

# **Parish Health Ministry**

## Summary Report

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2006 Diocesan Assembly  
Diocese of the Midwest  
Orthodox Church in America

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## Summary

Recent Diocesan Assemblies and All American Councils have devoted significant time and energy to the issue of improved parish health, vibrancy and vitality. In June 2006 the Diocesan Council, with the approval of Archbishop JOB, established a parish health ministry to be led by a parish health facilitator. Using existing diocesan surplus funds the position has funding for one year outside the normal Diocesan budget.

First step in implementing the ministry was to visit each of the Diocese's six deaneries to explain the ministry and receive input on priorities. Those visits occurred between July 24 and September 16, 2006.

This report summarizes what was learned during those visits. It proposes, for future discussion, some long range (5 years or longer) benchmarks/targets describing what a diocese with healthier parishes might look and feel like.

It also proposes an initial set of activities to be addressed by the Parish Health Ministry in the next year.

The following is a brief summary of currently proposed actions. The list is no doubt imperfect and will change somewhat as we better understand our limitations:

**(Items in standard type will hopefully provide useful "products/results" to parishes in 2007. Items in italics will result in a plans/definition of future activities.)**

Why	What	How
<b>Increase connectedness and sharing</b>		
	Parish Health E-newsletters	Written by parish health facilitator, published via email
	<i>Diocesan yellow pages (plan)</i>	<i>TBD</i>
	<b>Deanery Parish health related Retreats...schedule and execute at least 2</b>	Use outside experts to conduct the retreats
	<i>Develop plan (define content) for Diocesan Parish Health Conference</i>	<i>Discuss with OCA; develop budget; execute in 2007 or 2008</i>
<b>Parish Development</b>		
	Natural Church Development Methodology Lessons Learned	NCD Working Group (parishes involved in NCD method)
	Urban ministries practices definition	Urban Ministries Working Group
<b>Personal Development and Education</b>		
	Inquirers class	Volunteer committee to define, create in Power Point, peer review then publish
	<i>Lay Catechist – define plan</i>	<i>Lay catechist working group (volunteers) to define; receive approval publish findings</i>
	<i>Clergy Continuing Education – define plan</i>	<i>Interested Volunteers identify workable plan</i>
<b>Parish Administration</b>		
	Sexual Misconduct Policy Monitoring (Track status of policy implementation at parishes)	Identify lead parish and subject matter expert to describe maturity model identify contact in each parish Volunteers define and review
	Clergy Compensation Guide	Use existing diocesan council committee; perform survey ; propose policy and peer review by treasurers
	Financial Audit Manual	Find lead parish to develop; review by working group of Diocesan treasurers; publish

## Background

### ***Shrinking Numbers; Much Discussion; No Action***

The Diocese of the Midwest of the Orthodox Church in America is shrinking and has been for many years. Diocesan membership numbers are now 22% smaller than in 1998. Fifty one percent of diocesan parishes have declined by 15% or more in the last 10 years.

Five of the six deaneries are smaller. The only deanery that has shown growth is populated, for the most part, with relatively new parishes which serve large cities with a relatively limited selection of Orthodox parishes.

The numerical decline and its underlying root causes have been discussed throughout the OCA and the Diocese for many years. A history of those recent discussions can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Despite those discussions little new has been done by the Diocese to attempt to assist parishes to become more vibrant and healthy and, in the words from the theme of a recent All American Council, to *Live a Life in Christ*.

The diocesan budget has grown. The increased funds have been applied to shore up administrative needs of the diocese, to cover salaries and basic staff and to cover costs associated with diocesan properties. Nothing has been wasted or misspent. However until recently the primary investment the Diocese has made in its future has been the relatively robust budget support to mission parishes<sup>1</sup>. Overall the current budget applies less than 15% of funds toward activities that can help to strengthen parishes and parish life. As with many issues in the life of the Church we have been better at talking about the problem and the need than we have at taking action. (*"After all is said and done – more is said than done."*)

### ***A Response – a Work in Progress***

At its June meeting the Diocesan Council approved a plan for a Diocesan Parish Health Facilitator (PHF)— a person to lead a Diocese wide Parish Health Ministry. With the blessing of Archbishop JOB Joseph Kormos was asked to develop a plan for this ministry.

Part coordinator, part 'idea person', part manager, part "connector", part workshop leader, and even part cheer leader, the PHF position will clearly be a work in progress in its initial year. What it will also clearly be is "part time". Using surplus funds available due to delays in hiring previously authorized positions, the PHF position will be an eight day per month effort with funding available through the end of 2007. This will provide a reasonable and robust trial period for this ministry. The 2007 Diocesan Assembly will decide if this work is to continue via funding as part of the Diocesan assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> Over \$60,000 per year is spent on the Diocese' Mission efforts.

## Deanery Visits – Exhausting and Uplifting

As the first step in defining the Parish Health Ministry Joe Kormos was asked to visit each deanery prior to the Diocesan Assembly.

The meeting dates, attendance and additional stops made on this whirlwind tour are shown in [Appendix B](#).

Every meeting took on a different character based on the attendees, the venue and local needs and situations. The common thread between all meetings was a clearly positive and open reception to the parish health ministry concept.

*“Let’s try it. It won’t be perfect at first but if we work at it, it could be very valuable. If it doesn’t work then we can try some thing else,” was a prevailing opinion.*

[Appendix C](#) provides a thorough summary of meeting goals, what I expected to find, what I actually found and what I learned from these visits.

## Parish Health Ministry – A Five Year –or Longer-- Vision

My task after returning from the deanery tour was to select a starter set of activities for the first year of the parish health ministry.

In trying to do this I felt the need to describe some longer term vision for the parish health ministry. This vision could then provide the context for selecting the short term actions.

The following are some potential long term benchmarks for the diocese and the parish health ministry. They have not been broadly discussed so they surely will be imperfect. They are simply a starter list. They can, hopefully, be the start of dialogue about our diocese and the future.

I expect everyone can read this list and find something with which they agree. Likewise I’d expect most would find something important to be missing or even something with which to disagree. (“How can we *possibly* be talking about parish health without mentioning xyz.”) Some will find fault not with the individual planks of the list but with the overarching sense of the list.

Nonetheless here is an attempt to depict a future state for parish health ministry in the Diocese. Some these items speak about results. Others speak about activities. Together they attempt to draw a brighter, clearer picture.

### **A 5-10 year View...**

1. **Understanding of Parish Health** - As a Diocese we have developed a basic consensus about the root causes – both spiritual and pragmatic - of unhealthy Orthodox parishes, how to identify them and what approaches are most potent in addressing these issues.
2. **Diocesan Budget** - An increasing portion of the Diocesan budget is now dedicated to activities associated with building and enabling healthy parishes. The Diocese is investing in the future of its parishes.
3. **Parish Budgets** - An increasing portion of parish budgets is dedicated to ministries associated with parish health. (Outreach, charitable activities, education, training, worship, others). The number of parishes that include continuing education for clergy and other parish leaders in the parish budget has increased. More parishes are investing more of their resources in their future.
4. **Clergy Compensation Standards** - Clear standards for clergy compensation now exist and 85% of parishes meet those standards.

