

Guiding Principles of Vision 2000: A Bible Study



STUDY 2

The Parish and the Deanery

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FORWARD

In July of 2000, at the 20th Sobor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, a series of resolutions were passed under the title "Vision 2000". These resolutions covered the areas of spiritual renewal, educational development, effective communication and responsible stewardship; they gave the UOCC a mandate touching upon our internal life, our relations with other Orthodox Churches, and our outreach to the wider community.

These resolutions were founded upon a set of "Guiding Principles"; these principles outline fundamental Orthodox teachings on the nature of the human journey, and on the Church in which we are called to carry out this journey. This Bible study series is designed to offer a closer look at the Guiding Principles that formed "Vision 2000". It is hoped that this endeavour will be of benefit to all who continue the spiritual journey of life in the Holy Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada.

Rev. Fr. Andrew Jarmus, Winnipeg, 2002

Guiding Principles of Vision 2000: A Bible Study

2. The Parish and Deanery (Mission District)

- 2.1 A key element in the image of God in humans is that we are persons with the capacity, and the need, for relationships ("communion") with other persons.**
- 2.2 We do not grow in the likeness of God (thereby finding inner fulfillment) as isolated individuals, but in relationships with other persons. The parish is the interpersonal community established by God for human beings to journey together in their growth in the likeness of God.**
- 2.3 The closer a person gets to God, the closer s/he is drawn to his/her brothers and sisters in the Faith. Likewise, it is the mutual respect, love and solidarity among parish members that is the concrete expression of each person's love for God.**
- 2.4 The parish must always bear in mind the two aspects of its life: the internal, the ministry to its existing members; and the external, the ministry to those in need outside its membership (e.g., the spiritual seekers, the needy, the marginalised).**
- 2.5 The parish must also always be aware of the interdependence of clergy and laity. To have a fully functioning Christian community requires the active participation of both clergy and laity in all aspects of its life, primarily the liturgical.**
- 2.6 In the parish there is also interdependence of faith and culture. Specifically, in our parishes, that interdependence is between Orthodoxy and the Ukrainian cultural heritage.**

2.1 A key element in the image of God in humans is that we are persons with the capacity, and the need, for relationships ("communion") with other persons.

The creation narrative of the book of Genesis show us we were not made to live a life of isolation:

Genesis 2:18

One of the biblical terms for the devil is the "disturber" or "divider". The devil's main work is to disrupt relationships between persons. The devil does this because he knows that we are only truly complete when we exist in relationship with others.

The "others" with whom we must have relationship include 1.) other human beings and 2.) God. When Jesus is asked what is the greatest commandment, instead of highlighting one of the Ten Commandments, He outlines the "Two Great Commandments":

Matthew 22:37-40

NOTE: *These two commandments are originally found in the Old Testament books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus. However, they do not appear as a "set" of two commandments. Jesus presents them together.*

The "love" mentioned in the Two Great Commandments goes beyond fond feelings or good thoughts. The love of God and neighbour must be expressed actively, regularly and frequently, in concrete ways. It is a

love that is realised (that is "made real") in the context of actual human relationship. Only in this manner do we find fulfillment in our spiritual lives... and therefore in our lives as a whole.

2.2 We do not grow in the likeness of God (thereby finding inner fulfillment) as isolated individuals...

In part one of this study we learned that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. We know that God exists as a “community” of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This relationship is best described as “communion” -- a “common union” of mutual love, respect, and service. An important element of God’s image in us is that we too are made to exist in communion with other persons.

Our relationships give us the context for our growth in God's likeness (theosis/obozhennia), mentioned in

part one of this study. To be like God, we too, then, must exercise our capacity for “communion” with others. Although each of us must embrace the saving grace of God for ourselves, we are not saved alone.

Jesus speaks of this ultimate way of relating to others in what is known as His “High Priestly Prayer” to the Father before His passion and death on the Cross. This long prayer is found in St. John’s account of the Lord Supper. In this prayer, we read the following:

John 17:20-23

The context for our spiritual growth is the parish. A parish is a gathering of like-minded individuals, who become companions in the Christian Way of Life. The greatest asset of a healthy parish is the commitment of its members to Him who, provides the “ties that bind” the community together.

Every parish will face disagreements between members. Some members

will have closer relationships than others. Above all of this, though, must be a common, complete commitment to Christ and His Way. With this commitment as an anchor, all disagreements and potential points of division, can be handled without great trauma to the parish community.

