

St. Luke Orthodox Church

Strategic Plan Summary



Introduction:

The members of the Strategic Planning Committee are pleased to present the results of the survey sent to all the parishioners last fall (2022). The following summary is a synopsis of the “raw data” obtained from over 270 responses to the questions that were elicited on the Strategic Plan survey. The Strategic Planning Committee used “key word” searches to find prioritized themes within the answers (commonalities). The purpose of the assessment was to obtain a “ground up” understanding from all the faithful in the parish as to “where we presently are” as a parish and “where we need to be going” in the future. As such this serves as the very important “qualitative” feature of the Strategic Plan.

The 2nd part of this summary is “quantitative” in that we also elicited from the responses every “to do” or action item to be implemented for our parish’s future growth. These action items have been listed below. The last step in the strategic plan is for our parish members to numerically prioritize them so that the Strategic Planning Committee may gain knowledge of what action items need to be done first (with “1” being the highest or most critical). Once these tallies have been added then they will also be presented to the parish, and they will become the “business” of the Parish Council . Lastly, these action items were separated according to “internal needs” (of the parish) and “external needs” (of the community).

Question 1: What are our Parish Strengths?

Our parish received the highest scores for its warmth, openness, and welcoming disposition towards visitors and new members. Feedback from the comments submitted revealed how strongly dedicated our parishioners are to each other; they truly love and care and pray for one another; the parish functions well as a spiritual surrogate family (especially for those who have no immediate nuclear family to rely on). The church has excellent leadership from both its clergy and its many lay ministries. Our Church School is highly regarded, and our adult education classes and Bible studies are exceptional. The choir performs beautifully at the liturgical services, and Fr. Paul's sermons are, overall, outstanding. The weekly reflections in the bulletin are also appreciated by many. The church's many ministries, including its commitment to serving the homeless and its pro-life initiatives for the entire lifespan (conception to grave) enhance the church's richness and vitality.

- *"The people (here) are warm and welcoming. We take care of each other. There is genuine love."*
- *"Our congregation is supportive and open. This is what I value the most."*
- *"Weekly reflections are excellent in the bulletin and/or on Facebook!! Showing love and truly caring for each other is very good. Sermons are excellent and thought provoking."*
- *"Our clergy & church school are both top notch! We are blessed with a beautiful Divine Liturgy! Personally, I don't know why we are not packed every Sunday."*
- *"Pastoral ministry is excellent; the diaconal ministry seems to be excellent also. I believe the Sunday School is also well run and top notch as is the coffee ministry. The greeters seem to do a fine job."*
- *"I think that people in our surrounding community need to know that the 'church on the hill' is a welcoming Orthodox Christian church that is worth visiting."*

Question 2: What are our Weaknesses?

The majority of responses concerning weaknesses focused on issues related to youth, young adults, and young families. A common concern expressed was that our parish is aging, and we are losing too many of our young people. Although teenagers may graduate and leave for college, many do not return to the parish afterward - even those who remain in the Chicago area. Some single adults in the parish feel excluded and don't feel like they fit in. Respondents also noted that the church lacks its former enthusiasm and vitality, with apathy being a growing concern. Our existing ministries need updating, and more encouragement is needed to engage our faithful in these layministries. St. Luke's is also viewed by some as a "Sunday morning only" parish, and more emphasis should be placed on the importance of attending weekday services and Saturday night Vespers. The elderly and shut-ins could benefit from more consistent support and visitation, including regular phone calls. Lastly, it was noted that the parish lacks sufficient intentionality in its mission to evangelize the faith; instead of "letting down the nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4), a few fish occasionally "jump into the boat."

