

WORKING DRAFT OF A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA (OCA)



VERSION 4.6 JUNE 24, 2010

CAUTION

THIS IS A WORKING DRAFT OF A STRATEGIC PLAN MEANT TO ELICIT FEEDBACK FROM ALL SEGMENTS OF THE CHURCH. BASED ON THE FEEDBACK RECEIVED, THE PLAN WILL BE REVISED. TO DATE, IT REFLECTS INPUT FROM THE METROPOLITAN, THE STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE, MEMBERS OF THE LESSER SYNOD AND THE METROPOLITAN COUNCIL. OVER THE REMAINING COURSE OF THE YEAR WE WILL MEET WITH, AND ELICIT FURTHER INPUTS FROM THE DIOCESES AND THEIR PARISHIONERS. BECAUSE IT IS A WORKING DRAFT AND VERY MUCH UNDER DEVELOPMENT IT SHOULD NOT BE FURTHER COPIED, CITED OR DISTRIBUTED WITHOUT EXPLICIT APPROVAL OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE.

INTRODUCTION

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) of the Metropolitan Council of the OCA has been commissioned to develop a strategic plan for the OCA. This plan will capture the vision, goals, culture and structure of the church for the foreseeable future. It must be emphasized that this is a working draft document and that everything in it is open to discussion at all levels of the church.

To accomplish its commission, the SPC is 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. The plan is intended to address all aspects of the Church’s life, ranging from Church governance to internal spiritual growth, to mission and outreach to all. The SPC will gather all comments and ideas from these meetings in the spring and summer of 2010 into another draft document that will be discussed at the diocesan and parish levels in the fall and winter of 2010-11. All gathered information provided by the parishes and dioceses will be used by the SPC to prepare another draft during the spring and summer of 2011. The goal is to provide an initial version of this plan in time for discussion and perhaps adoption at the 16th All American Council in the fall of 2011.

The Strategic Plan begins with a statement that articulates “Who We Are and Where We Are Going” and defines the values that we will use to guide us along this path. In developing a strategic plan for the Church, we are very conscious that the Church is not just an institution; it is the very body of Christ. Therefore the next section of the Strategic Plan reviews the “Structure and Governance of the Church.” It begins at the parish level and proceeds through the Diocese, Diocesan Assemblies, Diocesan Councils, the Diocesan Bishop, the Holy Synod, the Metropolitan, the Office of the Metropolitan, the All-American Council and the Metropolitan Council. With this understanding of the nature of the Church, the plan then moves on to a frank discussion of our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This realistic assessment of our current status then allows us to identify major goals for better performing the work that Christ has called us to as we move into the 21st century. These goals fall into four broad categories, witnessing to the Kingdom in: our local parish; in the broader Orthodox Church; in the broader world; and, being faithful stewards of our God given resources, so as to accomplish all this.

A few words used in this document need to be defined. Clergy is defined as priests and deacons. The Diocese is to be defined as the basic unit of the Church. The Diocesan Bishop is the person responsible for all aspects of the life of the Diocese. The Holy Synod is comprised of all the Diocesan Bishops gathered together and must include the Metropolitan to be considered the Holy Synod. The Office of the Metropolitan includes the officers of the Church (Chancellor, Secretary and Treasurer), as well as other employees of what is presently called the Chancery.

The current Working Draft of a Strategic Plan is based on extensive discussions and written inputs from Metropolitan Jonah, a full day meeting with members of the Lesser Synod, and another day long workshop with the Metropolitan Council. This document, its introduction and its definitions will be revised as additional input is obtained as the conciliar process moves forward in 2010 and 2011.

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IDENTITY AND DIRECTIONS

As the Body of Christ, the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) is committed to bringing the Gospel to all the people of North America – indigenous and immigrant alike – 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).

WHO ARE WE?

The Orthodox Church in America (OCA) is a territorial manifestation of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church (Nicene Creed) established by Jesus Christ and faithfully transmitted through her Scriptures, worship and prayer life and through the teachings of the Holy Fathers. It seeks to make 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 Christians, i.e. hierarchs/bishops, priests, deacons and laity are transformed by the Holy Spirit into the living body of Christ. Within this Eucharistic context the OCA 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.