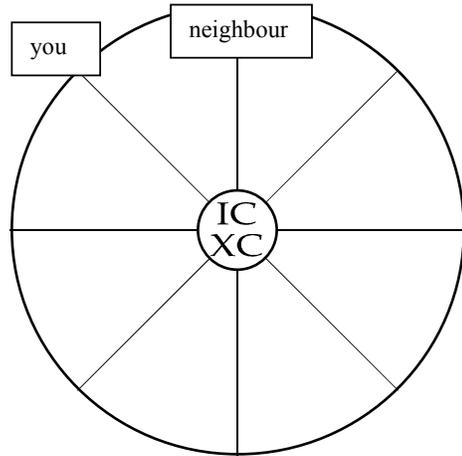
Parishes that bear the scars of great internal divisions and infighting can find good guidance in the words of

St. John Chrysostom, who teaches that the one sure way to completely

eradicate your enemy is to make him your friend.

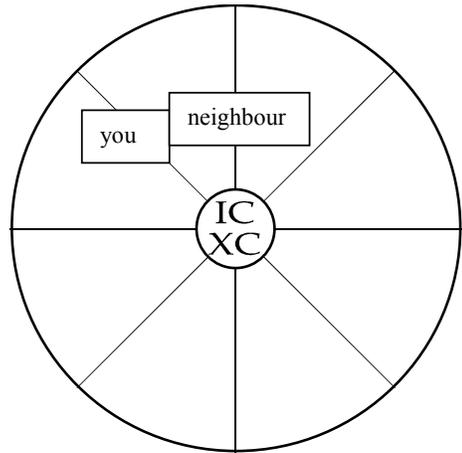
2.3 The closer a person gets to God, the closer s/he is drawn to his/her brothers and sisters in the Faith.

It has been said that, as Christians, we can look at our relationships with others using the imagery of a wagon wheel, with Christ at the centre.



The closer we get to the centre, to Christ, the closer we get to the other “spokes” on the wheel, that is to other persons on the same journey. Similarly, the closer we get to others, the closer we get to Christ.

The Holy Apostle and Evangelist John, in his second epistle, warns us that we cannot say that we love God, that we are a "good Christian", while at the same time bearing animosity in our hearts for another person.



1 John 4:20-21

Our love for Christ should naturally draw us into desiring fellowship with all other people.

2.4 The parish must always bear in mind the two aspects of its life: the internal, the ministry to its existing members; and the external, the ministry to those in need outside its membership...

As with people, a parish has an inner life and an outer life. The inner life of the parish involves matters of administration and the spiritual care of its members through liturgical celebrations, education, and pastoral care. A healthy inner life is absolutely vital for a parish to flourish and grow.

In the Book of Genesis, chapter 18, we read the story of Abraham (at that time still called “Abram”) being visited by God in the form of three men (a sign of the Holy Trinity). Abram welcomes them and shares with them his hospitality. It turns out that these three men are angels who symbolically represent the Lord

Himself. For his warm hospitality Abram is promised that, though he and his wife Sarah are elderly, they will have a son, and that Abram will become the father of many nations (as a result of this, the Lord changes his name to “Abraham”, meaning “father of many”). Abraham is the forefather of the nation of Israel. From Israel the Messiah comes. And through the Messiah all nations are saved and glorified.

In Genesis 18:9, the Lord reveals that Abraham and his descendants will be blessed specifically because they follow His precepts:

Genesis 18:18,19

Every parish community is a “household of God”. The Greek word for “church” (as in the building where people gather for worship) literally means “house”. It is of utmost importance that the inner life of the parish “household” is lead according to

God’s commandments and precepts. The Lord has a Way for us to follow, and it is by walking along this Way that a parish community receives the blessing of continued vitality and growth.

In his first general Epistle, St. Peter reminds us that we do not live by the values of this fallen world (which

should be foreign to our way of life as Christians); rather, we follow God's way of righteousness:

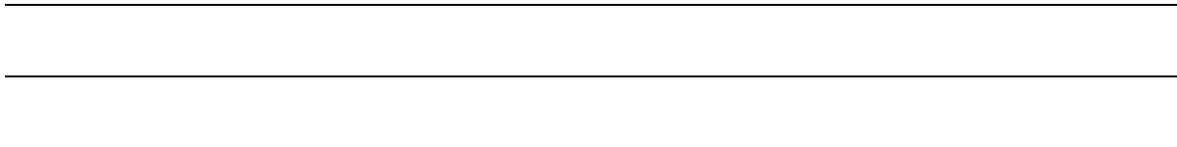


1 Peter 2:11

The outer, or external, life of the parish involves relations with other parishes, with the leadership of the diocese and national Church, and with the wider community. Our outer life is important because this is the place where we "walk the walk" of Christian commitment. It is easy for us to say that we love the Lord and follow His

teachings, but whether or not these words are true will be expressed by our actions.

