

THE CHALLENGE OF OUTREACH

A Report of the Orthodox Christian Laity

PREPARED FOR HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP SPYRIDON

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APRIL 1997

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FOREWORD

Your Eminence:

During your meeting with the Executive Board of the Orthodox Christian Laity (OCL) on December 2, 1996, you requested of OCL a comprehensive study on how our Orthodox Church needs to improve its outreach efforts in this country, both to Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike.

Your Eminence, a single report cannot encompass the entirety of the topic, nor is there any magic solution which can be effortlessly applied. In our study, we have attempted to sketch for you what we feel are the major outreach problems facing the Church and to provide solutions. What is needed, however, is an **on-going** process—the immediate creation of a **National Office of Outreach Ministries**, linked, on the one hand, to a series of mixed clerical-lay commissions set up to deal with specific issues (the youth, translations, etc.) and at the same time to **diocesan offices** and ultimately to **task-forces** set up in every **parish**, consisting not only of the parish priest, but supported by an entire network of deacons, catechists, counselors, and other lay ministers.

At the same time, Your Eminence, we must recognize that the root cause of our Church's malaise is **spiritual**. Only when we reaffirm the commission given to the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost, and personally accepted by each of us at our Baptism and Chrismation, to follow Christ and to make Him known to the world, and only when every Orthodox Christian—from the Archbishop and all the bishops down to the priests, the deacons, and every lay person—accepts the challenge of discipleship, will renewal occur.

In addition to this work, we would like to call to your attention two other studies which address the concerns of outreach ministry. The first is our own Project for Orthodox Renewal (1993), which you have had the occasion to glance through. The second is a report of the "Commission for An Archdiocesan Theological Agenda for the Third Millennium", chaired by His Eminence Metropolitan Silas in 1988. Both of these earlier documents underscore the fact that in order to achieve any benefit, solutions must be **implemented** in concrete action and cannot remain locked away in studies which gather dust.

Asking for your blessing in this Holy Lenten Spring,

For the Committee,

Dr. Nikolas K. Gvosdev

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We live in a time of the decline of Christian consciousness not only in our country and in the world, but within the walls of our own Orthodox Churches. We must take steps not only to halt this decline, but to rebuild and to **grow**—a task for the entire Church, hierarchy, clergy, and laity. This report is directed to you not only in your capacity as Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, but also as President of the Standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops in America (SCOBA).

Our ultimate goal is the salvation of every human soul. For the Church to carry out this mission, however, its **core** must be **consolidated** and those on the fringes of the Church brought into closer communion. **Outreach** means “to surpass in reach, to exceed the usual activities.” If our Church is truly following Christ’s teachings, then we cannot be passively expecting people to come in, but we must seek them out and invite them to “come and see.” As we are in the United States, the primary language of both education and worship in the Church needs to be **English**.

With exceptions, the present direction of the Church has **failed**. Demographically, Orthodoxy in this country has **stagnated** in the last 80 years, and if present trends continue unabated, Orthodoxy will continue to decline and become even more marginalized in America. Despite all the publicity, the Church **has not** made significant numbers of conversions, and **large numbers** of cradle Orthodox have continued to **flow out** of the Mother Church.

We have identified **eight** areas where we think the Church’s outreach efforts need to be concentrated:

1. The “Unchurched Orthodox” (3-4 million)
2. Non-Orthodox and non-Christian spouses and family members (up to 2 million)
3. Converts (50,000-100,000)
4. Immigrants (up to one million)
5. Youth (1 million)
6. Senior Citizens (730,000)
7. The “Captives” (the homebound, those in nursing homes, etc.)
8. Women (over 60% of the **active** members of our congregations)

Many of the concerns of the above groups are interrelated. Our approach must be **multi-dimensional**. Our Church in this country is **re-active**. It must become **pro-active**. It must establish its presence in the community and be able to transform the lives of all those who come into contact with it.

STEP I: The **immediate** creation of a **National Office of Outreach Ministries**, along with the mixed clerical-lay commissions, and the diocesan offices.

STEP II: (1997-1998): the implementation of a series of **short-range** outreach projects, which can be done with **existing resources**, as well as planning for the implementation of the **intermediate-term** projects.

STEP III: (1998-2002): the implementation of the **intermediate-range** projects and expansion of the Church’s outreach ministries at all levels.

STEP IV: (2002-): the implementation of the **long-term** projects and the shift in outreach priorities from **recovery** to **active growth**.

THE CRISIS OF ORTHODOXY

Orthodoxy in the United States is facing a crisis. For the last eighty years, despite large-scale immigration from the traditionally Orthodox countries, despite a small but steady flow of converts into the Orthodox Church, the percentage of Orthodox in America has remained steady.

This is due to a **failure** in outreach. Orthodoxy has yet to make a dramatic impact on American society. The magnitude of the challenge facing the Church is made clearer when we compare the rates of growth for the last eighty years for **nominal** Orthodox versus **active** or **practicing** Orthodox. In 1910 reliable estimates conclude that there were approximately 600,000 baptized Orthodox in North America, of whom about 300,000 were practicing members of the Church. Today, it is estimated that over 4.6 million Americans are “of Orthodox background” but only about 900,000 Americans attend an Orthodox church with any regularity. While the “Orthodox population” has grown at about 8% annually for the last eight decades, the number of **active** Orthodox has only kept pace with the natural growth of the population—in other words, **no real growth**.

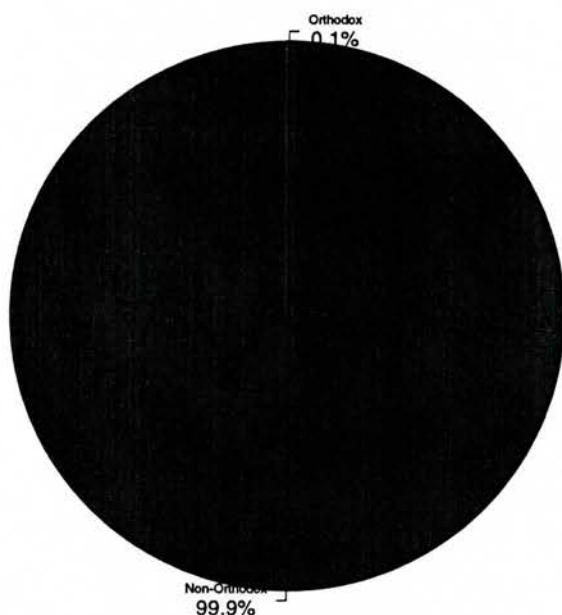
Had the Orthodox Church instituted real programs of outreach to retain within the Church the immigrants and their descendants, and to aggressively seek converts to replace those Orthodox who fell away from their faith, the Church should have grown at a rate closer to the rate of growth in the “ethnic population” rather than just keeping pace. The gap between the two rates reflects the large numbers of the unchurched, those lost through intermarriage, and other factors.