Our North American mission began in 1794 when the first Orthodox monks arrived in Alaska to bring the Gospel to the Native Alaskan people. This mission to “Go and make disciples” will always be our mission. The Gospel will 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 OCA received from its mother, the Russian Orthodox Church and the church council of 1917-1918.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

As we move into the first part of the 21st century, 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 new and all embracing commandment to love one another as He has loved us (Jn 13:34) whereby 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. As the Body of Christ, the Church is a living organism whose 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, sacrifice, humility, integrity, trust 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 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 Church is multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual in its composition, becoming “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 monasticism is an integral part 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.

STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE OF THE CHURCH

The Orthodox Church is the Body of Christ. It is comprised of Dioceses that form and delineate a Territorial Church which acts locally through parishes and other institutions. For the Body to be healthy, all of its ‘organs’ – parishes, Dioceses, Territorial Church – must be healthy in order to function properly in relation to each other.

THE PARISH

The Parish is a locally centered Eucharistic community of the Diocese. It is here, at the local gathering of the faithful in celebration of the Eucharist, that we encounter and become the Body of Christ. The Eucharist is both the source and focus of Christian life. It is in the parish that persons are equipped with all that is necessary to work out their own personal salvation, in and through Christ, and to bring this salvation to the world. The life of this community is expressed in its liturgical, educational, missionary, charitable, and administrative work. It is most often through this life in community that future leaders of the Church both lay and clergy are identified, nurtured and developed. It is also through these labors that people in turn may become servants to others. At all times all the parish members are called to be self sacrificing to witness to Truth which is Jesus Christ the Lord.

Parish life will manifest itself in many diverse ways: cultural, ethnic, lingual and economic, due to the geographical distances separating parishes and due to the specific needs of the people in that parish. Hence parish communities should not be expected to be homogeneous in their make up or life expressions. The unifying element of all parishes is found principally in the Christ who is worshipped and glorified and in the outreaching love of the Christ for His people.

All the members of this local body of believers must function in harmony and as the apostle reminds us: not all members have the same function, but all are necessary (Eph. 4:16). Unity and harmony are manifested not by any subordination, but through a primacy and order of functions, by which all members mutually acknowledge one another’s unique gifts and talents, bringing them to bear in unison to build up the church, both in her liturgical life and in outreach and service to community and society. By the loving acceptance of the faithful, bishops and priests perform their particular ministries as shepherds and teachers, manifesting their leadership as servants. The Diocesan Bishop’s

role is to oversee all parishes within his diocese. He ensures unity and catholicity (wholeness) internally as chief pastor, and externally through conciliarity with other hierarchs. The priest assembles the faithful and leads all to mutually identify, nurture, and exercise their particular gifts and to recognize the charisms of others who would function as leaders of the parish. Together, the priest and deacon strive to exemplify and manifest the priesthood and servanthood of all believers. The ministry of shepherds, bishops and priests, manifests the Good Shepherd and High Priest Christ, who both offers all to the Father and is offered for the salvation of all. The laity participate in the offering up of this sacrifice and in taking God's saving work into the world, each according to their own particular gifts given to them by God.

THE DIOCESE

The Diocese (comprised of parishes, institutions and monastic communities within a determined geographical area or on an exceptional basis an ethnic group) is the fullest 'catholic' presence of the Church. The Diocese, under its Diocesan Bishop, conducts its spiritual life by executing all the mission tasks expected of Christ's Holy Church in the area. As stated by St. Ignatius of Antioch "Wheresoever the bishop shall appear, there let the people be; even as where Jesus may be, there is the Catholic Church" (Letter to the Smyrneans, 8.2). In this context 'Catholic' means the fullness of the faith derived from the Apostolic teaching and preaching. This 'Catholic Faith' is to be maintained, interpreted and properly proclaimed/articulated bringing Christ's salvation to all seeking to enter His new and everlasting covenant. While actualizing the fullness of the Church locally, the Diocese is simultaneously also one with each of the other Dioceses in the Territorial Church in the one Body of Christ. There cannot be a bishop independent of a council of bishops (Synod).

A diocese is more than a collection of parishes; it must develop particular and diverse ministries beyond the scope of individual parishes. Some of these ministries are common within each diocese, such as missions and evangelism, charitable outreach, youth work, and religious education. Others are tailored to the particular need of the people of that diocese, perhaps in language, education or outreach. To fulfill these ministries, the diocesan leaders should know the needs of their people, actively seeking their input and insight into the life of the Church, especially at the parish level. Diocesan ministries and administrative work offer opportunities for further spiritual growth and experiences for those coming from its parishes and for the further development of leaders in the Church in continuing Christ's ministry to the world. In these diocesan ministries, the leaders should be active members of their diocesan councils.

