

Group Notes from SAOC World Café Discussion Sunday, October 7, 2018

The Present

1.) From your vantage point, what are some of the top strengths of SAOC?

- Worship was the most frequently mentioned strength.
The music & liturgical life, teaching/homilies, many opportunities for worship, participation of the congregation in singing the responses. We are a community of prayer first and foremost. Sunday attendance generally good.
- Clarity of doctrine, reinforced by the worship & teaching.
- High level of commitment to the Faith, love of Christ.
- Tithing community. People are sacrificial and generous in their giving.
- Strong sense of community/family/fellowship/tight bonds.
Welcoming, embracing and warm to newcomers. Loyal to each other. Loving community. Lots of opportunities to come together as a family. Old and young people interact with one another.
- Strong foundation, connection to the past, many have been here a long time; Strong connection to history/heritage passed down from the founders.
- Administration & Leadership - well organized and strong.
Priest, Administrator, Parish Council.
- Pastoral care.
- Many active, healthy ministries, many members involved in them, many taking on leadership roles, many talented people.
- Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program for the children.
- High number of converts to Orthodoxy.
- Youth - Lots of teens and young adults; youth program steadily improving; strong bonds forming among the youth.
- Location - we are in a visible spot, can let our light shine.
- Involvement in Project Mexico.
- Outreach to the homeless (St. Brigid Fellowship); we try to follow God's directives to care for the poor.
- Liturgical Arts Festival.
- Our building – having a permanent home after many years of planning.

The Present

2.) *From your vantage point, what are some of the top areas for Improvement?*

- Our community is challenging to "break into." Our strong sense of history and long-time relationships can make it challenging for new members to find a place. Though we are initially extremely welcoming, newcomers seem to have difficulty becoming truly integrated into the parish family. There is a sense, by some, that there are "gate keepers." We need to develop some systems/programs for helping new people to assimilate more deeply into the family. Need to improve retention of members.

We need more small group gatherings/ice breakers. (All-parish gatherings that are strictly social, i.e. camping trip, night at Zodo's, etc...)

- More support for college students. A car-pool system to help college students get to church.
- Teen, Young Adult/College programs still need improvement. Continue to build on the growth of the past few years.
- Better process for involving people in ministries, including the youth and young adults. A "succession plan" for well established ministries that enables and encourages new leadership.
- More training in evangelism. Need to learn how to invite people to "come and see." Need to learn how to have a conversation about Orthodoxy with non-Orthodox people.
- Better care/help for some groups with specific needs:
 - Post high school young adults – college
 - Single young adults
 - Young couples
 - Young families

How can we make it easier for them? Help them see and buy into the vision of the parish? Provide childcare during church events?

Seniors (housing, other kinds of support)
- Outreach to those who have left the parish. How do we find out why they left, and welcome them back if/when they return?
- A "succession plan" (transition plan) for bringing on new clergy.
- Broader interactions within the Orthodox community for our college age and young adults.
- More adult education. Need to understand our Faith and the Liturgy better. More teaching and support in developing daily habits that help us in spiritual growth. More teaching/clarity on contemporary moral issues. Include educational component in Men's gatherings.
- A parish library
- More inter-Orthodox fellowship.
- Cultural diversity. Move out of our comfort zone.
- Stronger outreach into our community through St. Nicholas night and other similar programs, concerts and events. Participate in local festivals and events in the community that offer visibility, like the Lemon Festival.
- Attendance and participation could be better at services (especially Vespers and Matins) and educational opportunities like lenten seminars and Liturgical Arts Festival.
- More participation of the congregation in singing the responses during the services. A balance between old and new music. Focus on music as prayer.
- Tithing is declining
- Use of the back half of the property.

The Future: 3-5 Years from now . . .

When you look down the road 3-5 years, what do you see as SAOC's top accomplishments . . .

3.) Within the parish community?

- The patio and kitchen are finished, and we have made substantial progress on the temple.
- We have an aggressive and well planned fundraising strategy for the temple.
- We have a plan for how to utilize the back 17 acres of land. (Sports field?)
- We have become a "moral compass" in a time of extreme opposition to Christianity and traditional morals.
- There are many new members of diverse backgrounds and ethnicities. On Holy Saturday, we have several dozen chrismations. We reach out to the university, which has an ethnically diverse student, faculty and staff.
- We have transitioned into new pastoral leadership/younger clergy.
- We have a full-time Youth Director who is trained in Orthodox youth ministry.
- We have large and thriving teen and young adult programs. Activities are engaging, spiritually nurturing and fun. We have revived the teen retreats and annual ski trip.
- We have systems in place for integrating new people into the parish. (Small group gatherings, better mixing at Coffee Hour)
- We have more social activities as a means to embrace our new members and attract non-Orthodox friends to the parish.
- We have a solid and well-trained team of people who reach out into the community and share the light of Orthodoxy. (Evangelism)
- We have a system in place for reaching "lost sheep." (Those who were members but have stopped coming.)
- The homeless and poor of our community feel welcome worshipping in our community and we have programs in place to help them.
- Our young people understand their Orthodox faith well and can defend it.
- Our parishioners are well-educated in the Faith and see the Church as the pillar and grounding for our faith. We have regular opportunities for adults to go deeper in their understanding of the Faith. (Adult Fire on Father?)
- Our young families, college age adults and young adults feel well supported by the parish family. Childcare is frequently offered at parish activities and events. We have revived the "work parties" which provide help to our members at their homes.
- Our college age adults and young adults are interacting regularly with other Orthodox young people beyond our parish.
- Our community participates with enthusiasm in singing the responses during the services. The music is welcoming and engaging, and is a balance between our traditional music (from 30 years ago) and new, more diverse music.
- We address the needs of our aging members. Senior housing?
- We have more young people populating our ministries and in positions of leadership.

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When you look down the road 3-5 years, what do you see as SAOC's top accomplishments . . .

4.) Within the broader Goleta/Santa Barbara community?

- St. Nicholas Night, the Liturgical Arts Festival and other concerts, speakers and events have become well known in the community and attract many first-time visitors to the parish, and are used to teach the community about the Orthodox Faith.
- We have a presence at local festivals and fairs, like the Lemon Festival.
- We have established a vehicle for being in regular dialogue with other local Christian churches.
- The development of the back 17 acres of our property makes us a more visible presence in the community. (sports field?)
- When our temple is finished, we use the fellowship hall for activities and events as a means of expanding our presence in the larger community. (speakers, classes, local meetings, etc...)
- We have expanded our outreach in a way that is more inclusive of the homeless population and the poorest of the poor.
- We have a deliberate outreach to the local Hispanic population. (A service in Spanish?)