

Best Practices and Activities In Implementing the Eparchial 25 Year Pastoral Plan

PILLAR 3: TO SERVE GOD (Building Community)

Increasing Participation in the Life of our Parish

A parish relies on its members to manage the financial and material aspects of the parish and create a nurturing parish community (see document Who is a Parishioner). The “Welcoming Parishes” initiative of the Eparchy encourages parishes to be more engaging with new or potential members, and to encourage all to visit and pray with us.

To build a stronger sense of community, parishes are encouraged to be more inclusive in their various decision-making processes. Get feedback and comments from the members, so that they feel that they are part of the decision, and therefore are engaged in the resulting activity.

Actively invite and encourage new members to get involved in parish activities, regardless of how large or small. Provide a friendly and positive experience. In part, this is supported by the Eparchy’s “Safer Environments” policy.

Show volunteers we appreciate them. Annually recognize all volunteers at an event. It can be a wine and cheese evening, or a special Divine Liturgy on Sunday for the volunteers of the parish. Consider a “new volunteer of the year” award that can be as little as a mention in the bulletin. Expand this to a new volunteer of the month, again with a small acknowledgement in the bulletin and/or by some other means.

To refresh the life of the parish, provide new opportunities for members to get involved in. Do something different.

- The parish praznyk dinner has been the same for decades, and it is the same volunteers who do all the work. So, do something different! Have a barbeque instead, with salads

and burgers. This will allow others to get involved, as it is easier to make salads and burgers than a full-course traditional Ukrainian dinner. This also gives parishioners more time to visit with one another.

Involving youth participation.

Provide the youth of the parish with an activity or undertaking that they care about. The project should be determined by the group that will undertake the project, with minimal direction from the parish. Let them plan and execute the project.

Typically, projects are short-term with a measurable result.

Projects can include organizing and executing a “shoe box” campaign (“shoe boxes for Ukraine” is an available annual autumn project under Samaritan’s Purse), collecting for the local food bank, volunteering once a month at the local food bank, etc. Let the youth decide on the project and let them do it. They will learn by doing.

Rather than trying to organize a youth club that meets on a regular basis, let the youth organize via some online means. This electronic connection creates the sense of community in the group. It allows the coordinator to create an event on short notice. The group can interact electronically to determine the project and then just come together to execute it.

Involving youth in Parish life.

Provide opportunities for youth to participate in the Divine Liturgy and other parish services and activities. The youngest can hold candles during the Gospel and be involved in the procession of the Shroud on Good Friday, for example. Older children can be acolytes, and serve at the Liturgy as ushers, collect donations, be responsible for candles. Young adults can be given the role of reading the Epistle on Sunday.

Make parish events youth-friendly. Hold a birthday party for Jesus before Christmas, with appropriate spiritual messaging. Hold parish family nights, with pizza, popcorn and a movie.

Hold an autumn pumpkin carving (not necessarily at Halloween). Have youth hand out flowers to mothers on Mother's Day and chocolate bars to fathers on Father's Day.

Outreach

As part of the "Welcoming Parishes" Initiative, it is incumbent on each parish to step outside of the parish community, into the community at large to become involved in community endeavours, such as local fundraising initiatives for local community projects, international relief outside the Ukrainian community, or hosting a bingo evening or afternoon at the local nursing/seniors home.

The objective is to help others, but also to demonstrate that we play a key participant in the life of the larger community. By interacting with those we do not normally interact with as a parish, we have the opportunity to reach out to potential new members, rather than waiting for them to come to us.

Outreach can occur by the parish hosting events open to all, such as community pyrohy or other types of supper, dances, or leading a community initiative. There should be members on hand to act as ushers and hosts, welcoming and offering friendship to all who come.

Opportunity for outreach occurs every time someone from outside our parish community comes to our church or hall. This is especially true for funerals, weddings and similar events. (This requires its own section with specific details. Can we find suggestions or plan items?)