty and the growing inequality between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'; the understanding and role of human sexuality; the belief that all values are relative, protection of the environment, and many more issues. One important way of witnessing to Christ is by how we bring our faith to address such current issues – not only what we teach but what we actually do as Orthodox Christians. To that end, this goal initially picks a small number of these big social issues and proposes some concrete actions than we can take. With time, we will expand the number of issues to be addressed – but for now, we start with two: the sacredness of life; and, social justice.

Cultivate a ‘sacredness of life’ culture in the Church and in the world by witness of the Church: all of life – from the moment of our conception to our falling asleep in the Lord -- is a gift from God and, as such, is beautiful and sacred. The Church has taken some significant steps to witness to this truth – including position papers; designation of Sanctity of Life Sunday and the associated March for Life; and the formation of organizations to deal with the tragedy of abortions, to provide meaningful alternatives to abortions; and to help counsel and support abortion survivors. Possible next steps include:

Objective 1: Develop a collection of prayers for use at appropriate services and in our personal lives.

Objective 2: Encourage and support those who are doing sacredness of life work.

Organizations such as Zoe for Life, Martha and Mary House, Orthodox Christians for Life, and crisis pregnancy centers are addressing the tragedy of abortion, providing meaningful alternatives, and supporting the survivors of abortion. We need to use appropriate venues to make these groups known.

Objective 3: Compile resources for teachings on issues of bio-ethics. The goal here is to go beyond providing the resources to actually, albeit gradually, articulate a comprehensive authentically Orthodox vision of life. This project would lead to a means for people to ask questions and receive answers from trusted, qualified, representatives of our Church’s teachings.

Objective 4: Train personnel to educate and encourage witness to the Church’s teachings on moral issues. Provide conferences – both virtual and live – to reach out broadly.

Objective 5: Engage young people in the Church to participate in the development and achievement of objectives 1 through 4. Use their expertise in modern venues of communication.

Objective 6: Work with the OCA departments to identify additional resources on moral issues.

Address health disparities of Orthodox living in poverty here in North

America. Unknown to many of us, there are a significant number of Orthodox who are living in poverty, or in environmentally polluted areas, or are suffering from the lack of health care – and as a result are experiencing ‘health disparities’, poorer health than the ‘average North American’. To help address these disparities, we propose that the OCA develop a network of priests, physicians, social workers and public health professionals to evaluate and assist communities in need. Some possible objectives for accomplishing this include:

Objective 7: Develop and train a network of network of priests, physicians, social workers and public health professionals to provide a cohesive response to health and social needs of Orthodox suffering from health disparities. Encourage, support and build-on the efforts of the Orthodox Christian Association of Medicine, Psychology and Religion (OCAMPR) and the Parish Nursing Ministries that have arisen in a number of parishes.

Objective 8: Develop a health screening program model for local churches to implement. Suggested screening includes prostate cancer for men, breast cancer and ovarian cancer for women, and diabetes and heart disease. Screenings can be performed at health fairs or other community-based activities.

Objective 9: Establish programs to address alcoholism prevention and violence prevention.