The challenge to any church is to **retain** its people (and by extension draw others into their community). In the first part of this century, Orthodoxy retained about 50% of its people within the Church. Today, with the outflow of entire generations of children and grandchildren out from Orthodoxy, we retain **less than 20%**. (By comparison, the Roman Catholic Church generally retains about 85% of those baptized as infants into the Catholic Church.)

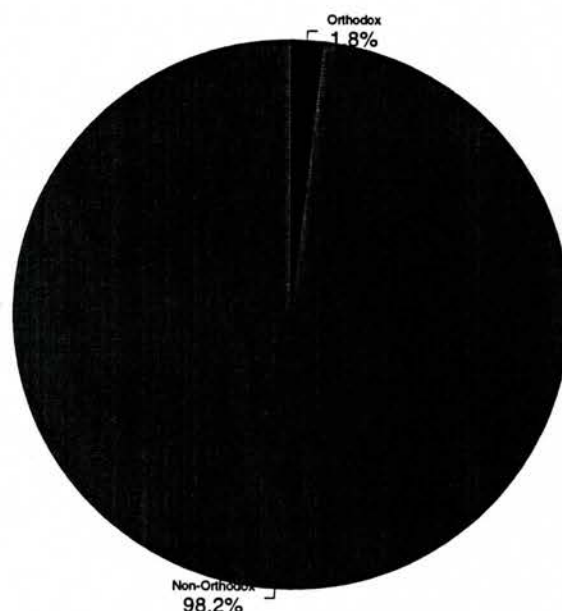
This, then, is the challenge of outreach—how to reclaim the millions lost from Orthodoxy, how to draw in those who by marriage or other personal ties have a connection with Orthodoxy, and ultimately how to begin a process that will evangelize the entire North American continent. This requires an unconditional commitment by professed Orthodox leaders—hierarchs and laity working together—to institute an effective outreach mission.

Despite immigration, Orthodoxy has failed to make a significant impact on the American population, and has not been able to bring large numbers into the Church

Orthodox as a Proportion of the US Population, 1910

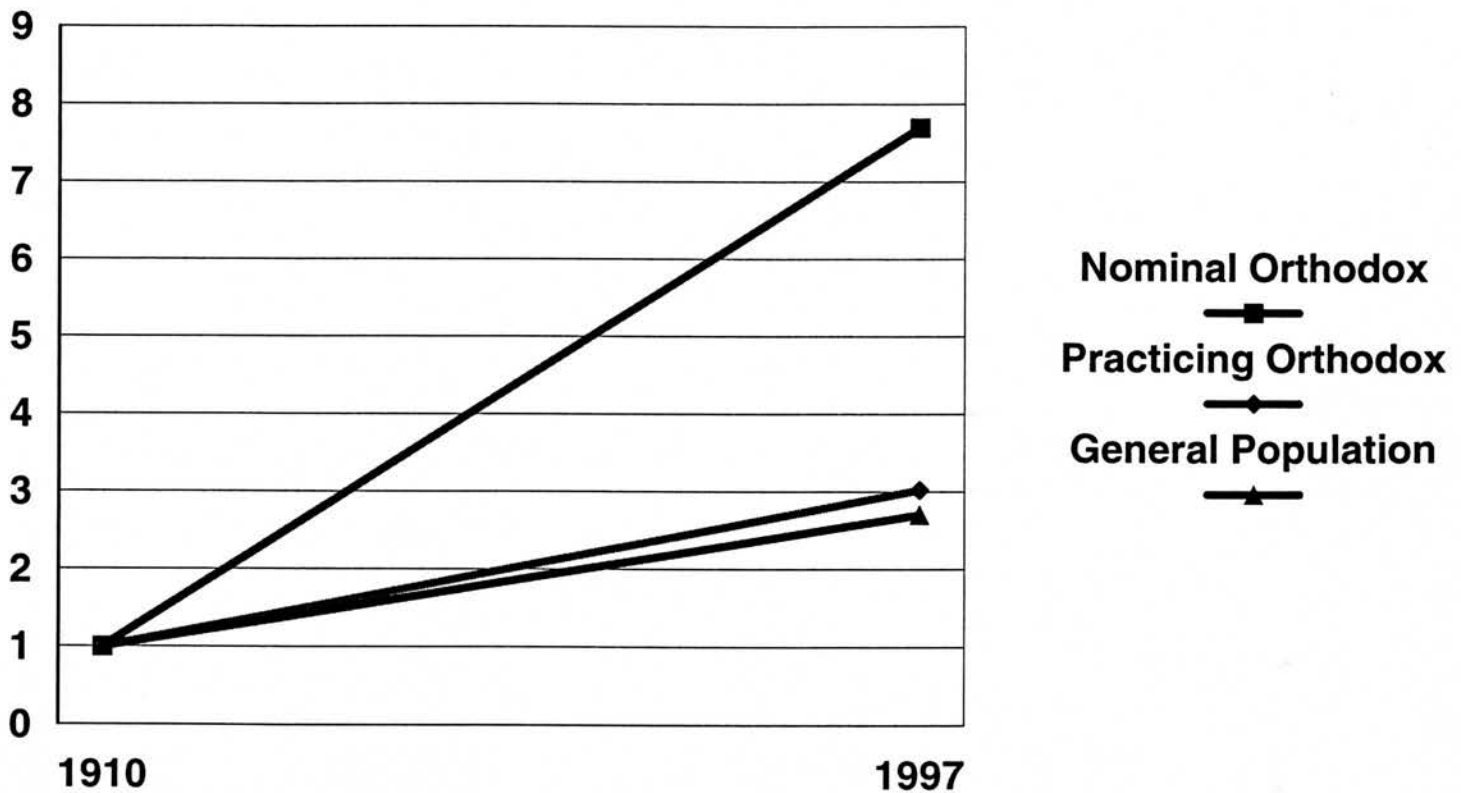


Orthodox as a Proportion of the US Population, 1997



Data: Rt. Rev. Gregory (Afonsky), The Orthodox Church in America: 1917-1934; Charles Moskos, Project for Orthodox Renewal; US Census Bureau; Dr. N. K. Gvosdev, Crisis in Demography