Because of their large geographical extents Dioceses are often subdivided into smaller geographical units call Deaneries. The Deanery is a significant part of the pastoral life within a Diocese and its role will be addressed more fully in future versions of this plan.

DIOCESAN ASSEMBLIES

The Diocesan Assembly is a Eucharistic assembly of the Diocesan Bishop and representatives of the parishes, institutions and ministries within the Diocese and as such should begin with the Divine Liturgy. In serving the Divine Liturgy with the Diocesan Bishop, the Assembly visibly and concretely acknowledges the Church as the Body of Christ, as described by St. Ignatius. The Assembly manifests the living relationship of the Bishop with the people for whom he is responsible before God. It is a meeting of Diocesan father with his family, and as such, it is an opportunity for communion with each other, for growing toward God, for learning and for fellowship.

The Assembly is responsible for helping the Bishop regulate the interior life of the diocese in peace, harmony, and unity in Christ. It approves measures to strengthen the Orthodox faith and piety, religious education, charities, and outreach activities to be delivered by the Diocese. It hears reports on the actions of the Bishop, the Diocesan Council, the Metropolitan Council and organizations and institutions under the responsibilities of the Diocesan Bishop. It discusses financial means to fulfill these aims and approves financial budgets and statements. It authorizes the Diocesan Council to acquire, encumber, or dispose of diocesan properties. It participates in the implementation of All American Council decisions. All decisions of the Diocesan Assembly require the blessings of the Diocesan Bishop.

The Assembly shall be composed of the Diocesan Bishop; clergy and lay representatives of the parishes in the Bishop's diocese; members of the diocesan council and its auditing committee; diocesan representatives to the Metropolitan Council; retired bishops, priests and deacons residing in the diocese (but without the right to vote); and, abbots of monastic communities and heads of institutions and organizations under the Bishop's responsibility. All members of the diocese are encouraged to attend meetings. Per the current *Statute of the OCA*, the Assembly is responsible to elect clergy and lay members of the Diocesan Council and Diocesan auditing committee, and, when a vacancy occurs, to nominate candidates for Bishop.

THE DIOCESAN COUNCIL

The fundamental role of Diocesan Council is to advise the Bishop and help the Bishop in administering his diocesan family. The Bishop and the Council work together to identify and communicate the needs within the Diocese and to develop the ministries and marshal the resources to address those needs. Historically, the presbyters constituted a council around the Bishop. The present day Diocesan Council, meets regularly under the leadership of the Bishop and is comprised of the clergy and lay leaders of the Diocese elected by the Diocesan Assembly. All of their decisions, arrived at together with the Bishop, are enacted upon his official blessing. The Diocesan Councils, as well as gatherings of smaller geographical areas (Deaneries) are among the effective organ of conciliarity within each local church.

THE DIOCESAN BISHOP

In the Orthodox Church, the Diocesan Bishop is responsible before, and in, the Lord, for everyone, and everything, in his pastoral care, and territory. The term bishop, in fact, comes from the Greek word, *episkopos*, meaning, overseer (1Tim 3.1). The Bishop is priest, shepherd, teacher and servant. He is to love and care for the people and to unite his community into one Body. As Christ says: “I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own” (Jn. 10:14). The Bishop must know, love and serve his priests, deacons, and people, and actively build and maintain consensus and relationships with them. The Bishop is entrusted with responsibility for every aspect of the life of the Diocese, including ultimate responsibility and accountability for the material goods and finances of the Diocese. The Bishop is responsible for the doctrine and practice of the Faith, so that there may be a united community gathered in love. The Bishop is responsible to maintain canonical order and integrity among his diocesan clergy. The Bishop is accountable to the people in love and the people are accountable to the Bishop in love. Only in relation to his own flock, and Synod, does the episcopacy of a Bishop have meaning. The unity of the community comes from the Bishop’s active ministry and involvement in the lives of his people, and their consensus in following the Bishop’s leadership. The community – presbyters, deacons and people – are gathered in mutual love around their Bishop. This reciprocal dynamic is crucial: the love of the flock for the Bishop – and hence, obedience to Christ through cooperation and support of the Bishop; and the love of the Bishop for the flock – being present, being intimately involved, protecting them, leading them, and seeking to fulfill their needs by initiating and empowering ministries within the Body of Christ, the Church. The Bishop stands in Christ’s place (but not as some “vicar” of Christ, for Christ is Himself fully present) in self-sacrificing priesthood, and humble and active servanthood.