5. **Sexual Misconduct** – All communities have a functioning, effective, effort to comply with the sexual misconduct policy and 85% of all parishes in the Diocese will have achieved a maturity level score of 4 out of a possible 5.<sup>2</sup>
6. **Diocese as Parish Engine** - Parishes willingly look to the diocese as a source of information, training, encouragement and expertise. They expect and receive timely, useful assistance.
7. **Experience Sharing Conferences** – A parish health ministries conference is held in the Diocese every 2-3 years. Deaneries hold similar smaller scale retreats every other year. Learning and zeal from these events is shared throughout the Diocese.
8. **Parish Health Assessment** – An assessment methodology that demonstrates traction – gets parishes to focus on consistent, gradual change toward living a life in Christ has been defined. It now has a proven track record of results. A significant percentage of all parishes have completed this Parish Life/Health self Assessment and are committing to and taking appropriate developmental actions.
9. **Intervention team** – A team of priests/laity from within or outside the Diocese now exists and is capable of providing assistance to parishes in the framework of the above assessment.
10. **Parish Education** – Seventy-five percent of the parishes in the Diocese have now had their Church School (and/or Adult Education) program peer reviewed. Seventy-five percent of church school teachers have received at least some basic training and/or certification
11. **Certifications and On Going Development** – Educational activities for choir director training, church school teacher training, lay catechist training clergy continuing education and leadership development have been defined and implemented. As a result 20 choir directors have now received some training in the last three years and/or certification in Diocese/deanery based certification programs. Sixty-five percent of parish priests have participated in some sort of on going continuing education. Fifty laypersons have been certified as *trained lay catechists*.
12. **Tithing/Pledging** - Personal stewardship (financial) has increased by a meaningful amount. More parishioners in more parishes tithe. The number of parishes with pledge programs has increased. As a result of increased personal stewardship income from fund raising has decreased as a percentage of parish income. Larger portions of parish budgets are focused on outreach and charitable purposes.
13. **Worship** - More parishes with full liturgical cycle; greater participation in all liturgical services including feast days & vespers. More importantly an increasing number of parishes see worship to be at the parish's core, the essential mode of its self realization, and the foundational purpose for its existence and life.<sup>3</sup>
14. **Letting Light Shine** – Parishes are welcoming to all. Parish members are knowledgeable in their faith. They demonstrate a zeal for the Gospel of Jesus Christ and a willingness to share it with others. Parishes live a life in Christ. They are dedicated to being the one holy and apostolic church.
15. **Missions** –Five new missions have been started since October 2006. Five new missions have received parish status since October 2006. Gestation period for mission to parish conversions shows signs of decreasing.
16. **Census Figures/Parish data** – Diocese wide the average age of parish members is now staying the same or getting a bit younger. Fewer parishes are numerically declining than were declining in 2006. More parishes are increasing in size than are decreasing in size. The number of baptisms &

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<sup>2</sup> These "levels" are of course yet to be defined.

<sup>3</sup> Inspired and/or adapted from the study papers for the 13th All American Council written by Fr. Thomas Hopko

converts is increasing diocese wide and the ratio of baptisms + converts to burials is increasing from year to year.

17. **Others** – Add your recommendations here...

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_

## **A One Year Agenda – Parish Health Ministry**

Having drawn a longer range picture of where we might be heading we can now turn to the issue of specifics for the next year.

The deanery visits generated a long list (over 80 entries) of ideas that could be considered for activities of the parish health ministry. This list of suggestions can be found in [Appendix D](#).

### **So Many Items So Little Time**

Using the context of the admittedly initial and incomplete long range vision from the previous section, I built a list of items that seemed reasonable to tackle in the coming year. In doing so I also applied the following criteria:

#### ***Fit with Vision***

I gave priority to activities that seemed to address critical gaps between where we would want to be and where we are.

#### ***Multiple Activities***

I wanted to have a number of activities, many of modest size and scope. I didn't want us to put all our eggs in one basket. I also wanted to avoid the look and feel of a "silver bullet style" program often associated with efforts that focus on only one or two high profile efforts.

I also wanted to avoid having the parish health ministry fall over under its own weight. By focusing on many activities of moderate size, if the lineup of activities becomes too great for our ability to execute we can simply reduce the list a bit without putting the entire ministry in jeopardy.

#### ***Ease of Execution***

I particularly gave weight to items for which I had reason to expect I could find volunteers to assist, which seemed to be of a size and scope as to be achievable and or which I had some personal competency.

#### ***Impact On Many Parishes Not Just a Few***

We need a sort of poster child for this ministry -- a couple of parishes that have begun to achieve new vibrancy due to the encouragement and efforts of this ministry.

The best way to achieve that, it seems, is to concentrate our efforts on a relatively few parishes. But even that "focus approach" will take many months to bear fruit.

We all need to begin to build confidence that the efforts of this ministry can bear fruit. We will naturally be impatient – all of us. Soon we will ask ourselves "Is this really worthwhile?"

As a result I tried to select items that could impact multiple parishes if only in a small way in a relatively short time.

#### ***Connectedness***

As mentioned in the deanery visit summary in [Appendix C](#) a strong theme from the visits was a desire to build connectedness among parishes. I tried to give priority to items that seemed to do that.

**Balance**

We received all types of suggestions. In the end I selected three or four from a set of categories including *administrative issues*, *educational issues*, *parish development* and *connectedness and sharing*.

**“Products” vs. Plans**

Obviously we can’t spend all of our time on “planning”. That would achieve little or nothing. Likewise some items simply can’t be done without a bit of exploration to see if they are feasible and they will have value. We’ve tried to make sure there are enough items that deliver some form of “product” (“deliverable”) as soon as possible.

We’ve also mixed in a few tasks associated with “defining” and “exploring”. Hopefully these will provide a foundation for delivering additional useful results in the future.

**PROPOSED ACTION LIST – WHAT WILL WE DO**

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With that background here is starter list. It will change as we try to execute it.

**Connectedness and Sharing**

The following are proposed activities that are associated with building connectedness and sharing among parishes. They focus on communication, encouragement and building a hub for understanding needs, telling stories and transferring ideas.

**1. Parish Health E-Newsletter**

A parish health e-newsletter will be published and serve as the communications backbone of the ministry. The newsletter will augment the Vigil – covering content specifically focused on parish health activities. It will be delivered via email/web to clergy , parish council members and other lay leaders.

Content will focus on tips, ideas, encouragement and stories about parish health activities from sources inside and outside the Diocese.

The newsletter will serve to update parishes on the execution status of various activities/projects in the parish health ministry – keeping those projects in front of clergy and parish leaders.

We may develop special sections of the newsletter, or dedicate special issues of the newsletter, to various aspects of parish life such as education, worship, financial administration, outreach etc.

**One Year Target Outcome – 7 or more newsletters that a reasonable number of people/parishes actually read and find valuable.**

**2. Help Us Find...**

“We need to put together a small brochure about our parish. Do you know a good printer or graphics person?”