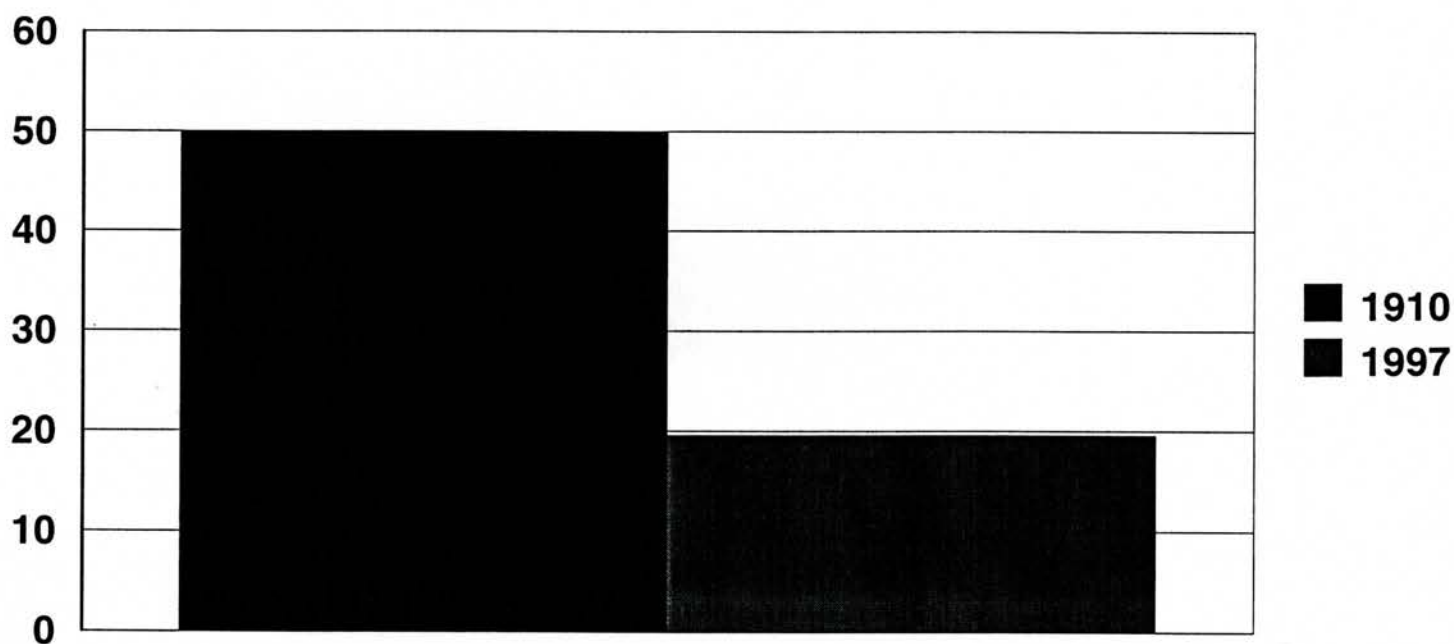
Comparison in Rates of Growth Between Nominal Orthodox, Practicing Orthodox, and the General Population, 1910-1997 (Gap between churched and unchurched)



Data: Rt. Rev. Gregory (Afonsky), The Orthodox Church in America, 1917-1934; Charles Moskos, Project for Orthodox Renewal; US Census Bureau; National Council of Churches

In 1910, 1/2 of the "Orthodox" population in the US were active members of the Church; today, that figure is less than 20%

Comparison of the Rate of Retention, 1910 and 1997



(Extrapolation based on previously-cited data)

OUTREACH: THE UNCHURCHED

The “unchurched” are defined as those Orthodox who were **born and baptized** into the faith but have **left the Church** and are no longer active members of the Orthodox Church. Some attend no church at all while others have joined other confessions. Based on U. S. Census data, we can extrapolate that over **3 million Americans** can be considered “unchurched Orthodox.”

THE FOUR MAIN REASONS ORTHODOX LEAVE THEIR CHURCH

- **Inability to understand** the **language** used in worship
- A desire to **assimilate** into the **American mainstream** by joining a Protestant or Catholic congregation
- **Intermarriage** with a non-Orthodox spouse
- **Clashes** with a priest or parish over **inflexibility** in application of Church canons or procedures (especially with regard to marriage or the treatment of women), or over **political** issues or other matters not related to the faith.

Little attention has been paid to this group because for years the prevailing assumption has been that all Americans descended from an “Orthodox” nationality (e. g. Greek, Serbian) were automatically a part of the Church, even if they only attended at Christmas and Easter. This mindset ignores the reality that these people, and more importantly, their children and grandchildren, are becoming disconnected from the Church and either are attending no church at all or being drawn into another denomination. The death of former Senator Paul Tsongas is a warning that we do not have the luxury of waiting for people to “return” to Orthodoxy.

There are **two strategies** for dealing with the unchurched. One group, generally those who left because the services were not in English, may have joined other confessions but over the years have never been satisfied and might be induced to return to find a spirituality lacking in other churches, if the treasures of Orthodoxy can be presented in a fashion that they can comprehend. This requires both an effective program of Orthodox Christian education,

and the **employment of English as the primary language of worship**, for it is in the **services** that the Church instructs and guides her faithful. The other group are those who might be attracted to Orthodoxy in the course of searching for their roots, especially the children of intermarriage. In both cases, our parishes need to reach out to those who come once or twice a year, to encourage them to take part in the life of our Church. Unfortunately, many of our people take the attitude that “the Church doesn’t matter, it’s all the same God anyway” and little effort is taken to showcase the unique religious heritage we enjoy as Orthodox.

The **3 million** unchurched Orthodox are a poignant reminder of Orthodoxy’s failure to evangelize in this country, even among its own people, in keeping with Christ’s commandments.

