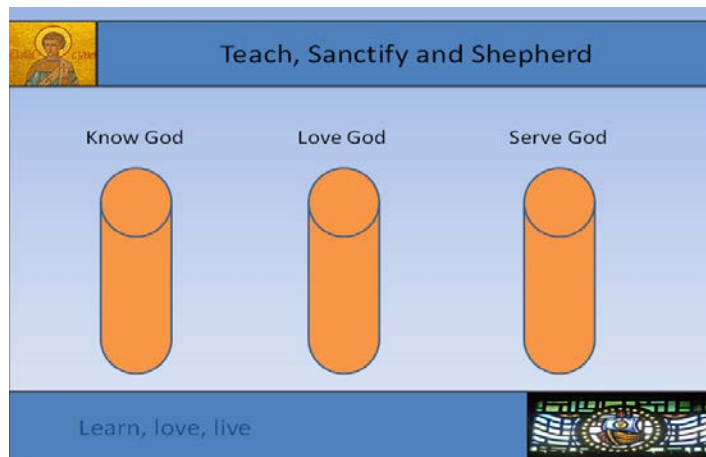




Becoming a More Welcoming Parish: Survey Results

2015 SURVEY COMMENTS

The following is a summary of the key themes that came to light in the survey comments. For complete survey results, you are encouraged to visit the Eparchial website, or contact the Chancery office.



The Three Pillars of the Eparchial 25 Year Pastoral Plan

Teach

Eparchy/bishop

- A key role of the bishop and eparchy should be to focus on catechizing and evangelizing, helping the faithful grow in their faith, providing more instruction and “grounding” in the Ukrainian Catholic faith and traditions.

Parish/Pastor

- More instruction on our traditions and religious practices (e.g., the Kiss of Peace, rosary, stations of the cross) is needed for all age groups. Several

responses identified bible studies as a teaching and learning opportunity that would be welcomed.

- Parishes should provide more informative bulletins and websites and make other materials available in churches as means of communicating Ukrainian Catholic community news, both locally and abroad, and/or as tools for teaching about the Ukrainian Catholic faith.
- While there was a desire for more Sunday school offering for children, there was also concern that Sunday school should not run concurrently with liturgies, so that children can learn about, and participate in, the liturgies.
- Some concern was expressed about our rite becoming the same as the Roman Catholic, with certain traditions identified as Roman Catholic that are actually part of Eastern Church tradition.

Faithful:

- There was a common theme that our eparchial community needs to offer more spiritual education and individuals need to take the initiative and responsibility to participate in learning opportunities that are offered.

Sanctify

Eparchy/Bishop

- To some respondents the Liturgy is “too traditional”, needs to be more “contemporary” to attract more youth, while to others it is not “traditional” enough.
- There was a similar dichotomy expressed about the role of the music or singing in the Liturgy: whether it is “not contemporary” enough or should remain more “traditional”.
- **The Kiss of Peace:** (a number of comments were received specifically regarding the Kiss of Peace. About half see it as a positive element of the Liturgy. Half said it should not be practiced.
 - Some respondents felt it encourages those attending to meet one another, make each other feel more welcome and friendly and that this is a positive element in the Liturgy that needs to be expanded in the parishes.
 - Others saw the Kiss of Peace as disruptive to the Liturgy or, along with the sharing of the Eucharist with a spoon, as a health concern.



- Some expressed the opinion that the Kiss of Peace is artificial and done without sincerity.
- Some of comments appeared to highlight a poor understanding of the origin and value of the Kiss of Peace, even at the pastoral level.

Parish/Pastor

- A number of respondents indicated that choir singing in church is too slow or “depressing,” or under-practiced.
- Some respondents expressed the opinion that the choir is too operatic or controls the singing, discouraging congregational participation.
- The music or selection of songs is not varied; the same hymns are repeated continually.
- Suggestions for improvement included integrating instruments with the singing or using taped material to enhance and vary the music.
- Some respondents asked for more encouragement and means for congregations to participate in the signing.



- Several respondents praised the beauty of the choir singing and church services such as marriages and funerals.

- A variety of suggestions were made in relation to language in church services, specifically the Liturgy: mix Ukrainian and English or provide either more Ukrainian or more English.

- A few respondents felt that liturgies should be shorter, offered at more convenient times, and standardized across the eparchy.

- For some respondents homilies are too long, not relevant, discuss inappropriate topics, or are difficult to understand in English. For others, homilies are informative, easy to understand, thought-provoking, relevant and/or provide spiritual direction and instruction.
- There were requests for a monthly homily for the young and an increased role for youth and children in the liturgies.
- While some responses suggested that children should be more welcome in church during the liturgies, others opined that parents need to “control” their children to a greater degree during the liturgies, as their behaviour is distracting.
- A respondent suggested that we need to refocus on other services like vespers, moleben, akathists, missions, opportunity for confession, etc. that bring out the “richness” of our Rite.
- More pastoral care was requested from parish priests, such as visitation and support for the sick, suffering (physically and spiritually), and elderly,

encouragement for children and youth, visibility among the parishioners and community, greater involvement in the life of the parish.