“We’re exploring an interior renovation project. We need a liturgical woodcarver, iconographer or architect? Do you know somebody?”

Answering these questions well will not cause parishes to become healthy or to grow. But they can lead to useful outcomes and save time.

We will explore a mechanism for helping parishes looking for help with xyz issue to connect with those who may have an answer. Part of this can be handled via the newsletter, others by trading phone numbers and following up phone calls. We’ll also examine a sort of diocesan yellow pages listing that could be available via the diocesan website.

**Target Out come – As yet unclear; perhaps a yellow pages style web page.**

**3. Deanery Retreats**

A workshop/retreat on a Parish Health related topic in at least two of our six deaneries. The parish health facilitator will work with each Deanery to design and

schedule the event. A set of potential topics is being developed. We may try to offer a common theme/topic for each. Most will use the services of subject matter experts as retreat leaders.

**Target Out come – At least two deanery retreats in next twelve months**

#### **4. Diocesan Parish Health Ministries Conference**

Web sites, conference calls and other tech based means for sharing and connecting among parishes can be useful and helpful. Eventually however people need to meet face to face. Deanery retreats (above) can bring people together in limited form to cover a specific topic. Perhaps, as in the case with the Antiochian and Greek Orthodox Archdioceses, an event of larger scope would also be valuable.

The OCA has held a parish ministries conference 2-3 times over the past ten years. However, the event has always been held at either St. Tikhon's or St. Vladimir's seminary. As a result the event is not particularly accessible to parishes in this Diocese and our attendance is minimal.

We will explore the potential content, costs and venues of such a conference as well as the benefits it could provide. If it seems useful a plan will be developed for same. Perhaps the conference can be conducted jointly with other jurisdictions and /or as part of the OCA conference.

**Target Outcome – This is a planning task. The outcome here is a definition of what a parish health ministries conference would like, what it might cost, how it might work etc. If it appears valuable and affordable we'll get it scheduled for the future.**

### **Parish Discernment and Development**

This section includes a couple of items that focus on help individual parishes to understand their strengths and weaknesses and develop internally.

#### **5. "Natural Church Development" Methodology Monitoring**

After all is said and done the job of making a parish healthier and more vibrant will fall to the parish itself.

One assist that the Diocese can provide is to offer a proven assessment tool. This tool should:

- offer a model defining a healthy Orthodox parish in America,
- provide a methodology for helping parishes to assess their strengths and weaknesses with respect to that model,
- deliver action templates to assist parishes to take appropriate action to apply their strengths more aggressively and to begin shoring up weaknesses and...
- offer outside facilitation to assist the parish to understand its key items and to remain on track.

The Natural Church Development methodology, while not specifically Orthodox, is being followed by 7-8 parishes in this Diocese. It is hoped that this approach, with some adjustments can become such a model/method. It is currently too early to tell.

In the coming year we will follow the progress of each parish's utilization of the NCD methodology closely. We will facilitate experience sharing, via conference calls, visits, email lists and web chats among the participating parishes. We will pull together a set of lessons learned and likes/dislikes about the activity. We will attempt to define the situations/environment in which NCD seems to have worked well and not so well, so that parishes can make more informed decisions as to whether this approach has merit in their situation. If appropriate we will push to expand or redirect the areas covered by NCD to more effectively reflect the issues faced by orthodox parishes in America.

**Target Outcome: A set of lessons learned about NCD. Within twelve months we will attempt to draw a conclusion as to the future usefulness of NCD as a model/methodology for developing healthier parishes. If it appears that it is not useful we'll work to outline an alternative. If it is, we will outline elements where the program can be further strengthened and made available to more parishes throughout the Diocese.**

#### **6. Urban Ministry Good Practices Definition or Handbook**

Parish health means different things in different parishes. The practices of a healthy suburban or rural parish may differ greatly from those of an urban/inner city parish.

The deanery visits discovered a particular need/interest among our many urban parishes to share what works and what doesn't and to identify next steps in their ministries.

An *urban parish ministry working group* will be created from the 8-12 urban parishes in the Diocese. A conference call will be held to explore if and how the group could fruitfully work together. Can some sort of document or product be created? (e.g. a set of principles and or good practices for Orthodox urban ministry) Is the utility of the group based on experience sharing or encouragement of one another's efforts? Can the parish health facilitator help this group in some way?

**Target Outcome: To be defined by the working group**

### **Personal Development and Education**

These items relate to education and personal development for laity and clergy.

#### **7. Inquirers Class**

Emerging from the deanery visits was a desire for a standard inquirers class for parishes to use to outline the basics of Orthodox Christianity to interested parties. The proposal is for this to be created in PowerPoint as a part of a 3-5 session (1 hour each) class.

We will facilitate the following: organize a work team to clearly define the requirements for these materials, design the content, create the content, incorporate it with graphics in PowerPoint and post it to the diocesan website for use by parishes. If necessary a script or speaker notes can be made available as well.

**Target Outcome – A professional looking multi-session, inquirers course rendered in Power Point available for download from the web. This will be version 1. Perfection is not the goal,**

#### **8. Lay Catechist**

In India trained lay catechists are used to leverage the priest's time and to provide a more accessible layperson's view of the church and its doctrine. Such an activity is, in a relatively unstructured manner, at work in a number of parishes in the Diocese.

The activities of this item will be to define the lay catechist concept. What do they do? When? What training should they receive/what competencies should they demonstrate. Should we define a layered system (lay catechist I, lay catechist II)? Certification?

If possible some prototype tests of the plan will be attempted.

**Target Outcome – A plan for implementing the lay catechist idea.**

#### **Other**

There are a variety of others activities that fit in this section that will be examined time permitting:

- Clergy Continuing Education
- Stewardship Workshop

- Leadership Development

### **Parish Administration**

This section includes a number of important items that are related to parish administration.

#### **9. Sexual Misconduct Policy Implementation Monitoring**

The implementation of the OCA's Sexual Misconduct policy within the Diocese is spotty at best. Many parishes are confused about the policy. Documentation of parish compliance with various aspects of the policy is not up to date.

Working closely with the Diocesan Center we will work to update Diocesan records concerning parish compliance with the policy.

We will seek and share stories of parishes that are well on the way to thorough implementation of the policy. How did they do it? How much time does it take? Why are they making the investment?

We will attempt to clarify the questions that parishes have about the policy and begin delivering answers.

Recognizing that all parishes are not going to move from their current state of implementation to a thorough, perfect application of the policy in a single step, a "maturity model" that defines step by step increasing maturity in implementing the policy will be defined and parish status tracked against it. (Level I, Level II, Level III etc.)

**Target Outcome – A definition of maturity stages, baseline data on implementation status and clear progress in implementation by parishes.**

#### **10. Updated Clergy Compensation Guide**

Parishes can't become healthy without motivated, educated clergy. Therefore it goes without saying that appropriate, fair compensation for clergy is a critical element of parish health. Current policies are unclear and generate more questions than they answer. It should come as no surprise that the policy is unevenly applied.

