

## Reaching Out to the Non-Orthodox: *Deliberately Spreading the Orthodox Faith*

### Does Reaching Out Make A Difference?

What importance do the local area non-Orthodox place on parish outreach to the neighboring and surrounding community?

By various estimates and surveys, **up to 80%** of the local area non-Orthodox population would consider attending the local Orthodox Church **\*\*if\*\*** they had some sort of connection to the parish via parish-sponsored ministries that were of direct value and positive influence and provided some benefit to the family.

The old adage is therefore very true: **“People don’t care what you know until they know that you care.”**

In the last edition of *Beyond the Plateau* we discussed how parishes can reach non-Orthodox through creative, inviting and welcoming parish events that **attract** the wider, non-Orthodox community to the parish.

While an outreach strategy based on events that **attract** is desirable, the opportunity dynamic to bring in and incorporate the non-Orthodox still lies with the outsider, the non-Orthodox to whom the Faith is presented as an opportunity to accept or reject.

This means the strategy of “attracting” is still only one leg of a three-legged strategy to bring new people into parish life. The second leg is that of deliberate **outreach**, reaching out to the community

### Reaching Out

Rather than bringing in, here you are deliberately leaving the parish, figuratively or otherwise, to reach out to those clearly identified as non-parishioners. Regardless of what this “clearly identified” group is, the fact is that you will tend to grow among those people with whom you share commonalities. A crowd attracts a crowd, and like attracts like.

If you are a suburban parish with young families with kids, you will tend to more easily attract young families with children. Thus, when you have events (dances, speakers, choir concerts, musical entertainment, icon workshops) you are, deliberately or otherwise, planning and structuring

those events to reach people in the community who would find the parish’s social and spiritual life to be of value and interest to them.

But how do you deal with those people who may not have any sort of direct connection or even interest in an Orthodox parish, or who may have a need that the parish can directly address? Such externally directed efforts may actually cost the parish and not offer any significant “return on investment”. Examples: AA meetings, Scouting programs, after-school mentoring, and Father-Daughter dances (a favorite of mine!). In addition to this there are the social welfare ministries such as soup kitchens and food pantries, whether the parish sponsors its own or helps

out elsewhere. Deliberately planning to reach people for an event – any event – or ongoing program needs months (not weeks) of planning, advertising, and appropriate and adequate PR, not to mention insurance issues (if the ministry or work being done is to take place on-premises).

### **The Parish Open House**

How do we know what kind of external (to the parish) neighborhood ministries would be welcomed by the wider community? *Ask them!*

The idea of surveying the neighborhood can be done in a variety of ways. First, flyers can be sent out by your local post office (ask them for details) to all homes in a particular zip code(s). Via this flyer, the parish can invite the wider neighborhood to a Parish-Community Open House. Local politicians and police love attending these kinds of meetings in order to assist parishes in their desire to reach out to the wider community, and can also act as an attendance draw. Internet tools like Eventbright and Survey Monkey can be used to administer the event and help direct those interested in attending to sign-up, thus helping the parish manage expectations and logistics.

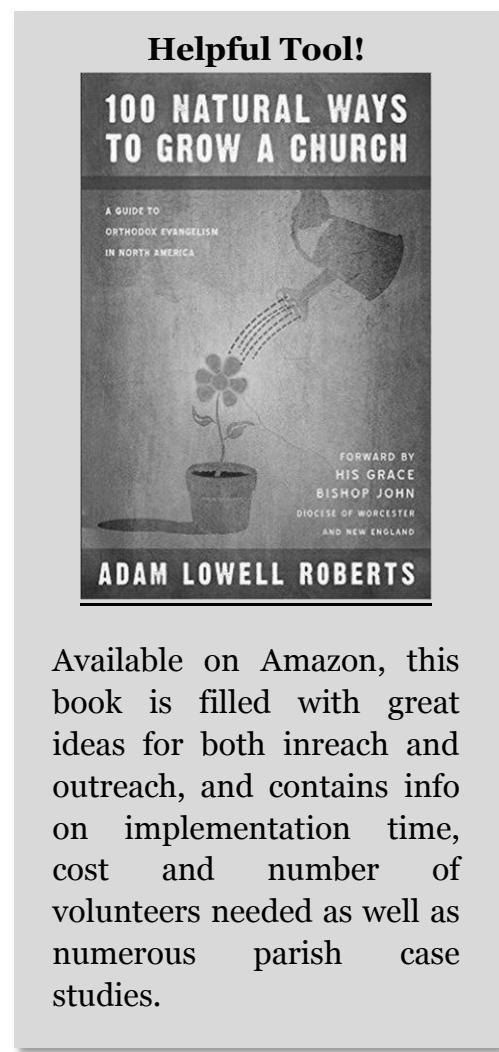
The agenda is simple:

- Welcome the attendees.
- Talk (briefly!) about the parish and the desire of the parish to serve the community.
- Present the attendees with a list of suggested ministries, such as the aforementioned Scouting programs, AA and the like; then present, realistically, any obvious pros and cons that should be known upfront.
- Spend the bulk of time letting the attendees make their own suggestions and simply see where the Spirit leads from there.

Since most neighborhoods see the local Orthodox church as a “foreign” entity, sponsoring community-based programs is a way for non-attending neighbors to view the parish as the place where they have a connection: their children go to Scouting programs there, for example, no longer making the parish “foreign” but rather the place where the family finds help and assistance in many forms.

*For Discussion:*

1. *How has your parish deliberately planned to reach people not currently a part of the parish?*
2. *What particular ministry interests do your parishioners have that could be fulfilled in neighborhood service?*
3. *What needs can be discerned in the surrounding community that the parish can address?*



Available on Amazon, this book is filled with great ideas for both inreach and outreach, and contains info on implementation time, cost and number of volunteers needed as well as numerous parish case studies.