

Attracting, Reaching, and Connecting: *How Do We Get New People to Come to Our Church?*

“Orthodoxy: America’s Best-Kept Secret!”

Have you seen this bumper sticker, or heard people say or claim this?

It’s nonsense.

While there are those who may not wish to communicate the Faith or their parish’s presence to the wider community, or simply do not know how and feel overwhelmed in attempting to do so. Still, countless clergy and lay persons across the country are trying valiantly, heroically and certainly creatively to retire this saying once and for all.

It is not as difficult as many would think to bring the Faith and the Church to the wider attention of the non-Orthodox community. Our “Ancient Faith” and devotion and adherence to the teachings of the “Early Church” are getting the attention of growing numbers outside of the Orthodox Church.

While there are many methods and ways in which people come to church, we can isolate here **three strategies** that are employed by parishes, whether they recognize them or not or are deliberately using them or not, that can connect the parish with “outsiders”:

Attracting...Reaching...Connecting

What is meant by “strategies” is not some man-made, artificial methods designed to capture market share and herd people toward the Church; we do not, here, discount in any way, shape or form the power and effectual operation of the Holy Spirit in bringing people to our parishes. Rather, what we mean here is a deliberate, well-thought-out plan to engage people with the Gospel and the Orthodox Faith, an approach we see as far back as Acts 15. In this issue of *Beyond the Plateau* we will take some time to explore the first of these three strategies.

Attracting

Attracting means getting the attention of people, whether you are deliberately trying to reach them or not.

Festivals are an obvious example of this, as are Christmas concerts, iconography exhibitions or classes, guest speakers and retreats. Advertise these not only in parish bulletins and internet sites, but in the mainstream local media. Probably a segment of

your local town or community will be interested in what you are doing for various reasons. They may like the food, they may be interested in the discussion topics, but whatever the reason, your event has brought your parish to the attention of the wider area.

If Orthodoxy is “the best kept secret in America”, and if somehow we’ve been keeping it that way, then this is very easily changed, and the impact can be enormous.

Attracting: Some Basic Principles to Build On

Don't only see the harvest, become the harvest

The Lord Jesus *wants* to grow His Church! To attract people to our church, the first task is to become better disciples ourselves – and encourage the other people in our parish to grow in their faith. This is ecclesiastical “Gene Therapy” – creating a culture where parishioners are excited about their faith and parish life, and want to share that joyfully with others. Why else would you want anyone to come to your church?

Network with our friends and associates

While there are millions of people who are no longer attending church at all (according to some studies, less than 20% of the American population is attending a religious service on a Sunday morning), there is just one thing that would bring them to your church, according to these people in their own words:

→ *a simple invitation from you*

Friends inviting friends (and, better yet, picking them up on a Sunday morning) is the most powerful way to get new people to your church. This is church networking on a broader level within the neighborhood or community: bowling leagues, civic groups, PTAs, fraternal organizations, special interests. That's where we meet unchurched people, and our networks with them can open doors to discussions centered on faith, belief, God and Church.

Plan “Taste and See” Events

Our Faith has much to offer: beautiful traditions in choral music and iconography; teaching on the spiritual life; commentary on modern social and moral themes. People are tired of the “milk” being fed to them in other churches; give them the “meat” our Faith has!

→ *For Discussion: What have we done recently to bring our parish to the attention of the wider community? How were those efforts viewed, and was any post-event analysis done?*

Action Points

- What “attraction” events can we plan over the next 12 to 18 months that would best highlight parish life, our best parish assets and the treasures of the Faith?
- What kinds of events will help our people bring their friends, neighbors and families?
- Who do we know that have stopped attending church, but might enjoy coming here to our parish?

Polls on Americans' satisfaction with their church's worship has revealed a surprising statistic: **70%** of those currently attending church have NOT felt the presence of God in their worship services!

~ **70%** ~

If one is going to church and not feeling that God is there, why go at all? Is it therefore any wonder that many denominations across the country are losing members?

This is what is meant by **creating a culture where parishioners are excited about their faith and parish life**: Such excitement can be absolutely contagious to those hungry and thirsting for exactly that!