The Diocesan Council recently created a committee to explore this issue. A survey of current practice/compensation will be developed and status determined. Based on the results of that survey a new policy will be proposed. It will be reviewed by a set of parish treasurers, comments incorporated and the policy distributed within the Diocese.

**Target Outcome – An updated, improved, approved policy.**

#### **11. Financial Audit Manual**

The deanery visits identified a need for clear standards for how to conduct an audit of parish finances.

A manual will be created based on the work of 1-2 lead parishes. The manual will be reviewed by a team of parish treasurers. Once comments are incorporated the manual will be made available for use by all parishes via the Diocesan website.

**Target Outcome – A published, reviewed, approved manual.**

### **"HOWS" – HOW WILL WE DO IT?**

"This list is too long. How can we get all of this done?."

During the deanery visits we asked for advice on how to do the job of facilitating the Parish Health Ministry. We received a lot of that. And, it varied widely. The following three ideas are not mutually exclusive but they do express some of the wider variations in suggested approach.

- 'Joe, pick three things, that you can pretty much execute yourself, on your own, do them well and then publicize their availability.'

- 'Don't try to do it all yourself. That is ludicrous and limiting. If you're a facilitator then facilitate others. Coordinate volunteers.'
- 'Don't focus on "producing" anything at all. If you do that you'll simply be another diocesan staff person. The job of the parish health facilitator should be one of '*lay person at large*'. Be the '*chief encourager*'. We already have smart people. What we need is to keep encouraging good grass roots efforts. Maintain active contact (phone, email and even travel) with parishes. Really come to understand what they are struggling with. What their challenges are. Then connect them to others who can pray for their efforts – or provide assistance.'

All of these suggestions have merit. After thinking about them I'm going to try a bit of all of them. We'll also consider mixing in some of the following techniques:

- Lead deaneries -- perhaps contiguous groups of parishes (ala Deaneries) may develop some energy around parts of an activity above. They can work with me to help define and implement it. For example a deanery make be interested in taking some ownership of the lay catechist idea.
- Ministry teams/peer groups/working groups – In other cases we'll be trying to put together people with like interests or subject matter expertise to help move a project along.
- Travel to parishes, lots of phone contact – I'll try to keep moving.
- Conference calls and chat sessions – Covering great distances in person is tiring, time consuming and expensive. We'll need to use some technology.

## Your Role

So what can you do?

Some of you will prefer to sit back see if this will work. That's fine. Let me know if I'm bothering you.

Others will find something on the above lists that generates energy for you. You will want to contribute. *You are the people I need to find.*

Here are some things you can do:

1. *Pray* – Please pray for our efforts and the efforts of parishes throughout the Diocese.
2. *Participate in discussion of this ministry* – Either at the Diocesan Assembly or after by phone email or over coffee. We're far from set in stone so feedback continues to be welcome.

You can comment on the overall approach, my writing style, my haircut, the long range goals, the short term actions– anything. Just be nice and I'll try to do the same.

3. *Volunteer to be part of a working group.* Working groups will be formed in a number of areas: parish finances, webmasters, parishes involved in NCD, leadership, lay catechists, inquirers class. Just about any item on our activity list will need assistance. I don't know enough about any of these topics to complete them myself.
4. *Peer Reviewer* – if you don't want to or are unable to contribute to creating or "doing" you may be well suited to review materials and provide feedback.
5. *Communicate* - We won't sit back and wait for the story to find us. But we will need your help. Please take/return our phone calls. Send your bulletin – you may have an idea (or problem) that will resonate five states away.
6. *An Action Pledge* – As I mentioned above this ministry is not going to make parishes healthy – you are. One clear way to contribute is to have your parish commit to taking one parish health related action this year in your parish. *Don't* make it too hard – look for low hanging fruit. *Do* make it something that you believe can be achieved and that will build a "we can do it" feeling.

7. *Make a Contribution* – Excluding stipends, our budget for executing the above is \$10,000. Perhaps a few parishes can pledge additional financial support. We won't waste it. We will put it to good use.

*Wish List - I would like to have say \$5000 to make available for grants to parishes that desire to try a new ministry but are financially strapped. If 4-5 parishes committed \$1000 we could put that in our toolbox this year.*

8. *Ask for Help* - Let us know what you need. Can we, together, define the real issues that are limiting your parish in living a life in Christ? Perhaps we can find some assistance or encouragement. We can certainly ask others to pray for your well thought out need.

## Evaluating This Ministry

Funding for this ministry is available through the end of 2007. At that point we, as a Diocese, will need to decide if we desire to continue to fund this ministry as part of our operating budget via the assessment.

How will we make that decision? What criteria and standards will we use?

My suggestion is that we use the following standards to evaluate whether this ministry is working for us or not:

- Are we able to do what we say we are going to do? (Do we have a reasonable batting average on getting things done? Or, is it mostly talk (and documents) but few tangible outputs/outcomes?)
- Are the things we get done actually valuable to parishes? Does it help them to live a life in Christ by saving time, doing new things, educating parishioners, identifying key obstacles to parish health?
- Have parishes – clergy and laity – developed a feeling of connectedness to one another and to the Diocese as a whole? Is that worthwhile? Is it likely to “payoff” in the long run? Is that an inherent part of being a Christian?
- Are people participating? How many persons/parishes have made some form of contribution to the body of effort in this ministry? Is that contribution likely to be sustainable or grow? Or, do they feel their efforts are not being utilized or making an impact? Is momentum building or waning? Are we tired of this?
- Are the funds that would be needed to support this ministry better spent somewhere else? On some other need? Like what?
- Is this ministry making a difference in proportion to its cost?

## Appendix A : Parish Health Ministry : Background

The following is a brief summary in outline form of the events issues and discussions leading to the Parish Health Facilitator Ministry within the Diocese of the Midwest.

### 2002 Orlando AAC: “The Parish Community: Our Life in Christ”

- Council focuses on Parish Life/Health
- Fr. Hopko outlines 4 elements of a healthy parish. **Heart:** Liturgical Worship and Sacramental Service; **Soul:** Spiritual Life and Pastoral Care; **Mind:** Education and Enlightenment; **Strength:** Mission & Philanthropy
- Workshops explore multiple topics. (Worship driven parish; 21<sup>st</sup> century parish; Strategic Parish planning, Principles of Christian Leadership) In particular, leadership development training is expressed by many as a need at all levels of the church.
- Parish profile survey begins to develop baseline parish data and to explore the differences between growing and declining parishes.

### 2003 Diocesan Assembly

- Declining membership figures presented.
- Assembly adopts restructuring plan --- part of which calls for help to struggling parishes. No immediate action is taken at that time but seeds are planted.

### 2004 Diocesan Assembly

- Fr. Ivanoff presents Natural Church Development methodology.
- Assembly concludes with high energy discussion on what can be done for all parishes – not just missions. “We’re watching our parishes die”. No motions -- but a clear sense that the Assembly wants Diocesan Council to take action. DO something!

### Diocesan Council

- Diocesan Council holds workshops to brainstorm ideas.
- Seed of an idea emerges that we need an “ombudsman” to connect and push on the accelerator, help share ideas and build hope.

