



PARISH LEADERSHIP: *Connecting the Dots*

“...there are many parts, but one body.”

1 Corinthians 12:20

Fr. James Kordaris

Our churches are busier than ever with youth activities, seniors group, athletics, choir, junior choir, Bible studies, support groups, community outreach, Sunday school, educational programs and much more. As these activities grow and develop leadership from within, they often take on a life of their own, disconnected from one another and from the Eucharistic community out of which they were formed.

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” (1 Cor. 12:27)

For a parish to be effective in its mission, all of its organizations and activities must be seen – and more importantly – must *see themselves* as members of one body, pursuing the same goals, and always leading toward the Eucharist. Sometimes we find that people will participate in one organization or ministry of the parish, yet they are rarely seen participating in Divine Liturgy. This happens in everything from Bible study to basketball.

A priest from a large parish refers to this as the need to “connect the dots.” All the activities, organizations and ministries need to connect in the Eucharist. And while all the various activities of the church may be worthwhile endeavors, they may not be moving people toward transfigured life in the within the body of Christ.

We all know the argument: “What if this activity is the only activity in which a member of the parish is involved? Isn’t it better to have some contact than none at all?” But if a parish organization is not led by a Christ-centered individual who sets an example by being present in Liturgy, how do we expect this activity to bring people to the Eucharist? An activity is effective when lives are transformed in such a way that people are inspired to become more Christ-like. One way to change perceptions is to refer to every activity and organization of the parish as a *ministry*, reminding us that everything the Church community does should lead people to Christ.

“Different kinds of service, but the same Lord.” (1 Corinthians 12:5)

Often the various parish ministries and organization develop into one person’s or one group’s turf. The activity becomes an autonomous group within the church, not coordinated or integrated with others. Sometimes there may even be competition among the groups. This is not compatible with the vision of the Church as the body of Christ with many limbs and organs all working together.

Building a Leadership Team

An effective strategy for getting the limbs and organs of the body of Christ working together is to gather the leaders of all the various ministries on a regular basis to pray for the church, coordinate the parish calendar of events and discuss common activities and goals of the parish. The priest directs the parish leadership by presenting the vision or mission of the Church, and opens the lines of communication between organizations and ministries. A positive result of this can be that all begin to coordinate their efforts and cooperate in working toward a common goal

This happened recently at the parish of Saint Nicholas in Youngstown, Ohio where a monthly Saturday morning breakfast meeting of all the leaders of the various parish ministries and community organizations was initiated. As the ministries planned the parish's first annual Family Outreach Sunday, they were drawn together to work toward making this a successful event for their individual organizations and for the parish.

Their coordinated effort resulted in attendance not seen at St. Nicholas since Pascha with attendance up by nearly 50 percent. Each organization hosted a booth in the church hall. Many provided food or refreshments to be served at the brunch, and the day was a positive experience for those who hosted and those who attended. Their first Family Outreach Sunday was a success in that it brought many inactive Orthodox Christians to church while bringing the ministries of the parish together to work toward a common goal.

Parish Activities/Ministries Coordinator

In 1999 the clergy and lay leadership of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church of Portland, Oregon began to assess the growing needs of the parish, and to consider ways to coordinate and grow the ministries of the parish. Initially they considered hiring a youth director, but upon further consideration realized that there were parish needs beyond the scope of the youth program. The leadership at Holy Trinity concluded that what was needed was a parish staff member whose responsibility it would be to coordinate the growing number of existing parish ministries and to develop additional ministries.

With the assistance of a grant from Leadership 100, the parish established the position of Parish Activities Coordinator, to address the challenge of organizing a large and active parish life, promoting volunteerism, fostering involvement in existing ministries, and working collaboratively with clergy to develop new ministries. Under the guidance of the parish priest, the coordinator works with the leaders of all parish ministries with a particular emphasis on youth related activities, and connects parishioners with suitable church ministries and programs. The position of Parish Activities Coordinator is outlined in the *Ministry Profiles* section of the www.Outreach.goarch.org web site.

“Without Vision the People Perish” (Proverbs 29:18)

Every parish has a different personality – different strengths and weaknesses. Every parish is located in a particular environment in a particular neighborhood. Every parish is made up of a different group of people with different needs, ethnic heritage, skills and education. For these reasons, every parish will have a different vision for the ministry that lies before them. Vision is a picture of the future that produces passion.

With their priest as their guide, parish leadership is encouraged to hammer out a vision for the future of their church. Vision causes people to imagine the future of their church and to develop concrete steps to realize that vision. The greater importance of vision is that it creates *passion* in ministry. And if we are passionate about ministry, that passion will be contagious. People will be inspired to accomplish great work for the realization of the vision.

As Orthodox Christian leaders, give all you can to this effort. Give all the time, service and prayer that you can give. Apply whatever gifts you have to this calling, because eternal lives are at stake.

Fr. Jim Kordaris (FrJimK@goarch.org) is Director of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Department of Outreach & Evangelism (www.outreach.goarch.org) and pastor of Saint George Greek Orthodox Church on West 54th Street in New York.