- *"Visitors need to be attended to, especially during coffee hour. This is an essential element that is often overlooked."*
- *"We seem to have lost the zest, the vitality we once had in coming together. We were known for all the different ministries we had. People outside the parish always remarked at how our church was so alive and engaged in these ministries, especially given our rather small size. We can blame Covid for part of this but it seems like we have just become lethargic. We have lost "knowing one another" - as we once did."*
- *"It seems the elderly/shut-ins need more attention and support. Perhaps a liaison to call and check on them, see if their spiritual needs are being met."*
- *"We are missing young families and young adults. Having additional youth in the church energizes everyone and builds on the family atmosphere."*
- *"Hard to retain or get post-college kids to come back, but worth more effort."*
- *"Not enough social activities to attract singles in early 20's and 30's."*

Question 3: What should our parish “look like” in 5 years?

Responses to this question were many and varied. Our church needs to focus more on growth, especially with young families. A new permanent sign is needed, possibly that includes scrolling digital messages (hybrid). There were many comments about finishing the iconography in the church, especially about the need for a new iconostasis, new icons on the ceiling of the church, and about new etched windows in the nave of the Church. A new adult baptistry is also needed. Thought should be given once again about making the church more handicapped accessible and more prayerful exploration on how to overcome our structural limitations so that we can facilitate growth. The St. Luke outdoor shrine might also be renovated/upgraded.

- *“We need to be thriving not just surviving! We may need to change things and not simply repeat what has always been done. We can try to find that fine line between pushing people outside of their comfort zone and helping us all to realize that we are here to grow...”*
- *“A new front Sign (with electronic lettering - not totally digital). I would like to see an adult baptistry added, and possibility a bookstore/coffee shop off campus that we could sponsor as part of our outreach to the community.”*
- *“I would love to see more Icons in the Church – on the ceiling - and to finish the windows with the engravings of the saints. Maybe also build a new shrine out of stone outside and build a small greenhouse in the back to grow and sell flowers. Build a large pergola somewhere on the property that would function as an outdoor chapel for outside services.”*
- *“A parish Coffee Shop/Bookstore somewhere on the property (?) that could invite the many people that drive by during the day (1000’s!) on 107th. There are NO coffee shops for miles around...”*
- *“Prayerfully, I would love to see us bursting at the seams! We all need to reach out & witness & do our parts, especially with our own families! I would love to see the inside of the dome painted & iconography added. Also some improvement to the Iconography on the Icon Screen. The windows need to be replaced & I believe that is in the plans.”*
- *“I would like to see an annual calendar so people can plan ahead for some key events, feasts and celebrations.”*

Question 4: What new ministries do we need?

When asked about new ministries needed, various suggestions were made. It was suggested that we should have a ministry for local college students, a singles ministry, and a divorce support group ministry. The lost sheep ministry, men's ministry, and senior outreach ministry need to be revitalized. Attention needs to be given to the homeless ministry, particularly now that we are no longer housing them on Monday evenings. There could be more women's ministries and social outings for young adults. Some members suggested having a coffee house ministry to reach out to the community, an AV ministry to assist with video and audio recordings, and a communications ministry that could publish a monthly or quarterly newsletter which would include a calendar showing all services and activities for the whole year.

- *“We need a formal ministry list, preferably digital, with an explanation of the ministry and who's in charge. This could be added to the website and printed out, it's important for all to know what ministries exist to bolster interest and involvement.”*
- *“Since we are not housing the homeless anymore, we need to find other ways to support them. I know that we have a meal train, but I think that needs to be advertised and/or formalized to engage others.”*
- *“Workshops for new readers, chanters, involving youth/young adults and anyone else interested.”*
- *“We really need a Coffee House - Bookstore Ministry so we can reach out to the neighborhood. Other Orthodox parishes are doing this, and it is wonderfully effective in providing an “open door” for people OFF THE STREETS to come in and learn about the Orthodox Faith.”*
- *“Working with/reaching out to ministries that serve the community - enhance our relationship with PADS or similar (feed my starving children, etc.)”*
- *“Loss and bereavement programs to for those going through a divorce and or loss of a loved one due to death and illness.”*
- *“Visiting the homebound or in nursing homes.”*
- *“Reconstitute our “Lost Sheep” ministry.”*

Question 5: What obstacles does our parish currently face?