### Jan 2005 -- Mission Committee Formed

- Mission committee formed... discussions are stimulating and useful work is done.
- It seems to become apparent to the committee that... by *learning what works and what doesn't* and holding communities accountable for “giving back” when they receive grants the possibility of, slowly, improving parish health seems feasible.
- Efforts focusing on parish health expand. For example 5-6 diocesan parishes start to use Fr Ivanoff's NCD program but find no way to share experiences. ‘Couldn't this be more potent if we learn from one another?’

### July 2006 - Toronto AAC

- Second parish profile survey adds to parish health baseline data.

- Council adopts platform of key priorities of focus for the Church. One is to expand evangelization efforts. Another is to provide help to ailing parishes.
- Workshops surface numerous needs. In the workshop I ran, attendees could be described as passionate about a number of ideas – improved communication/sharing among parishes being near the top.

#### **2005-06 Diocesan Council**

- Further discussions. Realization that “driving” parish health can’t be the job of the Archbishop or the Chancellor since they have other roles... limited time... the tone/skills of some of this activity may not fit their office.
- Diocesan council endorses parish health facilitator position with first step to be a needs assessment.

## Appendix B Deanery Visit Attendance Summary

The following summarizes the deanery visits and stops made.

Deanery/ Date Place	Number of Parishes / Missions in Deanery	# Parishes Represented by Priest <sup>4</sup>	# Parishes represented by Laity	# Parishes not represente d at all	Total # of Attendees
<b>Michigan</b> Monday July 24 Holy Transfiguration, Livonia, MI	6	4 (+1 Deacon)	3	0	15
<b>Columbus,</b> Tuesday Aug. 1 Camp Riverdale, IN	10	5	0	5	5
<b>Chicago</b> Monday Aug 21 Sts Peter & Paul Burr Ridge IL	18	12 rectors + 2 attached priests	1	6	20
<b>Minneapolis<sup>5</sup></b> Wednesday PM September 6 St Mary's Cathedral Minneapolis MN	16	6 rectors + 2 attached priests	7	6	20 <sup>6</sup>
<b>Kansas City</b> Saturday September 9 Holy Trinity Overland Park KS	6	4	3	1	25 <sup>7</sup>
Kansas City ( <b>St Louis</b> area parishes) Monday PM September 11 Nativity of the Virgin Mary, Madison IL	6	5	3	1 (chapel)	16
<b>Cleveland</b> Saturday, September 16 Archangel Michael Broadview Hts.	14	9	9	4	49
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>150</b>

In addition to the Deanery meetings stops or extended visits, sometimes for worship, were also made at:

- St Elizabeth, Chesterton IN, Vespers
- Protection of Holy Virgin, Merrillville IN, Divine Liturgy
- Holy Trinity St Paul MN; Church tour
- St Nicholas Mission, Pella IA; Festal Divine Liturgy
- Archangels Michael & Gabriel Mission Omaha NE; Church tour
- St John of Kronstadt, Lincoln NE: Vespers, discussion
- Holy Trinity, Overland Park KS: vespers, Divine Liturgy
- Archangel Michael, St Louis MO, Church tour

<sup>4</sup> In some cases these numbers include parishes where I made a special visit – though they were not at the actual Deanery meeting.

<sup>6</sup> Includes 6 attendees at special meeting in Pella IA

<sup>7</sup> Includes 8 attendees at a special meeting in Lincoln NE

## Appendix C Deanery Visit Summary – What I Learned

### MEETING GOALS

The stated goals of the meetings were to:

- Get acquainted -- put names with faces
- Explain the rationale behind the facilitator idea
- Allay potential concerns of intrusiveness on the part of the diocese.
- Collect grass roots/parish based suggestions what parish health activities/actions will be useful -- and which seemly effective ideas just won't work in reality.

### STARTING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT PARISH HEALTH AND THE PARISH HEALTH MINISTRY

Prior to my visits I had certain hypotheses as to what issues and obstacles Diocesan parishes faced associated with parish health. I also had certain assumptions about the obstacles related to defining and beginning the parish health ministry.

Here are some of them. Many were confirmed; a few were not.

What I Expected/ My Starting Assumptions	What I Found/Learned
<p><b><i>Herding Cats.</i></b></p> <p>Everybody has a different idea of what 'the problem' is, if there is a problem, and what should be done about it, if anything.</p> <p>Getting everyone to agree on how to view the current status of parish health will be virtually impossible. Even a clear majority is probably impossible. If a clear consensus were to emerge it would probably be around the least important issues. It is just not a simple subject.</p>	<p>Confirmed</p>
<p><b><i>Health Precedes Growth</i></b></p> <p>An important part of the reason we are embarking on this ministry as a Diocese is a clear dissatisfaction with growth (decline actually) in parish membership.</p> <p>My starting assumption, however, was that we couldn't and shouldn't focus on growth &amp; numbers alone or even primarily. Efforts to build up personal evangelization techniques, heighten awareness of the Orthodox faith, round up lost sheep and advertise parishes are all valuable and important. However, they will have little impact if parishes aren't focusing on living a life in Christ.</p> <p>In short bringing people in the door won't be that valuable if those same people don't experience Christ once inside.</p>	<p>I felt this assumption was confirmed. In a couple of instances I was asked why we weren't simply focusing on growth/evangelization related activities.</p> <p>Most seemed comfortable with the idea of internally strengthening parishes as job 1.</p>
<p><b><i>The Un-Program</i></b></p> <p>Another starting point was to avoid building "another program". We've had a variety of well meaning and occasionally well executed programs within the Orthodox Church in America.</p> <p>Nonetheless my sense was that we, as a Diocese, were not looking for a program. We couldn't have something where our hopes were pinned to a single activity – like a workshop or growth methodology. We needed instead to find a set of small baby step, "low hanging fruit" type items that could somehow get completed satisfactorily and give us the confidence to keep trying more things as we understood what we were capable of executing.</p>	<p>Strongly confirmed</p>
<p><b><i>Broad – Touch Many Parishes at Least in a Small Way</i></b></p> <p>Along with the above "baby steps" model I felt like we needed to be sure that the activities chosen for the ministry had the ability to impact numerous parishes – not just three or-four parishes that may sign –up</p>	<p>Confirmed. The ministry needs to quickly become evident to many.</p>