The Faithful

- Many comments related to needs and wants of parishioners, and the falling attendance at parish services and activities.
- A common theme was concern about
 - the few youth and young adults attending our parishes on a regular basis,
 - the drifting of our members to other churches or to no church,
 - the reasons for this disengagement, and
 - how we can retain these members and attract others into our churches.
- A number of survey responses suggested that the faithful need to be more supportive of, and show their appreciation of their parish priests, their work and their talents.

Shepherd

The Eparchy/ Bishop:

- Concerns were expressed about financial management of the eparchy, and specifically management and effective use of specific properties.
- Parishes should not be involved in casinos.
- On the one hand, the faithful should provide for parish and eparchial financial needs, on the other funding is needed for programs, but no indication where that funding should come from.
- We need to accelerate the planning process to address falling attendance/ participation at Liturgies and in church activities.
- The *25 year Pastoral Plan* needs to be much shorter and address current/ existing issues.
- Although there was a comment that we need to “rethink” the direction of the eparchy, few specifics were given.
- From another perspective, a number of positive comments were expressed about the current direction of the eparchy and its initiatives.
- Respondents suggested encouraging more interaction between parishes and with the bishop and between individuals to share good practices or partner on projects.
- We need to provide more regular communication, using a variety of tools, including for the purpose of evangelizing: a quarterly printed newsletter, for example.

- A number of comments about the most recent reassignment of priests across the Eparchy were positive, others preferred the previous pastor.
- “Rumours” about parish closures will drive parishioners away from church attendance.
- A lot of concern was expressed about the decline of parish membership, particularly of young families, children and youth.
- There were numerous positive comments about the bishop and a number of priests, as well as some unflattering comments.

The Parish: (Parish-specific comments will be provided to the relevant parishes. The following are general comments.)

- The pastor’s involvement in financial management of the parish, or the day to day operations of the Parish was questioned.
- More promotion of the *25 year Pastoral Plan* was suggested, particularly at the parish level.
- Some comments called for programs, resources, and/or activities for the elderly, those in poor health, shut-ins, those experiencing a loss and other life challenges, while others indicated there is not enough focus on children’s programs and activities.
- There needs to be a balance between parish and secular organization activities in the Ukrainian Catholic community. Secular organizations take away from parish activities, by offering alternative or similar functions, or take away volunteers and/or participants from parish activities.
- An opposite viewpoint expressed was to take parish activities out into the community, with outreach and charitable and volunteer efforts towards those outside of the Ukrainian Catholic community.
- There were positive comments on the welcoming “feel” of the parish, the number and type of activities, and management, both at the pastor and council levels.
- Some comments from smaller parishes indicated that they either did not have the numbers generally or, young people specifically, or the facilities/amenities to offer appropriate programs.
- Suggestions were offered for making a parish more welcoming, such as
 - parish welcome kits and individuals assigned to follow up with new members.
 - up-to-date pictorial directories of parish members.
 - opportunities for parishioners to meet one another: create family groups for regular activities in the Parish, such as coffee after liturgy to allow members to meet one another.
 - priests greeting parishioners at the door either before or after liturgy.

- Some comments expressed dismay about the physical limitations in their parishes, such as poor or non-existent sound systems or lack of disabled access.
- A number of comments targeted the mix of Ukrainian and English in particular parishes and what the preferred balance should be. Some would like to see more Ukrainian and less English used, while others would like to see the opposite occur.
- There was a small amount of commentary about the necessity for/ethics of parish membership fees.

The Faithful

- Recognize all volunteers, regardless of the nature or level of their volunteerism.
- Some parishes are controlled by a few elderly members, with outdated perspectives, who do not work with the pastor or others in the parish and do not engage younger members.
- The need for/role of ushers in church: some comments were in favour of greeters and requested more involvement, while others expressed the opposite viewpoint.
- More individuals are needed to be active in the Parish, on pastoral councils, committees and to assist during liturgies and other parish events.
- There were a number of comments about exclusionary cliques among parishioners in some parishes, and long-term or older parishioners being unwelcoming to newcomers or visitors.

The survey

- Some respondents thanked the eparchy for the survey, for listening, the opportunity to celebrate the parish and gather ideas to be more welcoming and to encourage greater participation in the life of the parish.
- Some negative comments suggested this was a self-serving means for parishes to promote themselves or that the survey methodology was flawed.
- Some ideas for the next information gathering process were offered and the suggestion that those who are not attending church or who have left be asked why and those who are attending other parishes (Eastern or Western traditions) be asked describe their experiences.

Appendix A attached.