When asked about the obstacles facing our parish, many responses were provided. Some members cited that they are overwhelmed by their work schedules and long commutes, which hinders their ability to participate in the life of the parish beyond weekends. St. Luke's is a "commuter" parish with many members living far away, making it difficult to attend weekday services, feasts, and events. Other members expressed concern that American culture is increasingly at odds with Christian values, and that public schools are no longer trustworthy for educating our children. There is also competition with school activities and weekend sports. Furthermore, there is a sense of internal apathy which can be detrimental to the overall health of the parish.

- *"The obstacles I see are the fact that too many parishioners are being dragged down by their jobs. Unfortunately, many are stressed out from the demands being placed on them. This can certainly discourage them from attending services if they are exhausted."*
- *"All sorts of secular obstacles - distance from church, many activities, etc. But we also have physical limitations - the church nave and parking lot are too small for significant growth."*
- *"Trying to overcome the obstacle of lack of weekday participation in services would be nice so we are not a Sunday only parish."*
- *"Individual spiritual malaise is a big one. Our society devalues religion; more emphasis on the secular. People's understanding of Orthodoxy is one dimensional as in "Greek Orthodoxy" - which outsiders find foreign and if they go to a Greek or a Russian church, usually find not very friendly. We also lack youth programs."*
- *"Competition with work, sports, social activities."*
- *"I believe that there is an overall decline in regular church attendance due to many factors, but this is not a unique issue to St. Luke's."*
- *"It concerns me that we are not growing. It may be just a period that all churches go through & I know that this is true. It seems all churches are struggling. We are a selfish society, materialistic & put everything else before God. It's persecution that the churches are experiencing which was foretold. It will get worse."*
- *"Spiritual Apathy! Along with being a "Sunday Only" parish, and not enough constituent outreach and evangelization to the non-Orthodox."*

Question 6: Is our parish welcoming to visitors?

Feedback received suggested that St. Luke's is generally very hospitable towards new visitors, with much credit given to the greeters ministry. However, some concerns were raised that some visitors might feel isolated during the liturgy, that it would be helpful to show them the liturgy book, and then make a personal invitation to join in the downstairs coffee fellowship. Care should also be given that these efforts not be too "overwhelming."

- *"This is one of our strengths. I have witnessed how newcomers are welcomed into the parish and how 'seasoned' members try to incorporate them into the life of the parish."*
- *"The greeters do a great job, BUT ALL should be invested in this ministry. Visitors should NEVER be left alone especially at coffee hour. We should also be better about greeting visitors on NON-Sunday services, when the greeters are not scheduled. There seem to be gaps with visitors that should be easy to fill with more awareness."*
- *"Greeters at the door do a great job. However, we fall short on inviting visitors to coffee hour and including them at our tables. Visitors should NEVER be sitting alone. And our "regular" members should also "mix it up" by visiting with different groups during fellowship hour."*
- *"I think St. Luke's is doing a great job in welcoming guests! Warm & not too overbearing."*

Question 7: Is our Parish Mission Statement still relevant?

Answers to this question were quite different. Some said that the parish is still in line with its original mission statement. Others said that too many of our parishioners don't know what the mission statement is and that the mission statement needs to be renewed and updated.

- *"We still live by our original mission statement; we are doing well."*
- *"St. Luke has met its original mission. About 10 years ago, I was searching for something - I did not know what. To me, St. Luke felt like a home/sanctuary I needed. Now, I am at peace."*
- *"Mission statement is still relevant."*
- *"I think we need to renew our mission, update the statement for the 21st century."*

Question 8: What is the unique purpose at St. Luke's?

Most of the replies focused on the need to continue to be an American Orthodox parish that worships in the English language. More emphasis should be given about the need to share our Faith with friends and family. The faithful at St. Luke's should all know what makes the parish unique and what it has to offer to the community.