OUTREACH: NON-ORTHODOX SPOUSES/FAMILY

Between **50%** and **80%** of Orthodox marry **outside** their faith-community. As a result, some **2 million** Americans are acquainted with Orthodoxy through a **familial** connection (marriage, conversion of relatives, etc.) Rather than being the means by which non-Orthodox are drawn into union with the Church, interfaith marriages often result in the **alienation** of the Orthodox spouse and children away from the Church.

We have no consistent approach to our people who marry non-Orthodox or towards dealing with families divided along religious lines. In particular:

- **No uniform program of pre-marital counseling** and guidance for all couples before marriage, with **follow-up** sessions after the ceremony.
- **No consistent policy** in dealing with the question of marriages between Orthodox and non-Orthodox. Some parishes and priests attempt to discourage such marriages, which can cause a person to leave the Church completely; other clerics and communities make no effort to encourage the conversion of a non-Orthodox spouse because "God is the same anyway." A problem in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese is that individual priests and parishes have carried the identification of Greek ethnicity with Orthodoxy to such a degree that even marriages between a Greek-American Orthodox and an Orthodox of another ethnic background are discouraged or uncanonically classified as "mixed marriages."
- **No program of outreach to non-Orthodox family members.** We do not present ourselves as an **accepting community of love in Christ**. We do not have a national program for the catechumenate, to provide for the education of those who would be interested in conversion to the Orthodox Church. We do not often encourage non-Orthodox to **become involved** in the spiritual side of the parish, attending services, partaking of the Antidoron in fellowship, receiving blessings, or becoming involved in the **philanthropic** work of the parish. Instead, many of our parishes foster a **division** by which **the Orthodox parish** is reduced to the **exotic "ethnic Church"** where one learns dances and foreign languages while a **non-Orthodox** community becomes the true **spiritual home** of the family.
- **No process of review of Church canons or procedures.** America is a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional society, yet many of the Church procedures which govern marriage and family life assume that we are living in an homogenously Orthodox country. If a non-Orthodox spouse will not convert, then the priest (with the help of his bishop) should explore other avenues of sanctifying the marriage. Barring someone from the Sacraments is counterproductive; our goal needs to be to encourage the Orthodox spouse to remain faithful to the Church and lay the groundwork so that over time the non-Orthodox spouse can be drawn into the life of the Church.

OUTREACH: CONVERTS

In this country, we still struggle as a Church with being Catholic (*katholous*)—being open to all without regard to ethnic background. Some parishes and jurisdictions make it very difficult for outsiders to join the Church, while others can be extremely lax in ensuring that those seeking to join the Orthodox Church have been properly prepared and instructed.

Converts enter our Church through different paths. Some are converted by reason of marriage to an Orthodox. Others are introduced to Orthodoxy through university study in fields such as Russian literature. A renewed interest in Christian origins among Protestants has led not only to individual conversions but the entry of whole congregations into the Church.

Our efforts to bring people not born into the Orthodox faith into our Church are **haphazard and uneven**, and we have produced **powerful disincentives** for anyone considering converting to Orthodoxy. In particular, we lack:

- **A uniform attitude** to converts. Some priests actively encourage conversions, others maintain an attitude that it is not necessary because “God is the same everywhere.”
- **A uniform system of education (catechumenate).** There is no **standard procedure** for the reception of converts or system of preparation akin to the Roman Catholic RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults). This leads to the danger that individual priests or catechists may try to “refashion” converts in their own particular image of Orthodoxy. Very few parishes follow the ancient practice of educating catechumens during Lent so that they may be received into the Church and on Pascha receive Communion as full and equal members of the community. A **standard** program is needed that will be implemented in every Orthodox parish and diocese.
- **A uniform reception** of converts into Orthodoxy. Without this in place, prospective converts might be tempted to “shop around” parishes and jurisdictions to find a way to enter Orthodoxy on their own terms or conditions (regarding Church doctrine, etc.)
- **Integration of converts** fully into the life of the Church. Often converts can be ignored or not made to feel welcome in the Church because of their “non-ethnic” background. In other parishes converts may be “exploited” as the workhorses but not appointed to high office within the parish or diocese. This can lead to the problem of “convert isolation” from the main body of the Church which can be spiritually unhealthy both for them and for the entire Church.

OUTREACH: IMMIGRANTS

While immigration from Greece has slowed to a trickle, the end of the Cold War has triggered a flood of new immigrants from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. At minimum, **40%** of all new immigrants from the ex-USSR are in fact of Orthodox (rather than Jewish) background. A steady flow of Orthodox also continue to arrive from the Middle East. Up to **one million** “new Americans” of Orthodox background have entered this country in the last two decades.

It is both foolish and short-sighted to assume that each ethnic jurisdiction can cope with the challenges of the new immigration, or that immigrants will **automatically** flock to the Orthodox Church. The retention of new immigrants in the Orthodox Church should be of concern to all Orthodox regardless of their ethnic background, especially since both the Roman Catholics and the Protestants have well-funded missionary efforts targeted at the new arrivals, and often use such incentives as social services, legal assistance, or language training. Only a **unified SCOBA effort** can coordinate the resources needed to mount a credible program of assistance for the newly-arrived immigrants.

The Church needs to provide both for the **material** needs of the immigrants but also for their **spiritual needs** through literature and educational programs, since many of the immigrants from Eastern Europe, due to the communist persecution, were not able to be active church-goers.

Immigrants can prove to be both a **blessing** and a **challenge** for existing parishes. They can provide new blood and rejuvenate older communities, but they can also bring their own rivalries and prejudices which can lead to conflict, particularly if a parish is divided over language.