<p>for a parish renewal effort of some sort.</p>	
<p><b>Administration is "Part" of Health</b></p> <p>Many of the potential items on my starter list of activities for the ministry could be categorized as administrative actions. Do these truly qualify as activities to build parish health? Does a template for conducting a parish financial audit have the potential for delivering parish health?</p> <p>My starting conclusion was that these sorts of issues/activities were clearly in-bounds for this ministry. Administrative improvements in many parishes could deliver a feeling that the parish is well run, build parishioner confidence and save time for clergy and lay leaders. This time that could then be spent in other foundational areas of parish health.</p>	<p>This topic came up on a couple of occasions. When I explained the view that improved administration was/is a form of good stewardship and is necessary, though certainly not sufficient, to build a healthy parish I sensed clear agreement.</p>
<p><b>A Layman?</b></p> <p>I expected some might find it odd that this job was being handled by a lay person.</p>	<p>I sensed some concern about this in 1-2 instances.</p> <p>However, overall I also heard strong support of this being a lay role. A few said "this job is clearly better suited for a lay person."</p> <p>So probably a non-issue.</p>
<p><b>Intervention -- the "Parish Health Police"</b></p> <p>I anticipated some might feel like this ministry was somehow designed to intervene in parish life in a way that might be uncomfortable to the parish.</p>	<p>I tried to allay those concerns at each stop. As a result the issue didn't seem to be a factor.</p>
<p><b>Despondency</b></p> <p>Woe is us... we can't get anywhere. I sort of expected a feeling of despondency on the part of parishes... particularly those in decline.</p>	<p>What I actually sensed was zeal, a desire to take something good and make it better. I sensed that declining parishes, to the extent they were present at the meetings, were glad to see us trying and happy to be listened to.</p>
<p><b>Preoccupation with Matters Syosset</b></p> <p>I expected that I'd find an unwillingness to engage with this topic/ministry due to a pre-occupation with the Syosset affair. I thought some couldn't get past that issue.</p>	<p>This had an influence on one meeting to some degree.</p> <p>Overall I found no problem with people focusing on this ministry.</p> <p>In fact I had the sense that it provided a breath of fresh air for many.</p>

**WHAT I LEARNED**

A reasonable question would be that if so many starting assumptions were confirmed did I really learn anything new? The following is a brief summary:

**Many Ideas**

The most obvious learning is embodied in the master list shown in [appendix D](#). It contains over 80 suggestions. I particularly noticed that there were certain ideas/suggestions which I personally thought were bad ideas but which, when shared with subsequent groups, received strong endorsements!

**Connectedness – Anti-parochialism**

The most significant theme that I sensed was a desire for connectedness among persons and parishes in the Diocese. Certainly I planted the seeds for this with my opening comments about what the Parish Health Ministry might become. Nonetheless at almost every stop the idea of how parishes could become more effective and

zealous at living a life in Christ by sharing ideas, needs, joys, sorrows, practices and prayer requests was clearly evident.

This desire for connectedness also extended to wanting more communication from the Archbishop and the Diocesan Center.

### **Laity Want to Help**

We had successful meetings that were entirely clergy. We had successful sessions with a mix of both clergy and laity.

When laity were present the suggestions and discussions seemed to take on a different character. In some cases business/administrative suggestions abounded. In other cases laity offered the most fervent endorsements of what their parishes are trying to achieve and become. And, they were happy that somebody was interested and listening. They want to contribute as more than treasurers and church school teachers.

### **Your Parish is *Not* Typical**

I knew before I left that “every body is different”. Nonetheless it is worth noting the vast differences in facilities, sizes, backgrounds, and atmospheres among Diocesan parishes.

We have a natural tendency to think that our parish is typical. Trust me on this one. Even if your parish seems very similar to the nearest other parish it is not hard to find something very different not far away.

The opportunity for sharing and learning is significant.

The difficulties in building consensus are also significant.

### **(Virtual) Death Before Renewal**

An unspoken goal of the tour was to understand stories of how parishes turned themselves around --to right a sinking ship. These stories of “how you did it” could then be shared with others and serve as beacon to deliver encouragement and perhaps a roadmap for a turn around.

While those stories possibly exist they are few in number. In most instances when I discovered mature parishes that arrested their numerical decline and began to become healthy and grow again, I invariably heard the “backstory” that “this parish was basically dead”. In most instances that I became familiar with the parish didn’t really renew itself. It almost completely died before it was able to develop the sense of urgency that changes needed to be made.

One would hope that we can find approaches to develop an openness to change for the 51% of diocesan parishes that have registered significant numerical decline in the last ten years – before they get to the crisis point. Understanding how to diagnose and treat the root causes of decline early will be critical for us.

### **Connect Beyond OCA**

As we discussed many of the ideas for parish health we were often reminded to look beyond our Diocese and the OCA for good ideas, effective stories on parish health and opportunities to connect with other Orthodox.

“If we have conferences invite the Antiochians and other parishes in the area. We’ll all be better off for it,” was a common comment.

## Appendix D Master Idea List – Resulting from Deanery Visits

The following is the master list of items that resulted from the Deanery visits. Items in red are among the items that have been recommended for further action. As the year progresses we may add some of these others to our action list.

### Collect Data/Analyze Trends/Draw Conclusions on Future Action

1. **\*\*\*Exit Interviews**<sup>8</sup> - Parishes should conduct the equivalent of exit interviews when people leave parishes. Data should be kept and collected and shared (anonymously) among multiple parishes. Looking at this information can be helpful to understand areas of specific and general parish weakness and to plan activities to strengthen parishes.
2. **\*\*\*Explore “Lost Youth”** - Go back and study, say from a group of parishes, those children graduating from High school in a particular period. Find out where they are. How many have been lost to the Orthodox Church and why?
3. **Get Data** –“Our parish is made up, largely of middle management engineers. When these people approach an issue they are seemingly incapable of thinking about it without “data” (see items 1 &2) – and lots of it – to help provide guidance and frame their thinking. While this doesn’t necessarily resonate with how I approach issues, I can see value in this approach to certain problems. Perhaps we should collect cross parish data about things such as various costs (e.g. insurance), clergy compensation etc. Small mini-surveys about items of interest could be valuable if shared among parishes and parish councils in a timely & prudent manner. (This is more of a general input)”
4. **\*College student tracking** -- Build a database of college’s being attended by Orthodox youth. Make it easy for priests/lay leaders in the college area to contact them and offer support.
5. **\*\*“Mystery Shopper”** – This started out as an endorsement for another item (“Exit interviews”) but turned out to be more along the lines of having anonymous people visit a parish to experience the social dynamics of the community and then provide feedback. (In retailing this is similar to what is known as a ‘mystery shopper’.) In second meeting a priest noted important to learn how new people felt about attending. Important not to make inaccurate judgments about their actions (e.g. they leave early). One attendee claimed this was being deceptive.

### Define Administrative Standards

6. **\*\*\*Reception of Converts** – We should develop clear standards/norms for reception of converts. (Not the office but the preparation and definition of status) What do we expect of them? When are they ready? What preparation should be offered?
7. **\*\*\*Endowment for Borrowing** – When parishes are building or renovating borrowing money can be a great difficulty. We should have a capability for the Diocese, or a related church institution, to assist parishes by lending money at low interest.
8. **\*Sexual Misconduct Compliance Maturity Monitoring** – We have a policy but we have no data on how it is applied within parishes. We hear questions about the policy but rarely pursue answers. We don’t track what is being done; how well we comply.
9. **\*\*\*Audit Manual** – Build/share a manual for how to properly conduct a parish financial audit.

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<sup>8</sup> Items marked with an asterisk have already received an endorsement from someone other than the original proposer.

10. **\*Transitional Audit Policy** – Adopt a policy of having parish books audited at the time of any priest transition.
11. **\*Clergy Compensation Policy/Standards** – Create a workable, understandable up to date set of standards and policies for clergy compensation.
12. **\*Common Budget Template** - Build a budget template for parishes; common categories; allow sharing /cross parish comparison of data; enable consistent Diocesan reporting.