THE HOLY SYNOD

The Bishops of the Church, gathered in council as the Holy Synod, manifest the unity of the Territorial Church and are accountable to Christ, to one another, and the people for the well-being of the Church in both sacred and secular matters. They are specifically responsible for addressing issues and meeting needs which transcend any one diocese and for providing for the mutual accountability of each bishop to his brother bishops for the flock entrusted to his care. The Metropolitan, elected by the Holy Synod, presides at its meetings.

Canonically, the Holy Synod is the ultimate authority of the Territorial Church and has responsibility for every aspect of the Church In the spirit of conciliarity, and more fully to hear the voice of the people, the Holy Synod, through *The Statute of the Orthodox Church in America*, has delegated the authority for legislative and administrative matters to the All-American Council and to the Metropolitan Council. The actions of each of these bodies are subject to the blessing of the Holy Synod.

THE METROPOLITAN

The Metropolitan, as one of the Diocesan Bishops, is nominated by the delegates of the All-American Council and elected by his peers on the Holy Synod to be the first among equals. As Primate of the Orthodox Church, he is accountable in love to the bishops and they are to him and to one another. He bears a unique responsibility and accountability to maintain the unity in love and obedience with the Synod; as well as unity with the rest of the Orthodox Churches worldwide. The Metropolitan as Primate bears the responsibility to maintain canonical order within the Synod and, with the Synod, bears the accountability of the bishops for their stewardship of their flocks. These structures of accountability are essential if the Church is to maintain its integrity. In addition, the Metropolitan is responsible for military and other chaplains, and those Church institutions that transcend dioceses, e.g. seminaries.

The Metropolitan's leadership arises through building consensus, the Metropolitan cannot act alone. As stated in Apostolic Canon 34: "The bishops of every nation must acknowledge him who is first among them and count him as their head and do nothing of consequence without his consent; but each may do those things only which concern his own 'parish' and the country places which belong to it. But neither let him (who is the first) do anything without the consent of all; for so there will be unanimity and God will be glorified through the Lord in the Holy Spirit." As a bishop sacramentally personifies his diocese, so also does the Metropolitan personify the Synod, personifying it and speaking for it as one Body.

The Metropolitan may only intervene in the affairs of another diocese when there is a canonical issue, and then does so with the consensus of the Synod. Should the canonical issue be within the Metropolitan's own diocese, it becomes the responsibility of the Holy Synod to intervene. The Metropolitan cannot, on his own, indebt the Church, but can only do so in concert with the Holy Synod and the Metropolitan Council.

THE OFFICE OF THE METROPOLITAN

The Office of the Metropolitan is comprised of the officers of the Corporation (Chancellor, Secretary and Treasurer), the heads of those ministries performed or coordinated at a church-wide level, and an adequate support staff. It reports directly to the Metropolitan. Its role is to assist the Metropolitan in maintaining unity with other Orthodox Churches; in the calling of councils, Synods and church-wide meetings; in the oversight and administration of theological education and training for ministries; in administrative matters relating to churches and clergy, such as health care, tax status and pension; in the facilitation of relations with other churches, both jurisdictional and inter-church ecumenical; and in the communications that facilitate the multiple levels of relationship. The Office of the Metropolitan coordinates and serves as a resource center for certain ministries common to all or most Dioceses, such as religious education. An objective of the strategic plan is to determine which ministries are best coordinated at the national level and which at the local level.

THE ALL-AMERICAN COUNCIL

The All-American Council is the highest legislative and administrative authority within the Church. It meets every three years, to examine and recommend administrative and legislative policies to address the needs that all dioceses hold in common and to determine how those activities will be funded. The Council also has the crucial function of nominating candidate(s) for Metropolitan to the Holy Synod when a vacancy occurs in that position. Its decisions are arrived at in concert with the Holy Synod of Bishops and are promulgated only upon receiving their official blessing.

Per the *The Statute of the Orthodox Church in America*, the All-American Council consists of the Holy Synod and a broad representation from throughout the Church, including the parish priest and an elected lay representative from each of the parishes in North America. In practice, not all parishes are able to participate because of cost, distance of travel and other reasons. In time, as we strengthen the conciliar processes at the parish and diocesan level, we may want to consider other possible compositions of the All-American Council.

THE METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

The Metropolitan Council is the permanent executive body of the Church administration and has the responsibility of continuing the work of the AAC between meetings of that body. The Metropolitan Council also has responsibility for a broad range of secular matters, defined in the *The Statute of the Orthodox Church in America*. Its decisions are arrived at in concert with the Metropolitan, Lesser Synod and/or Holy Synod and are promulgated upon receiving an official blessing.