Our outreach to immigrants is again uneven and haphazard. Some parishes ignore the needs of immigrants; others become engulfed by them to the detriment of the American-born members. We lack:

- **Consolidated services.** Every metropolitan area should have a consolidated, pan-Orthodox immigrant task force, which has connections to social services as well as professionals with appropriate language skills, so that the needs of our immigrant population can be met.
- **Consistent Church policies** with regards to the new immigration. Some parishes feel that they have no obligation to reach out beyond their immediate membership to embrace immigrants; others use the arrival of immigrants as an excuse not to introduce English into services or engage in mission work among the “American” community. The primary concern of the parish should be the spiritual well-being of the immigrants and instructing them in the Orthodox faith; language schools and cultural events, while important, should not detract from that primary mission.
- **Flexibility** with regard to the language issue. Regardless of jurisdiction, when new immigrants arrive, there are inevitable clashes between those who want services in the language of the “Old Country” and Americans who want English. Generally, the issue is resolved only when one group is **driven out** of the parish (and generally out of the Church). Priests should be given **ekonomia** to hold more than one Liturgy on a Sunday and certain parishes in a given area should be designated as “all-English” while others charged with meeting the spiritual needs of the immigrants.

OUTREACH: THE YOUTH

Our children are being raised **without the proper Orthodox religious formation**, and so are easy targets for the proselytizing efforts of other bodies. Few of our parishes encourage **participation**, either in the **liturgical life** (especially if **English** is not used), or the **administrative life** of the Church.

When compared with the youth programs of other Christian denominations of similar size to us, the Orthodox are clearly **inferior**. There are only a **handful** of struggling **Orthodox parochial schools**, and Orthodoxy's presence at our nation's colleges and universities is uneven and haphazard. **Sunday Schools** in many parishes are treated as little more than "**babysitters**" to allow parents to attend the coffee hour. Many Greek-language schools

concentrate on the teaching of modern conversational Greek with little or no reference to Byzantine culture or Orthodoxy. The Orthodox Church maintains no facilities for drug counseling, for assisting unwed mothers, for providing safe havens for abused children. Most youth programs are **insular** and do not expose the youth to other Orthodox of other jurisdictions in the same geographical area.

Current youth programs need to be overhauled and expanded:

- The basis of all educational activity in a parish, including language schools, should be the **promotion of Orthodoxy**.
- **Church schools** should be reorganized along the lines of the Roman Catholic Confraternity of Catholic Doctrine (CCD). **Lessons and teaching tools** need to be **standardized** for all Orthodox parishes. All **instructors** should be trained and certified at workshops held at the diocesan level. Moreover, classes should **never** be held during the **Liturgy**.
- Youth programs need to be developed along **geographic** rather than **jurisdictional** lines, so that all Orthodox young people in a given area participate in the same activities. Over the long-term, efforts should be undertaken to develop joint Orthodox youth institutions in the area, including **day-care**, **parochial schools**, and **youth centers**.
- All youth activities at the parish, diocesan, and national levels should be designed to **enhance** one's relationship with the Church. Priests should undertake every effort to ensure that youth participating in a dance troupe or basketball team are active in Church life—if Orthodox, that they receive the sacraments on a regular basis or if non-Orthodox (children of an interfaith marriage) that they are encouraged to develop closer **spiritual** ties with the Church.
- An Orthodox presence needs to be developed at all institutions of higher learning. Statistics show that a person is **most likely to abandon** an ancestral or familial Church **in college**.
- **Young people** should be **actively** encouraged and recruited into all echelons of Church administration, from the parish council to national institutions. If young people perceive that the Church administration is not open to them, their ideas, their input, they will drift away and turn to other denominations which might appear to be more receptive to their concerns.

OUTREACH: SENIOR CITIZENS

Now, at a time when men and women are living longer and comprise the largest segment of active Church members, the needs of our elderly (over 700,000 people) must be addressed.

The contemporary Church in this country is not well-equipped to deal with the needs of its aging members, and is often ministering only to those healthy enough to travel to the parish. We lack:

- **Nursing homes and retirement centers.** With a few exceptions, many of our elderly do not live among their co-religionists. If they are unable to travel, they may end up reluctantly accepting the services of a non-Orthodox clergyman attached to the institution where they reside.
- **Bus and van services.** Shut-ins and those unable to drive, therefore, cannot attend church; they may be forced to turn to non-Orthodox churches who can provide transportation to attend **any** sort of church service. Parishes also need to cope with the needs of the disabled in terms of access (ramps into church, arrangements for the reception of Communion, etc.)
- **Outreach ministries** geared to the challenges of **longer life expectancy**. With the breakdown of the traditional “extended family”, many elderly Orthodox must deal with loneliness, isolation, the grief of dealing with the death of a spouse or children, the costs and trauma of medical care (and linked with this, difficult questions such as euthanasia). In these areas it is **essential** that Orthodox **laypeople**, particularly physicians and counselors, be **invited** to share a **co-ministry** with the priests and bishops, bringing their expertise and skill, which Scripture tells us also comes from God.
- **Utilization** of our seniors as **lay ministers** within the Church. Our seniors should be encouraged and directed by their spiritual shepherds to seek out family members who have strayed from Orthodoxy and encourage them to return to their ancestral Church, as well as spread the “Good News” about our Faith among their friends and neighbors. They could also serve as teachers, and be paired with young people in the parish if their own families no longer live in the same geographic area, so that the benefit of their experience can be passed on to new generations.

OUTREACH: CAPTIVES

Christ came to set the captives free, and we must continue that ministry in our own communities. There are many modern-day captives, in hospitals, nursing homes, orphanages, prisons, homeless shelters, AIDS hospices, and drug rehabilitation centers, and we are called to minister to all regardless of their faith.

It would be foolish, however, to pretend that there are no Orthodox Christians to be found in these situations! Given the percentage of Orthodox in the population, we can conclude that at least 30,000 Orthodox are living on the streets of our major cities, and that tens of thousands of Orthodox are in drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs. Unfortunately, Orthodox philanthropic **ministries are few and far between**, and are often the product of individual efforts on the part of clergy and laity (the Philoptochos being a notable exception).

For many Americans, **philanthropy**, not dogma or liturgy, is the true test of Christianity, and Orthodoxy” lack of social outreach in this country, which is at odds with the Byzantine heritage of our Church, is a key factor as to why Orthodox are drawn away and why non-Orthodox are hesitant to convert.