- *"To understand that we are all here for one purpose - to work out our own salvation and continue to push ourselves to use our God- given talents for our own salvation and to help others who are also struggling. No one priest can do that for us. We must be accountable."*
- *"Our purpose is to be an English-speaking Orthodox community. I hear many visitors at coffee hour say "If only I knew all this growing up" or "I think my spouse would have come to church with me if we had found a church like this" . Yet, we perfectly embrace all the Cultures our Church has to offer. We have a perfect balance."*
- *"To become an American Orthodox parish that draws on the richness of our various members' little "t" traditions, our participation in the sacraments, and our outreach to the community to bring people to Christ and help them grow in him."*
- *"To be an American Orthodox Church for all of Chicago!"*

Question 9: How do we keep our focus on the one thing needful?

Answers to this were all consistent. More than anything else there is the need for personal prayer, study, and attending services. Every single member of the parish needs to be committed to spiritual growth and a continuing commitment to Christ. This emphasis on personal growth in the faith was stated as the one thing which will make the most positive difference in the future of our parish.

- *“The Orthodox Church and St Luke's has given us the tools we need. But we need to use them to the best of our ability (realizing that sometime life does prohibit us, like work-day services) but we can all do and must do more.”*
- *“We are becoming a Sunday only parish. Saturday Vespers and feast day attendance is dismal. There needs to be education on why it is necessary to at least try to attend SOME non-Sunday services. i.e review that frequent communion is not a free- for- all.”*
- *“Committing ourselves fully to the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church, increased personal prayer and study of the Faith.”*
- *“I believe this can only be done through prayer and example.”*

Question 10: What can we do to make St. Luke's a safe place to worship?

People were very happy, for the most part, that we had a "Safety Sunday" presentation. Council members and greeters should be especially vigilant about who is in the parking lot and about those entering the church. Enhanced exterior lighting could be helpful. There should also be a tornado drill and a fire drill for our Church School students.

- *"Very difficult to balance, yes, but we can be logically vigilant, mindful and aware of our surroundings while still participating in the liturgy. Maybe we have a rotating system of those able to be "on safety duty".*
- *"Be observant and vigilant. Safety Sunday was great. Unfortunately, no place today is guaranteed to be totally safe and without risk. Periodically re-visit and improve safety procedures if necessary."*
- *"The safety class offered after Liturgy was enlightening. Maybe have that every now and then. Review exits and strategies more often."*
- *"Security is definitely a major concern. A committee should be formed to investigate all options."*

Strategic Plan Action Items

(These are not listed in any particular order; they will need to be “voted” on as to which is most critical).

Internal:

- Revitalize parish ministries.
- Expand Youth Ministry.
- Expand Young Adult Ministry.
- Revitalize and expand Elderly/shut-in Ministry
- Revitalize Readers Ministry.
- Singles Ministry.
- Divorce Support Ministry.
- Revitalize Lost Sheep Ministry.
- Revitalize Outreach/evangelization Ministry.
- Coffee House Outreach ministry.
- Revitalize Men’s Ministry.
- Revitalize Women’s Ministries.
- Rudimentary Orthodox teaching. (Catechesis/Re-Catechesis)
- College Outreach Ministry (Moraine).
- Expand and strengthen Safety Ministry.
- Updated website.
- Bells Ministry (updated).
- Small Group m]Ministry (by demographic location).
- AV Ministries.
- Revitalize: Monthly newsletter: “The Evangelist”
- “Bring a friend to Liturgy” Sunday.
- Increase attendance at Sat. Vespers & weekly services.
- Renew parish mission statement.
- Annual calendar with services & activities.
- Foreign language school.
- English as a second language classes.

External:

- Finish etched windows in the Church Nave.
- New front sign.
- New iconostasis
- Redo print icons in church as painted Icons.
- New icons on the ceiling of the Church.
- Renovate outdoor shrine
- Build an adult baptistry.
- Expand property (if possible).
- New pergola for outdoor services.
- Green house.