### **Conferences/Workshops/Training**

Many of these items can take on a variety of forms. Some could be face to face events (e.g. 13) others might be delivered on line, as web pages, via conference calls or as on-going peer sharing groups. Some of these topic could have shown up in the next section – on publishing info experiences/practices.

13. **\* Singles Conference** – Singles can often feel left out of the life of the Church/parish. Why don't we have an Orthodox singles conference (or a set of conferences regionally so that travel time is reduced.) where singles come together to discuss singles issues. Perhaps undertake spiritual or outreach projects. Hear speakers discuss the ministry opportunities (what do you bring to the church) or coping with singles issues.
14. **\*\*\* Clergy Continuing Education** – Develop a cost effective approach for providing continuing education for clergy (or lay leaders as well) on a variety of topics. This could be, hopefully, done in conjunction with seminaries. It should attempt to employ advanced information technologies to allow content to be accessed on demand/ without the need for significant travel.
15. **\*\*Choir Director Certification/Mastery Training** – One deanery in the Diocese of New England recently conducted a series of choir director training courses. Those who actively participated in once per month sessions for X months received a certificate. Could be adapted for other topics (Church school teaching) or other electronic delivery mechanisms.
16. **\*\*Church School Certification/Mastery Training** – OCEC offers a certification program for Orthodox Church School teachers.
17. **\*\*Inner City Ministry training** – We have many parishes in inner city. We need trained priests (and laity) capable of engaging the neighborhood and surrounding cultures – specifically Hispanic.
18. **\*Stewardship Education Program** –Create a Diocesan stewardship education program. Deliver it in parishes via workshops or via some electronic means. Perhaps offer financial support for parishes who participate. (Make it proportional to number of participants.)
19. **\*\*\*Trained Lay catechists** – In India the church uses trained lay catechists as the first level of support/service to inquirers. It can off load the priest, and provide, at times, an easier, more accessible conversation for the inquirer. In the parish health effort we could define the position, publicize ways to make it effective in parishes, provide a hearty endorsement from the archbishop and outline a set of competencies for the catechist to master. This also provides what can be thought of in a sense as an advancement ladder for laity.
20. **'Nice' Lessons** – Give people and parishes “nice lessons”. After all is said and done what good is right doctrine if we can't be nice. Perhaps could be workshop or a set of pamphlets/tracts. Perhaps a simple check list.
21. **Dealing with Conflict** – Develop a course or pamphlet dealing with the issues of how to handle conflict, dealing with difficult people etc.
22. **Intergenerational issues** – Similar to above training, principles, practices for parishes to better handle intergenerational issues.
23. **Marriage Family Counseling Training** – Find a set of priests in the Diocese who are trained in (e.g.) marriage & family counseling. Pool their talents as a lead group for

offering resources to priests and laity who have less background in this area. Perhaps training materials, perhaps coaching/mentoring etc.

24. **\*\*Clergy Leadership development course/training** – Specialized for the needs of clergy. Needs work to define leadership in our context. Could be workshop, on-line, tracts etc.
25. **\*\*Laity Leadership** – similar, designed for lay leaders in a parish context
26. **Speakers list** – Maintain a list of speakers by topic, keep up to date on who has used them how effective they were, what fees, would they recommend them etc.

### **Identify Good Practices/Methods/ Develop/Publish Materials**

27. **Natural Church Development (NCD) Conference call** – We have many parishes attempting to apply the Natural Church Development assessment & renewal methodology via Fr Ivanoff. Most say positive things yet all are having difficulties. Perhaps a conference call to help share lessons learned would be valuable.
28. **Morph NCD materials** – Pull together interested parties to contribute modifications to NCD materials to make them more effective in an Orthodox setting.
29. **\*Youth Oratorical contest** – Our future will depend on building fervent Orthodox Christians from the ground up. Other jurisdictions use youth oratorical contests effectively.
30. **\*\*Youth** – tools for understanding/communicating with and engaging youth who are the product of a post modern culture and who view the world differently than the church leaders that are trying to engage them.
31. **Importance of College choices** – Evidence exists about the impact that college choices can have on developing maintaining religious affiliation. Make this info accessible to parents.
32. **\*Church School Project Contest** – Offered as an adaptation of the “oratorical contest” idea this would be to operate a contest where parishes submit projects (models, documents, presentations, poster sessions etc.) in a cross parish competition. This could provide recognition for church school teachers, and/or honor individual students. It could stimulate creative thinking in the execution of church school lessons. Virtually any parish that has at least a few students can participate. It can help us grow committed, zealous, knowledgeable Orthodox Christians.
33. **\*‘Serving with the Hierarchy’ Video** – Film a video on to train altar servers for the specific characteristics of serving with a hierarchy
34. **\*\*Inquirers class** – Design and implement an inquirers class. It could be five one hour lessons. We could offer a set of recommended do’s and don’ts for conducting class (start end on time, max class size etc.) We could build a nice looking set of PowerPoint presentations that can be used by the priest (deacon or perhaps trained catechist) to teach the class. The benefit... a comprehensive class, with professional materials in less parish time and effort. With many parishes using the same basic model, improvements could be fed back and relatively easily incorporated.
35. **\*(\_\_Insert a topic\_\_) Video** – Create videos or other media (slide presentations with voice over. On various topics of interest or usefulness. (This suggestion focuses more in the delivery vehicle – “how” than it does on the idea – the “what”.)
36. **\*\* Parish Health E-Newsletters** – Designed to promote experience sharing. Subject matter versions/items could be oriented to: choir directors, webmasters, Treasurers, Church school.
37. **Ministering to xyz group’** – Workshop; Tract Immigrants, elderly, mature parishes etc.
38. **Web Forums** – Create a series of interactive forums on the web to allow various leadership areas (treasurers, church school teachers) to interact.
39. **\*\*On Line Education Lessons** – Build a set of online lessons outlining key elements of the Orthodox faith. Include links to background material and study questions. This

could form the basis for learners classes and allow lifelong Orthodox to be grow.  
(Perhaps already handled/attempted with the OCA Focus Curriculum.)

40. **Nursing Ministry** – info on how to set up a parish nursing ministry. (I seem to recall something about this in the OCA Resource Handbook.)

### **Internships**

41. **\*Pastoral Internship** – One priest offered that he has always wanted to really think through what it would take to provide a real internship for newly ordained priests. Bring them into a parish for an extended period. Let them get their feet wet. Let them see what kinds of real world issues they'll be facing. Give what are likely to be new marriages a chance to grow without the stress of a parish and they likely poverty that goes with it.
42. **College Internship program** – Find college age students needing a summer job and connect them with orthodox employers who can help.