In order to develop more effective ministries to manifest Christ to the world:

- Each **diocese** should have a **social service committee** with a branch in each parish which can assess the needs of the community and how Church resources can be deployed to meet those needs.
- The **priests** are overworked as it is, and their primary function is to lead the local community of the Body of Christ. The Church needs a **complete restoration** of the **Diaconate**, with qualified laypeople, particularly those Orthodox who already work “in the world” as counselors, nurses, guardians of the elderly, teachers, and as prison workers, being **trained** by the diocese and ordained by the bishop as deacons. These deacons could then coordinate with the parish priest to act as the outreach arms of the parish, bringing the Sacraments to those who cannot attend services or to supplement and deepen the ministries under the presidency of the priest (for example, marriage counseling, therapy, etc.)
- The dioceses need to seriously examine the **long-term creation of Orthodox ministries and centers** that can serve not only our “own people” (rather than counting on “other denominations” to care for our sick, our elderly, our orphans, our drug addicts), but can bring a specifically **Orthodox** emphasis on spiritual renewal and healing to an increasingly mechanistic and secular culture for the benefit of all Americans in keeping with Christ’s commands.

OUTREACH: WOMEN

Women make up over **half** of the overall membership of the Orthodox Church in the United States, and in most parishes comprise up to 70% of the **active** membership.

(A separate report being prepared will present in greater detail the need for the restoration of the female diaconate and the needs of women which are largely ignored by the Church. In the Early Church, the women deacons carried out an entire range of ministries for women, including Christian education and visitation of the sick and infirm.)

Archaic or derogatory attitudes to women within the Church constitute the largest impediment to a successful outreach to women. It is sad and ironic that while many parishes have allowed traditional Orthodox practices (such as the Sacrament of Confession) to fall by the wayside, customs pertaining to women which originate not from authentic Orthodox theology but often from village superstitions or un-Orthodox interpretations of the Jewish Law are upheld as unchangeable dogma. Such attitudes can hamper the development of serious outreach programs for today's women, especially to

the "unchurched" and to the non-Orthodox spouse.

It is also unfortunate that in some circles of our Church any attempt to develop an outreach to women, whether to the "educated and successful" or to those who are victims of abuse, is condemned as some sort of "accommodation" with the secular world. Historically, the Orthodox Church of the Byzantine Empire maintained an entire network of women's monasteries and hospices to which women could turn for education, for ministry, and for healing.

The Church needs to develop an outreach to women in the following areas:

- **Bringing women into responsible positions** of both administrative and leadership authority within the Church (such as the ones held by St. Phoebe, the associate of St. Paul, or St. Olympias in Constantinople under St. John Chrysostom), while **ending** demeaning practices such as the way female infants are churched, or the continuing application of "ritual purity" laws which Christ abrogated.
- Encouraging the **restoration** of the women's ministries within the Church, especially female monasticism, to provide spiritual guides for women seeking pastoral care and counseling.
- Working to **provide Orthodox child-care** in every area so that parents, and particularly single parents, can receive the needed assistance (both spiritual and practical) in trying to nurture and raise a family.
- **Taking seriously** sensitive issues such as clerical sexual abuse, the misuse of spiritual authority, and spousal abuse, and working through restored women's ministries such as a network of monasteries and of deacons and counselors to provide assistance and healing.
- **Recognizing the contributions** of women to their Church in the same way that archons are honored, as well as opening up membership in the archons to all qualified Orthodox, men and women, along the lines of the Order of St. Ignatius in the Antiochian Archdiocese.

SOLUTIONS:

THE STRUCTURE FOR A RENEWED OUTREACH MINISTRY

The best intentions often fail because of a **lack of planning**. Individual priests and laypeople alone cannot execute the solutions needed to the problems described above.

Timeline

The first step is the immediate creation of a NATIONAL OFFICE OF OUTREACH MINISTRIES. This office, based at the Archdiocese, would be responsible for coordinating all outreach efforts of in this country, and consist of a staff of both **clergy** and **laity** dedicated to the task and proven professionals in the field (through actual experience gained in the missions, in counseling, in parish service, or in managing institutions such as nursing homes or schools).

The second step would be to set up in **EACH DIOCESE** a **branch** of this **NATIONAL OFFICE**, with both clergy and laity represented. This diocesan office would be largely responsible for setting up the workshops for the training of the outreach ministers, as well as identifying and prioritizing the outreach needs of the area. The diocesan office would also work to create in **every parish** an outreach committee. We believe that once the **diaconal ministries** of the Church are restored, that the lay ministers who will work alongside the parish priest will be able to take on this role.

Simultaneously with the above two steps would be the creation of **MIXED COMMISSIONS** to address particular outreach needs, each **chaired by an episcopal moderator**, with both **clerical** and **lay vice-chairs**, and consisting of priests and laypeople from around the country and from different disciplines and professions. Each Commission would report to directly to the **ARCHBISHOP and the CLERGY-LAITY CONGRESS**, and be under the supervision of the **NATIONAL OFFICE of OUTREACH MINISTRIES**. With the advances made in teleconferencing, with fax machines and electronic mail, there is no need for expensive travel budgets for these Commissions. However, each Commission should have a real budget which will enable each Commission to oversee and execute the projects in their field of supervision.

WE PROPOSE THE FOLLOWING COMMISSIONS:

Mixed Commission on Orthodox Christian Education: will oversee the development of all Orthodox Christian educational materials and the training of Church school teachers and of **catechists**.

Mixed Commission on Women: will work to develop outreach ministries to abused and abandoned women and will work for the restoration of the authentic Orthodox women's ministries in the Church including the female diaconate.

Mixed Commission on Seniors: will examine the status of the senior citizens of the Church and ways to improve the Church's ministry to them, including the longer-term goals of operating Orthodox nursing homes and care facilities.

Mixed Commission on Publications, Media and Public

Outreach: will work to improve publicity about the Church at all levels, including the publishing of literature, the development of audio and video programs for broadcast across the country and work toward the acquisition of Orthodox radio and television networks, cable television outlets, and permanent Internet sites. An emphasis will also be placed on the publication of educational and spiritual literature for Orthodox Christians to be disseminated on a wide basis.

Mixed Commission on Higher Education: will strive to set up Orthodox chaplaincies in every institution of higher learning in the United States and work toward the development of Orthodox studies programs. The longer-term goals are the establishment of Orthodox colleges and universities.

Mixed Commission on Social Services: will examine ways in which the Church's philanthropic arm can be brought to bear on problems such as drug abuse, homelessness, etc. The longer-term goals would be to become active partners in existing institutions or create new Orthodox ones (hospitals, drug rehabilitation centers, etc.)