At present, the membership of the Metropolitan Council consists of a priest and lay representative of each diocese, and three priests and three lay representatives elected by the All-American Council. Originally the intent of the ‘at large delegates’, those elected by the All-American Council itself, was to represent those institutions that are not currently represented through the normal Diocesan structure, e.g. seminaries, certain monasteries, and chaplains. It is the recommendation of this Plan that the election of these at large delegates be returned to this original purpose.

Together the members of the Metropolitan Council are called upon to bring their expertise to bear on those matters of Church life outside the strictly religious. While not explicitly selected for their particular expertise (e.g. financial, legal, organizational), historically these talents have been present on the Metropolitan Council. The 21st century will bring with it new opportunities and outreach – from a revitalizing of our parishes and dioceses to active mission and outreach to North America to working with our sister Orthodox Churches to establish a united, autocephalous Orthodox Church in North America. We should remain open to examining, and if necessary optimizing, the composition of our Metropolitan Council, to continue to meet the evolving needs of the Church.

OUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES AS WE MOVE INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

With this understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ called to bring the Gospel to all the inhabitants of North America – both indigenous and immigrant – where are we in the process of responding to this calling? What are our strengths and our weaknesses? What opportunities lay before us and what are the threats to successfully doing Christ's work in the future that we must be aware of and overcome.

To address these strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOTS), the Strategic Planning Committee conducted a two day brainstorming session. The top level results of that session are summarized below. A complete listing of all suggested strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats is given in the Appendix (still to be added)

STRENGTHS:

- Fullness of the Orthodox faith, with its scriptural, liturgical and sacramental life, strong theological resources, and commitment, piety and holiness of our forbearers;
- Focus on the outreach to the people of North America from the OCA's early roots in Alaska to active missionary outreach in its dioceses today, manifested in the large fraction of converts in the OCA today;
- Conciliarity in its Church life, involving bishops, priests and laity in its decision making.

WEAKNESSES:

- Lack of unified, charismatic, enlightened leadership coupled with a lack of leadership and management training at all levels – bishops, clergy, lay – resulting in isolation, fragmentation, lack of follow through, and a lack of a unified and energizing vision;
- Lack of a true culture of stewardship: e.g. caring for our priests, our needy parishioners and our established parishes; cultivation of major donors and endowments; ; empowering and utilizing the many talented potential volunteers already in our Church;
- The precipitous reduction of our ministries ranging from Pastoral Life and Outreach through Education to Christian Witness and Humanitarian Aid.

OPPORTUNITIES:

- More North Americans than ever before looking for meaning and spirituality in their lives, including disaffected Christians from other denominations, Orthodox immigrants; and those looking for solutions in New Age spiritualism and elsewhere;
- Better utilization of the many untapped, or underutilized resources already available to our Church: new, energized clergy; large pool of seminary graduates, including women; talented, lay volunteers with a broad range of skills; and new modern technologies that enable broad, rapid and effective communications and that offer distance learning and outreach to many;
- Historic opportunity to achieve Orthodox unity in North America, allowing us to more effectively witness to Christ and to reach out to others.

THREATS:

- A secular culture that has impacted our Church life through: promoting a social gospel that minimizes the need for ascetic life; focusing on just the current life and not on eternal life; a tendency to oppose science and religion; and the emergence of a sense of Orthodox fundamentalism rooted, in part, in a static and narrow experience of Tradition. Consequently the Orthodox Church might be losing its authentic voice;
- That all of us – Holy Synod, Priests, laity – will proceed with ‘business as usual’ – not refocusing our lives on Christ – and not truly and zealously witnessing to all North America;
- Increasing fragmentation and isolation – where we focus on our parish, or our diocese, or our ministry – without thinking of the fullness of the Body of Christ and which, if unchecked, can potentially lead to the disintegration of the OCA;
- Allowing ourselves to be crushed by what is otherwise a healthy, ongoing review, acknowledgment and repentance over 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 OCA’s major goals be as it moves into the 21st century? Given its commitment to bringing the Gospel to all the people of North America, its overarching

goal should be on witnessing to the Kingdom at all levels – within the local community, in the greater Church, and in the world – and to providing the resources to do so. Within that overarching goal, we have identified eleven specific goals and some of the intermediate steps to attaining them. These are given below.