### **Provide Opportunities for Parishes to Interact and Help One Another**

43. **\*\*\*Turning Parish Retreats into Deanery Retreats** – Often parish retreats are not well attended by people from other parishes. One possible solution is for the deanery in assembly to choose a topic then assign/have volunteer one parish to serve as host, with costs covered on a deanery basis. Perhaps this would occur every 2-3 years. Make Pan Orthodox. Look at Antiochian approaches/resources.
44. **Good Ole Barn Raising** – Someone mentioned a need for a new roof at their parish. That led to... why not keep parishes informed of needs of other (presumably regional/local) parishes... perhaps a crew of people can be created from among various parishes to help put on a new roof. Which led to...(by phone)...
45. **\*Talents to Treasure – Bring a challenge** – In our parish we have a bulletin board where when people notice something that needs to be done it gets added to the board and then people capable of taking on that job sign up to take care of it. Why can't this idea be extended throughout the Diocese (or perhaps Deaneries) to help build community and connectedness, fellowship, love among parishes. If a parish ( or perhaps individual) has a specific need (someone wants to go to seminary, someone needs money for a mission trip to Mexico, parish has facilities need, serious need for prayers for sick) that parish posts the need as a "challenge" perhaps on Diocesan website. Another parish or parishes sign up to "take that challenge" thus multiplying our talents treasure to build up the body. By helping others to other overcome small challenges perhaps a spirit of achievement is developed that extends to deeper spiritual development.

### **Diocesan Events Non Training**

46. **\*\*\* Diocesan/Deanery Mission trips** – Why not plan mission or outreach trips/efforts for people from the Diocese/Deanery interested in activities such as Project Mexico.

### **Grants**

47. **\*\*Parish Renewal Grants** - Why can't we have a policy/activity where mature parishes can receive 1-2 year grants of money so that they can undertake a specific ministry or try out a new idea that requires some investment. (e.g Open a coffee house)

### **Provide Direct Services to Parishes (Free or fee)**

48. **\*Consulting model/ Parish Health Assistance & Assessment team** – One priest offered that he was surprised that the ideas so far hadn't included a consulting sort of approach where a parish consultant (or a team of same) is invited into a parish, performs an assessment and works with the priest and parishioners to implement some mutually agreed upon health changes.
49. **Web Site Review Service** – Offer a service for parishes to have to have their web sites reviewed by "outside eyeballs" to understand the impressions it creates, the info missing, etc. . This could start with a web site planning form (what are your goals for

this site) a list of do's and don'ts for parish websites and a check list of items. But nothing is as helpful as getting reactions from others.

### **Provide Support**

50. **Help Us Find...** - Often we'll be looking for people with particular professional or artisan skills (architects, lawyers, woodworkers, electrician were examples given). Some way to help us find people who others have used successfully, and who, even better, are Orthodox could be valuable. (Obviously some of these need to be local rather than people across an 11 state area)
51. **\*\*More Arch-pastoral Letters/More communication from Diocesan chancery** – We should hear more from our Bishop. We should get more letters from him on Feast days. As well as hearing about what his concerns and hopes are for the Diocese.
52. **\*Peer Ministries** – Build a referral system for people who can offer skills in a particular area. An example was grief counseling.
53. **Show us Somebody cares** – Visit our parish, show us that somebody from the Diocese cares. If this would be done people would find this valuable.

### **Diocesan Administration**

54. **Diocesan Development Funding Coordination** – Build an approach for approaching members of the Diocese for major donations. Also this function could focus on writing grants to gain outside funding

### **General**

These items tend to be more comment than they are specific action.

55. **Worship, Pastoral Care, Education, Mission** – Let us focus on the aspects of a healthy parish taught by Fr Hopko and use this as the framework for our activities efforts and priorities.
56. **\*Don't Make More Work for the Priest** – If this activity funnels everything through the priest it will probably not work well – falling over under its own weight. Priests will either become (intentionally or unintentionally) a bottleneck. This needs to engage directly with others in addition to the priest. (This is not an actionable idea but speaks more to ground rules for the activity.)
  - a. **Don't Make More work for the Dean** – contributed by a Dean
57. **Deal with Core Issues** – The PHF idea, as explained, doesn't really deal with issues that are at the core of why our parishes are declining. (i.e that people are not committed, knowledgeable Orthodox Christians who live their faith and put that first in their lives.) It is not helpful to expend energy on some peripheral/administrative activities that really don't deliver more or better Orthodox Christians.
58. **Set Norms** – To deal with the above the Archbishop should bring clergy together to define clear norms of what will be expected in parishes in the Diocese. The Archbishop should, essentially, lay down the law and ask the clergy to enforce it.
59. **\*Inter-Parish Exchanges** – The element of this PHF idea that can be most valuable is that of learning from what other parishes are doing. Understanding how we compare, where others have had a good idea and tackled an issue in a useful or creative manner.
60. **“Lay person at large”** – This person should be called lay person at large. Contrary to what some may think this can be done better by a lay person. The job should be about encouraging. Don't get up to your ears in “producing” things. That will be too limiting. Circulate find good stories. Connect people with them – to build a feeling of encouragement and empowerment.

### **Uncategorized New Additions from Later Meetings**

61. **Diocesan prayer list. Parish needs. Once per season. Distribute via newsletter**
62. Materials for putting together a Vespers service, Readers service
63. Historical catalog of videos

64. Enhance/expand Item 6 to continue nurturing new converts' faith journey
65. Church tour instruction manual for laypersons to support clergy
66. Use technology to get more presence of Bishop?
  - a. Receive more communications from the Bishop
  - b. Web site, letters, newsletters
67. Taking a trip to visit the Bishop (relates to Item ?)
68. Provide reliable information on other beliefs (for teachers, students, parishioners)
69. Sharing models on parish ministries
  - c. Need to develop best delivery of models
70. Stewardship Fair
71. Importance of The Divine Cycle of Services as the basis/foundation of our Orthodoxy which leads us to do the right things/activities
72. Mission Ministers – Find mission minded, couples willing to transplant to places where missions are being formed.
73. Parish ministries conference
74. Do a thorough study of growing Orthodox parishes in US. Find best practices. Common themes. Pattern after the “Good to Great” concept.
  - a. This Diocese
  - b. Other OCA
  - c. Greek
  - d. Antiochian
75. Append training to Clergy convo
76. Develop a form and manual for prep for marriage. Check list/ review system.
77. Baptismal Sponsor manual
78. Explore the Episcopalian model of equivalent pledge units for examining stewardship.
79. Collect more data on parish life via Census form
  - a. Graduates
80. Build a financial model of healthy parish – 150 people.
81. many parishes ask for rebate on assessment. Consider this, in very few cases, if they give something. Attendance at Deanery Workshop... rebate for attendees over X. Attendance at Bible study
82. Deliver video snippets of effective parish ministries. (Lincoln coffee house/book store.)
83. Get parishes to sign up for one new thing this year. (stop or start)
84. Define a parishioner life cycle -- model of good practices for a moving to higher stages of commitment/engagement.
  - a. Unaware
  - b. Aware
  - c. Inquirer
  - d. Catechumen
  - e. Parishioner – passive
  - f. Active

- g. Include age variations – baby, child, youth, young adult, adult, parent; senior.
85. Get parishes to pledge support of PHF budget (beyond \$10K) so that more can be done.