Mixed Commission on Mission: in coordination with the Orthodox Christian Mission Center created by SCOBA, this commission will work to develop programs for effective missionary work among unchurched Orthodox and among non-Orthodox. This commission will also develop and institute a standard program for the education and reception of all converts.

Mixed Commission on the Diaconate: will study ways of restoring the ancient diaconal ministries of the Church in the modern setting, and how this can be balanced with the existing parish and diocesan structures. This commission will also develop a course curriculum for the training of deacons and guidelines for their service.

Mixed Commission on Translations and Music: will work to translate all materials—service books, theological tracts, manuscripts, and most importantly, the Scriptures—into approved English texts so that the entire legacy of Orthodoxy may be made available in English. the commission will also work to render the entire rich heritage of church music into settings which can be used with these English texts, and in forms conducive not only for choirs, but ultimately to reintroduce on a wide level the ancient practice of **congregational singing**.

Mixed Commission on Marriage and Family Life: in conjunction with related commissions dealing with mission, women, and social services, this commission will look at ways to strengthen marriage counseling efforts and combatting abuse within the family. This commission will also be charged with examining the entire corpus of canon law and current procedures within the Church with regards to marriage and divorce, and to draft new legislation, as necessary, that will address contemporary issues and needs while remaining faithful to Orthodox tradition.

SOLUTIONS:

SHORT-TERM OUTREACH PROJECTS

Short-term projects are designed to be implemented within one year's time and would not require any additional funds than those already in the Church's possession

1. **Immediate distribution** of approved texts and musical settings of the services in **English** which shall be **mandated** for use in all parishes. (All the services have been translated and dozens of different versions exist, with musical settings ranging from pure Byzantine chant to four-part polyphony, already in use in various SCOBA jurisdictions. This material can easily be reprinted and distributed on a mass basis.) Within the year, **all parishes** (except those designated as missions for immigrants) should be required to conduct the **majority** of the service in **English**. Parishes should also be encouraged to restore congregational singing as much as possible for the Liturgy, for Vespers, for Matins, and other services.
2. **Literature racks** which would be placed in every parish (if not already present) and which would contain pamphlets on Orthodoxy, its dogmas, the Liturgy, etc. There exists a wide variety of literature which can be adapted and standardized, printed in mass quantities, and distributed for use in every parish. This literature can also be included into a parish's library.
3. **Expansion** of the ACTION-LINE at Holy Cross Theological School. This toll-free number should be manned year-round and should be able to provide not only information on Orthodoxy but practical data as well (location of parishes, etc.) Its operators should be trained to handle emergencies and crises and should be able to refer callers to appropriate persons or institutions which can further assist the caller. (The toll-free number could then be **included** on every piece of literature sent out to the parishes for the literature racks, contained in all publications, and circulated on pledge cards, etc.)
4. **Project Sign**, which was proposed to SCOBA and tabled in 1995, and which consisted of providing traffic signs to every Orthodox parish in the country so that they could be placed at major thoroughfares to provide directions to the church (along the lines of signs in use by the Episcopal Church). Further efforts could be undertaken to ensure that all hotel and motel chains, travel guides, visitor information stands, and so on, can provide the location of all Orthodox parishes in a given geographical area.
5. **Workshops** should be organized by **each DIOCESAN OFFICE** to **train** all **choir leaders, Church school teachers, chanters, and catechists**, who will then be **certified** and **blessed** for their ministry. **Attendance should be mandatory and each parish should sponsor their candidates**, with the diocese stepping in to provide assistance to poor parishes and new missions.

By 1999, **all church singers and educators** should have passed through a continuing education program.

6. **Media materials** should be prepared (both audio and video) by **competent** professionals and distributed across the country, to each parish, for use in their outreach ministries. A list of all current Orthodox and “ethnic” radio and television programs in operation across the country should be developed and materials prepared and disseminated to instruct parishes how to gain access for Orthodoxy via public broadcasting and “cable access” channels.
7. **Development** of a national **Church bulletin service** which would provide to the faithful of **every** Orthodox parish both **religious material** (exposition on the weekly Scriptural readings, selections from the Fathers) as well as **announcements** from the national Church administration and the diocese. (The Orthodox Weekly bulletin service which provides weekly icon covers for parishes to use could be an excellent starting point for this project).
8. The **immediate** circulation to **all** parishes of standard guidelines for **Confession and Communion**. All priests should be directed to contact everyone in their parish (metrical) books (all those baptized or received by chrismation) and personally remind them of their obligations for confession and communion to remain as Orthodox Christians “in good standing.”
9. The election of **lay observers** for the Archdiocesan headquarters who will act as a liaison between the hierarchy and the lay people of the Church. These observers shall be **ex officio** members of the Synod (present at all sessions except when certain spiritual matters which are the sole prerogative of the ordained clergy are discussed) and of all committees of the Church, and shall act as **official auditors** of all Church finances and expenditures. In this manner, confidence in the administrative operations of the Church can be restored and a major cause for **disillusionment** among the laity about the Church can be removed. These positions will be duplicated at the diocesan level.

SOLUTIONS:

INTERMEDIATE-TERM OUTREACH PROJECTS

These projects should be in place and operational within 2 to 5 years

1. The **creation** of a **single, unified** Orthodox YOUTH ORGANIZATION, MEN'S FELLOWSHIP, AND WOMEN'S SISTERHOOD for **all SCOBA** jurisdictions, with branches in every single Orthodox parish. Each of these organizations will be organized on the geographic principle.
2. A **complete** overhaul of the **Church school curriculum**. A new curriculum stretching from pre-school level to college should be drawn up, reviewed, and published for use in every SCOBA jurisdiction. The quality should be akin to that used in Roman Catholic parochial schools, with an emphasis on sound education and spiritual formation.
3. The creation of a **uniform program** for **catechumens**, with a standard curriculum, implemented by **parish catechists** who have been trained at the **DIOCESAN** workshops, with the corresponding restoration of the ancient status of catechumen into our modern Liturgical life.
4. The development of a **comprehensive** and **authorized Catechism** that is theologically authentic to the Orthodox tradition yet presented in a fashion that is relevant and meaningful for Orthodox living in the modern age.
5. **Full restoration** of the Diaconate for **both men and women** as an outreach of the Church—in visiting the sick, counseling the afflicted, working in prisons and hospitals and college campuses as chaplains and counselors. This will include drawing up a **Statute** (with reference to existing models in the Greek and Russian Churches) and shall be implemented at the **DIOCESAN** level.
6. **Orthodox Christian Fellowships** shall be established at every college and university (as far as possible) through the creation of a joint network of Orthodox priests and laypeople prepared to act as chaplains, along with the development of "Orthodox houses" at the major universities (akin to existing Catholic "Newman" or Jewish "Hillel" institutions.)
7. **Canon law review** should commence, with input from scholars, clerics, and counselors alike, to review existing canon laws and their applications and to recommend revisions. Particular emphasis should be paid to the questions of marriage and divorce and the participation of non-Orthodox in the life of the Church.