WITNESS TO THE KINGDOM – WITHIN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

REDEDICATE OURSELVES TO 'THE GOSPEL VISION': Too often, our vision of the Church is a “self-sustaining one”, not too hot, not too cold, lukewarm, concerned more with externals than with what is contained in the heart of man. But the “business-as-usual” approach that this implies is inconsistent with the Gospel which calls for a fundamental, self-sacrificing, energetic (dynamic) vision – understanding what it means “to be all things to all men, so that some may be saved”. But - even if we re-dedicate ourselves to the Gospel Vision of witness and ministry in this Strategic Plan, there is a danger that this Plan becomes just another “plan” to be “put on the shelf” and that some time after its release the enthusiasm and ardor will have faded, and we instead proceed as we have been, without making the necessary changes to our church life to address our issues and to fulfill Christ’s commands to us. To avoid this, we should:

- Personally rededicate ourselves to Christ and the Church in study of the Scriptures, prayer, fasting and going to services;
- Communicate the vision of the Strategic Plan (which is in fact striving to be identical with the Gospel vision, expressed in terms of *this* time and in *this* place) through all venues: face-to-face encounters of bishops, clergy and laity; through Diocesan, Deanery and parish workshops and retreats; sharing success stories and connecting all elements of the strategic plan with the seminaries so that future clergy and lay leaders are familiar with it;
- Re-energize the clergy brotherhood through more frequent clergy meetings, clergy retreats, continuing education, and through personal interactions with each other;
- Identify and recommend to each other, uniquely gifted individuals (teachers, monastic and lay persons) who can visit locally to communicate and enrich our Gospel vision.
- Develop parish- and deanery-based adult education program in the areas of scripture study, and Christian ethics and daily life.
- Reach out to the marginalized of our society, those that seem different than us – for they too are icons in the image and likeness of God. As Christ says, when we feed, give drink to, clothe, or visit in prison the least of these, we do it to Christ Himself.

REVITALIZE OUR PARISH SACRAMENTAL, LITURGICAL, AND DEVOTIONAL LIFE AND MINISTRY: One of the most powerful steps in infusing our lives with the Gospel Vision is to revitalize our parish sacramental, liturgical and devotional life. One powerful element in doing so will be connect us with the Church through all times – with our forbearers, with modern day ‘living saints’, with authentic

monastic communities living a life of prayer, with new missions with all their zeal, and with our older established parishes from which we have much to learn and for whom our interest and attention can mean so much. To that end, let us:

- Tell, and re-tell, the STORY of your parish and of the Orthodox Church in America. All of us can be energized by re-hearing the story of the faith of our fathers, grandfathers and other forbearers in building our parish, our Church. And, our youth frequently don't have the STORY of themselves and their roots.
- As part of telling our story, and as church-wide fellowship and interaction is fostered and isolation overcome, we will learn to identify and recommend to each other, uniquely gifted individuals (teachers, monastic and holy lay persons) who can 'visit' locally – either in person or by film – to communicate and enrich our Gospel vision.
- Adopt a monastic and have a monastic adopt a parish. What better way to teach prayer life to our parishioners and to strengthen the tie of parishes to monasteries. Similarly have parishes adopt a mission or an older parish. They both have so much to give to each other.
- Require and enable continuing clergy education. Our clergy would benefit greatly from the opportunity for continued spiritual growth and renewal and the chance to extend their pastoral skills. 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.

REENERGIZE THE BOND BETWEEN HIERARCHY, CLERGY AND LAITY: the OCA has a rich tradition of conciliarity – i.e. involving not only bishops, but clergy and laity in its decision making – which it inherited from the efforts of the All Russian Council of 1917. This is a unique gift in reaching out to the peoples in North America and one that must be nurtured through:

- Frequent meetings and personal communications amongst the bishop, clergy, and laity, to include: frequent bishop-clergy meetings; personal communications, initiated by bishop and clergy alike; visits by the bishop to his parishes with a focus on getting to know the parish and the parishioners; and some strictly social gatherings at all levels.
- Christian leadership and management training for hierarchy, clergy and lay leaders. Leadership and management are two quite different skills, each with their own charisms, responsibilities and tools. Both need to be approached in humility, with Christ's servant model in mind. Appropriate training in these can help us to be more effective shepherds in leading the Church, stewards in managing the resources of the Church, and apostles in empowering others to go out and perform Christ's work.