A truly Christ-centred parish life will, of necessity, include external work beyond the local parish community. This reflects the words of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount:



Matthew 5:14,15

The external ministries of a parish can include support for diocesan and Church-wide initiatives, outreach work in the parish's local community, missionary work in the community, support of global missionary and outreach projects, and outreach to the lapsed members of the community.

Some parishioners are reluctant to interact with the wider community, for fear that such relations with "outsiders" will compromise the integrity of the parish community. Such people can find comfort and sound guidance in St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews:

(cont'd on p. 7)

Hebrews 13:2

NOTE: *While considering these words of St. Paul, remember the Old Testament account of the hospitality of Abraham that we mentioned earlier.*

2.5 The parish must also always be aware of the interdependence of clergy and laity...

There is an essential interdependence in the inner life of the Church between clergy and laity.

The word "laity" comes from the Greek "laos", meaning "people". The "laity"

are the "People of God". This reflects the words of the Holy Apostle Peter in his first epistle:

1 Peter 2:9

In its most strict sense, the term "laity", then refers to all the faithful, both those ordained and not ordained.

The term "clergy" comes from the Greek word "cleros", which means

"lot" or "straw". In Acts 1:15-26, we read that the replacement for Judas among the Twelve Apostles was selected by drawing lots.

Acts 1:26

The "clergy" are those men selected by God, through His faithful, to serve in

the ministries of teaching, pastoral

care, liturgical celebration and administration.

In the Church, clergy and laity are understood to be mutually dependent on one another's roles and functions. A priest, for example, may not

celebrate a Divine Liturgy on his own, just as the laity may not celebrate it without a priest. We find this teaching clearly laid out in St. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 12:21

1 Corinthians 12:26, 27

Rather than thinking of clergy and laity as different parts of the Church, each with its own purpose or job, they should be looked upon as

complementary. The totality of the clergy laity relationship is greater than the sum of its parts.

2.6 In the parish there is also interdependence of faith and culture.

If you have a chance to visit any of the historically Orthodox countries, Ukraine, Greece, Serbia, etc., you will find that while the Faith is the same, the "spirit" of each country is slightly different. The same can be said, though to a lesser degree, when

visiting a parish of another Orthodox jurisdiction here in North America.

As people of faith, we do not live in a vacuum. We need a vehicle for expressing our beliefs in our daily lives. The vehicle, or perhaps a better word is "vessel", in which we live out

our faith is our cultural (or national) identity. The Bible teaches us that we

are called to serve God individually as persons, but also as part of a nation:

Isaiah 60:12

Psalms 46:10

Psalms 67:4

Because the Church is the Body of Christ, it is eternal and will exist in the Kingdom even when every nation and kingdom have disappeared. However, in this life, the cultural context in which the Church finds itself gives it a presence and a voice in that culture. The cultural identity of a people is the vessel through which the Faith is embraced and lived in a concrete way.

Similarly, we would say that culture finds its fullest expression only when it is shaped and fed by the Faith. The example of the militantly atheistic USSR in the 20th century is proof enough that a culture without a faith can only bear the fruits of depersonalization, repression, and despair. In our own society, as well,

we see that as God continues to be written out of our popular awareness, we face more and more violence, broken relationships, depression and anxiety.

In the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada the cultural context of our faith is that of the Ukrainian people. The Orthodox Church has been present in our ancestral homeland since the days of the New Testament. In his letter to the Colossians, St. Paul teaches that in the Christian life " there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scyth'ian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all."(Col. 3:11) The Scyth'ians mentioned in this passage are the ancestors of the

Ukrainian people. Ours is a people who have heard the good news preached for two millennia.

This long-standing heritage has withstood the test of time in good moments and bad. Over the centuries, we have amassed a great choir of Saints who stand before the Lord and pray for each and every one of us. Our Orthodox Ukrainian heritage provides us with a multifaceted model for living our faith today. This heritage is a treasure we should celebrate and

share with all those who wish to make one of our parishes their home. Even though such people may not be Ukrainian by birth, all can become sons and daughters of the spiritual legacy that is the Ukrainian Orthodox tradition. The key is that we do not allow this heritage to become an obstacle for those who come to us, by placing heritage over the Faith. Our heritage celebrates and expresses the Faith that will save us.