8. Each diocese should have in place a system of **continuing education** for its priests: both **theological training** as well as **marriage and family counseling workshops**. The cost of these workshops shall be borne by each parish, with financial assistance from the diocese.
9. Each parish and diocese should have in place a network of **ministries**, coordinated by the local priest and utilizing the services of the restored Diaconate and other qualified laity, to the **terminally ill**, to the **divorced**, to the **widowed**, the **aged**, the **handicapped**, the **impoverished**, and the **homebound**. Each diocese should have in place its **Social Services Committee**, chaired by a competent professional, which can identify resources and institutions (aid programs from governmental and non-governmental sources, relationships with existing hospitals and institutions where the needs of the Orthodox population can be met, etc.)

SOLUTIONS:

LONG-TERM OUTREACH PROJECTS

These projects look to the establishment of permanent, self-sufficient institutions. They will require a great deal of advancing planning and the creation of endowments sufficient to support their activities. Such projects will not come to fruition without a high degree of inter-Orthodox cooperation as well as the donation of funds and professional experience from a wide range of Orthodox laypeople.

1. **Media development.** Working toward the long-range goals of Orthodox ownership of radio and television broadcast stations, as well as developing Orthodox telecommunications and satellite networks, and production facilities.
2. **Education.** Orthodox should be weaned away from their dependence on the schools of other denominations. Partnerships between local Orthodox parishes, the dioceses, and the national administration should be fostered to encourage the development of a national network of accredited elementary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions, using existing resources such as the seminaries, printing presses, and church schools as a support mechanism.
3. **Social Services.** The Mixed Commission for Social Services should work to identify areas in which the Orthodox Church can develop institutions, and raise the necessary funds and locate the necessary expertise from among the Orthodox population (doctors, nurses, counselors, etc.) to either present the Orthodox Church as a viable partner for existing institutions or to create new sites. A **national network** of

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Orthodox-managed hospitals, drug and alcohol rehabilitation clinics, AIDS and cancer hospices, and nursing homes could be developed along the lines of the Roman Catholic Sisters of Mercy (which operates dozens of hospitals around the United States)

4. **Monasteries.** In the “Old Country”, monasteries served as places for retreat and reflection, and as centers of learning, and had attached to them hospices for the sick and the aged. Each diocese should have at least one men’s and one women’s monastery capable of enriching the spiritual life of the region, and possessing the facilities needed to carry out these tasks.

SOLUTIONS: FINANCING

The constant refrain heard in the Orthodox Church in the United States today is that “we have no money, no funds, no resources to carry out these outreach projects.” The problem is that we as a Church have not been **good stewards** of what Christ has given us, nor have we cultivated among the people the **discipline of tithing to the Church**. Many Orthodox individuals contribute millions of dollars every year to charitable causes sponsored by non-Orthodox denominations precisely because our Church has done so little in terms of outreach.

We have the resources to begin carrying out these projects, and when we are successful “in small things”, as Christ tells us, then we will demonstrate, both to Orthodox and to non-Orthodox benefactors alike, that we as a Church are worthy recipients of their resources so that they may “lay up treasures in heaven.” In particular:

1. **End the wasteful duplication.** Every Orthodox jurisdiction maintains their own chanceries, their own youth programs, their own departments of Christian education, their own women’s organizations, their own set of often struggling institutions (seminaries, homes for the aged, etc.), wasting **millions** of dollars which the Church does not have to spare. Administrative cooperation and the creation of single, overarching departments (of youth ministry, of Christian education, of charity, of outreach, as well as a single insurance program for all priests and church workers which can command better rates because of the economies of scale) under **SCOPA** will free up the needed resources so that these other tasks may be commenced.
2. **Downsize** central Church administrations. Each jurisdiction expends the bulk of the funds it collects on maintaining its national office. With the recent advances in telecommunications, many of the functions currently being **micromanaged** by a central office, **isolated** from the heartland of the Church, can be **more efficiently** taken up by strengthened **diocesan offices**. This can also have the added benefit of making the bishop and the Church administration more of a “real presence” to the

average Orthodox layperson, rather than a distant and unresponsive organization **divorced** from the reality of Church life.

3. **Professional and accountable financial management.** The resources of the Church are not private funds to be administered by individual whims, but the material blessings which Christ has provided so that His Church can carry out the tasks He has given us. Church finances should be managed by a group of **competent** professionals who will undertake an ethical investment program that gives the Church a maximum return at a minimum of risk. The management of Church finances should be transparent and open.
4. **Development** of a long-term financial plan for the Church and the creation of **endowment funds** capable of supporting different aspects of the Church's outreach mission. The boards for these funds should be composed of both clergy and laity from around the country who are dedicated members of the Church.

The Apostles told Jesus that the five loaves were insufficient to feed a crowd of five thousand, yet after all had eaten, they collected twelve baskets of fragments. The Church **has** the resources to carry out its mission.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We no longer have the luxury to **discuss** outreach ministry; we must put it **into action**. This is our assessment of the state of our Holy Church in this country and our suggestions as to how we can reclaim the "lost sheep" and then go forward with the task of evangelization. We recommend that a committee of pious laypeople who are financial and management experts be convened, and that they be given **immediate** and **unfettered access** to all financial and administrative records of the Church so that they may make a proper evaluation of the current administration of the Church and how these proposals presented above may be carried out in the most effective manner.

May the All-Holy, Life-Giving, and Undivided Trinity continue to bless you and all who strive for the establishment and growth of God's Holy Church in this land.