- Empower a lay apostolate. The Church is full of untapped talent, just waiting to be called to do the work of Christ. We need to recognize that talent, define the job and provide the training for the job, and then empower the individual to go and do the job.
- Provide cross-cultural training for all, clergy and laity alike. We live in a land and times of many cultures and many problems specific to our time and our place: 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 the native Alaskans.

CARE FOR AND INVEST IN YOUNG PEOPLE: if we are to keep our young people in the Churches, then we have to do a better job in connecting Christ and His Church to all aspects of their lives.

- Address relevant contemporary and moral concerns. To engage our young people we must not only speak about doctrine and church history but we must also show how the Church speaks to the many everyday decisions and challenges they are facing in life.
- Challenge our young people. Often our young people are willing to undertake bigger challenges than we are. They want to change the world and we should allow them to see how through Christ the world is being changed. This can be done by involving them in hands-on doing, both locally and in mission teams – both domestically and internationally.
- Provide social interaction and networking opportunities, so as to build an ‘Orthodox community’. These opportunities can include sponsoring participation in Orthodox summer camps, retreats, pan-Orthodox activities, movies, games and making use of modern media.
- Place a focus on family formation. Church school can only do so much, the teachings and the examples have to come from home. Find creative and engaging ways to instruct parents and relatives in making Christ more present in their homes and families.

WITNESS TO THE KINGDOM – IN THE “GREATER” CHURCH OUTSIDE THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

ORGANIZE EFFECTIVE PARISH/DIOCESE/TERRITORIAL INTERACTIONS AND ADMINISTRATION: witnessing beyond our local communities begins with understanding how our parishes fit into the Deanery, the Diocese, and the Territorial Church and how these all interact to conduct the “Ministries of the Church” both to those within the Church and to those outside the Church.

- Develop a clear list of duties and responsibilities at all levels: those that only can be performed by the Territorial Church; those that should be performed by the Diocese; those that are in some way shared between the Diocese and the Territorial Church; those that are the responsibility of the Parish; and those that are the responsibility of the individual parishioners. Better define the function of the Deanery within the Diocesan structure.
- Define the “Ministries of the Church”, their organization, and oversight and incorporate this in an on-going “Ministries Handbook”, where all the top-level, appropriate information may all be found under ‘one cover’.
- Develop appropriate methods of financing each of the elements above (see last goal on Financing and Stewardship).

ESTABLISH PERSONAL WORKING RELATIONS WITH OTHER ORTHODOX CHURCHES: the move to Orthodox unity in North America involves both ‘grass roots’, informal efforts as well as the recent top-level Episcopal Assembly process defined by the Patriarchs. This goal focuses on the ‘grass roots’, informal efforts.

- Encourage, participate in and initiate, if necessary, pan-Orthodox activities at the local parish level. Participate in, or initiate a local Orthodox clergy association. Sponsor inter-parish visits and periodically conduct joint services to expose and get people familiar and comfortable with the variety of Orthodox liturgical worship. Strive to experience and understand different Orthodox cultures and traditions. Develop a pan-Orthodox community outreach project to more effectively meet the needs of, and witness to, the local community. Actively support IOCC, OCMC, FOCUS and their local committees.
- Cultivate a successor for the Department of External Affairs. Fr. Leonid Kishkovsky has done an outstanding job in representing us to the Orthodox world at large. Who will be his successor when the time comes?
- Sponsor/ promote seminary exchanges – of both students and faculty – both in seminaries of different Orthodox Churches within North America and with Orthodox seminaries world-wide. Provide inter-jurisdictional development assignments to identified future clergy and lay leaders. Building that kind of understanding, love and personal contact amongst the future clergy and lay leaders of our Churches is a key element of inter-Orthodox cooperation.

JOIN OTHER ORTHODOX TO CREATE A UNITED AUTOCEPHALOUS CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA: the move to Orthodox unity in North America involves both ‘grass roots’, informal efforts as well as the recent top-level Episcopal Assembly process defined by the Patriarchs. This goal focuses on the ‘grass roots’, informal efforts.

- Actively support the “Episcopal Assembly” process, through our Territorial, Diocesan and Parish communications and by introducing a petition into our Liturgy for the Holy Spirit to guide it in accomplishing its goals.
- Clearly communicate the gifts that the OCA brings to this process – its emphasis on hierarchical conciliarity and on mission to Americans, whatever their past ground – while still recognizing the gifts that the other Orthodox Churches also bring to this process.

WITNESS TO THE KINGDOM – IN THE WORLD

INTENSIFY CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR CLERGY AND LAITY: this goal deals explicitly with training clergy and laity in understanding and appreciating the many non-Orthodox cultures that one encounters in North America today. The broader goal of continuing clergy education is dealt with under the section: “Revitalize our parish sacramental, liturgical, and devotional life and ministry”.

- Develop the curriculum and the associated content to enable our clergy and laypeople to respectfully appreciate the good contained in the range of non-Orthodox cultures and philosophies that one encounters in North America today (as well as to identify the negative and respond effectively).
- Develop specialists skilled in understanding these cultures and philosophies and communicating them at all levels. Drawing on this understanding, develop a set of tools to explain Orthodoxy to non-Orthodox.

ENCOUNTER CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND MORALS: a plurality of cultures, post-modernism, and rapid advances in technology are confronting Orthodox Christians – young and old – with a number of ‘contemporary’ culture and moral issues. We need to do a better job in showing how the Church’s teachings apply to these issues and how to best to address them pastorally. Because these can be very sensitive issues, we must carefully prioritize them and take the time and care to treat them appropriately.

- Convene conferences of Orthodox theologians, laity, and the ‘best minds’ in society, on well prioritized issues: (a) to understand the different cultures views on the issue; and (b) to understand the Orthodox view on the issue.
- Develop appropriate educational tools on Contemporary Culture and Moral issues. Such tools should include a bibliography of Orthodox writings on the issue; appropriate seminary course(s); and media-based courses accessible to a broader range of folks both inside and outside the Church.
- Appropriate position papers from the Holy Synod of Bishops, clarifying their understanding of these issues and applying the Church’s teachings to the issues at hand, including recommended pastoral ways of dealing with the issue. Ensure that

we put “practice what we preach” and that we do what we say we will do in the papers and policies.

FOSTER EVANGELIZATION/OUTREACH/MINISTRY EFFORTS AT ALL CHURCH LEVELS: evangelization and outreach means not only planting new missions or parishes but also revitalizing existing ones that have reached a plateau or even declined – and to do so takes not only trained clergy but trained teams of people.

- Develop and pursue a pro-active strategy and approach to parish planting. There should be clear recommended guidelines for where and how to establish missions, how to finance them, checkpoints in their development to see if they are progressing appropriately and criteria for either transitioning them to parish status or ceasing to fund them.
- Train parish level and regional mission teams, not just priests. It is not just sufficient to send out a priest to establish a mission – but that priest needs appropriate training, a choir director or chanter that can conduct services with the resources of a small mission, etc.
- Train regional level revitalization teams. Helping to diagnose and revitalize a ‘plateaued’ or ‘stagnant’ parish requires a different set of skills than establishing a new mission or parish. We need to train teams that can go in and work with such a parish to understand ‘its story/history’, its needs, and its potential and to work with the local clergy and council to ‘revitalize’ the parish.

STEWARDSHIP OF OUR RESOURCES

- Develop and articulate a compelling and convincing story. People will give of their time, talent and money provided we give them a compelling vision of how the Church will transform their lives, those of their children, and those around. This needs to be more than continuing to exist and paying the bills. As good stewards of their resources they need to see how their resources will be used to more fully bring Christ into their lives and the lives of those around them.
- Establish a professional-level development office. This job requires the skills and time of more than a part-time or even a full-time professional; it requires a team of professionals.
- Pursue a broad range of funding vehicles for the Church and its ministry. Actively identify and develop major donors, often for specific projects/programs. Replace the current per capita assessment system with tithing or proportional giving. Encourage Dioceses to pool their resources and create their own ‘banks’ for financing parish development or revitalization efforts. Pursue alternate funding options.

ON-GOING EVALUATION

The proposals outlined by the strategic Planning Committee constitute a *preliminary* effort to identify ways of moving from comfort and stagnation towards a vital experience and witness of the Kingdom inaugurated by the incarnate and risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Cultures are living and unpredictable realities. Thus we must remain open and willing to re-examine strategies for communicating and living out the Gospel in light of new challenges. The one permanent criterion for doing so, and which runs through all the processes we describe, is the criterion of *conciliarity*. This implies the fostering of the priesthood in all believers, and of the conviction that every member of the Church has unique and necessary gifts to bring to the common table. In the incarnation Christ God emptied Himself, becoming as nothing so that we might be lifted up to the divine dignity of sons and daughters of the Father on high. Thus, only the paradox of self-emptying servant-leadership, the manifestation of strength in weakness, of authority in genuine humility – is capable of mirroring and sustaining this love of God, among those who are called by Him to lead within the Church.