COUNCIL OF MINISTRIES AND ITS ROLE IN STEWARDSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Fr. Steve Dalber • Saint Nektarios Church • Charlotte, NC

Introduction

The concept of a "Council of Ministries" is not only a structuring of ministries but also a leadership structure for the entire community. This not something that was invented, but rather something that evolved in our community and is serving us well. It is my hope that this concept might benefit other communities.

Most Orthodox communities in America use a leadership structure which involves the priest and a parish council as leaders of administration and ministry. Some communities use this system effectively, while others find themselves in a seemingly constant struggle. While the priest has the backing of the Archdiocese Regulations and is the spiritual and ministerial leader of the parish; the parish council, never the less, controls the "purse strings." The debate then becomes: How do we get money, how do we spend it and who makes this determination? The priest's job is to develop ministries, while the parish council sees the need to pay the bills and there never seems to be enough money to go around. Meanwhile the parish in general doesn't have a clue as to what's going on while developing an attitude of, "I really don't care." In these parishes true stewardship cannot take hold. This creates even greater desperation to raise funds, usually resulting in an ever increasing dependence on festivals and an endless stream of other fundraisers in an effort to keep the parish financially afloat. Survival becomes a priority while ministries take a back seat and the arguing seems endless.

This negative dynamic between money and ministry creates an atmosphere of dysfunction in the community which can become intergenerational creating many factions within a community and often times a revolving door policy for priests.

It is my belief that the dysfunction within which some of our parishes have fallen is not the fault of the priest, the parish or the parish council, but rather the fundamental leadership/ministry structure in our communities. The council of ministries model described below works. I truly believe communities that choose to adopt it can "fix" what's broken and enhance the effectiveness of what they are already "doing well."

How It Happened

The community that eventually would become St Nektarios was formed during the summer of 1998 under the leadership of Fr. Nick Triantafillou, who was at that time the dean of Holy Trinity Cathedral in Charlotte. Fr. Nick divided the small group into taskforces with different assignments designed to help create a community. With the approval of Bishop Alexios the community was chartered in September 1998. The taskforce leaders were then appointed as the first "board of directors." The taskforce

The Role of the Administrator

As ministries grow and multiply there is an increasing need for office support. The administrator, ideally a paid staff person, handles the financial record keeping and coordinates all of the logistical support for everyone, priest, parish council as well as the rest of the ministries. Processes are defined. Church operational policies become politically neutral. Communication among ministries is improved. Financial records are open and transparency is achieved. Again as the parish grows more paid staff will be needed to assist the administrator's ministry. Volunteer staff is also instrumental in supporting the paid staff with "non-critical" work. Regular office hours are maintained to respond to the needs of our congregants.

The Role of the Community in General

The community's role is to support the Church's mission of time, talent (involvement in ministries) and treasure. It is the priest's role to do his utmost to educate every parishioner as to the non-negotiable mission of the Church, and that by accepting salvation; we have also accepted the mission with which Jesus Christ has entrusted us. Once again making the mission clear is critical. In this system the task of teaching the mission is made much easier in that a significant number of those in the community are already members of the Council of Ministries and have already bought into the mission and are excited about making it successful.

A Note on Stewardship

Our community serves approximately 530 families. There are approximately 200+ people actively involved in the ministry process. When there are 200+ people in the community with a clear picture of what the church is here for and a vested interest in its' success stewardship starts becoming a no-brainer. The community becomes its own teacher. The need is recognized, accepted and supported.

A Note on Festivals

While arguments can be made as to the good things a festival bring to a community; it is my humble and personal opinion (and experience) that they are counterproductive to the true ministry of the Church and for that reason counterproductive to stewardship. Furthermore I believe that it is an inefficient use time and talent (manpower) and has a tendency of making our community's operations/ministries dependent upon "outside sources."

Conclusion

For reasons mentioned above, the ministry structure is a continuous work in progress, constantly changing as our ministry and community involvement grows. This system has worked and continues to work for us. I hope that you will find something useful for your community in this information, and may God continue to bless His Church and His ministry always.

Your fellow servants in Christ,
Saint Nektarios, Charlotte, NC

groups became the original ministry groups with their respective leaders as their head. I arrived a month later to find a small, well-organized group. Each "ministry/committee" was headed by a board member. This was for the most part the standard leadership/ministry structure of all Orthodox churches. Within six months this same structure was threatening to destroy our community. A strong division had arisen among the board having to do with the property we had purchased. This division created an atmosphere of distrust. Because of the leadership/ministry structure, these issues were not contained within the boardroom. They overflowed into the ministry committees with board members trying to influence the members of their respective committees to support their point of view. The work of the ministry was disrupted. It became increasingly evident that if we were going to survive as a community something radical had to be done.

The Model

Realizing that the ministry groups had become a political platform for those trying to get their own way, the board members had to be separated from them. This was the beginning of the current "Council of Ministries" structure. A flow chart was constructed showing the priest and the board on top, an administrator (office person) between the two, with each ministry headed by a volunteer. This new structure gave ownership to the ministry heads. The priest became a resource and spiritual father to the ministries with the board and administrator providing material support. The ministries began to flourish giving birth to sub-ministries and new ministries.

The Mission

By decentralizing the authority structure, the artificial restrictions to ministry, growth and development are shattered leaving behind fertile fields for innovation and growth. With each new ministry or sub-ministry, a new leadership position is created. This allows even more people to become intimately involved and feel ownership in the community, which in turn creates an excitement and a desire to truly be a ministry centered church.

Choir

The sharing of authority and leadership with so many people and ministries can be a frightening process. After all how do all these leaders stay focused and oriented in the same direction? What keeps them from going astray, wanting to do their own thing? It is critical that a strong, non-negotiable mission statement is in place to which everyone agrees and adheres. In order for the mission to be non-negotiable, it must come from the very authority who established the church and its ministry as reflected in His own worldly ministry; that is to say, Jesus Christ Himself. The mission statement is non-negotiable. The vision statement is how we see ourselves accomplishing the mission statement.

Fellowship Ministry

OUR MISSION:
St. Nektarios Greek Orthodox Church is dedicated to the continuation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ's ministry of salvation through the proclamation and teaching of the Gospel; through Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and through loving service to God and to mankind.

OUR VISION:
The community will provide a loving, caring and welcoming environment where all belong and grow in the faith through worship, service, witness, and fellowship.

The Role of the Priest

The priest in this model is free to be priest; to oversee the work of the parish council and all of the ministries without having to try to micromanage every detail of every aspect of parish life. Above and beyond his liturgical duties, he is also freed to be a teacher, a spiritual guide, and a counselor to the community entrusted to him. By having regular Council of Ministries meetings where the priest encourages the efforts of all and reiterates the mission and vision, this system becomes self-policing. The entire ministry structure then has a natural tendency to evaluate itself against the mission and the vision which has been unanimously accepted by all.

The Role of the Parish Council

The parish council in this system is no longer one of a "bean counter" but rather one of ministry. The mission and vision of the community is what drives their ministry as well. Their decisions are no longer based on a matter of personal opinions, which cause egos to clash, but rather on the criteria of how well does it fit against the mission statement. Once again the acceptance of the mission statement is critical. The members of the parish council may serve in one or more of our 14 ministry teams. They do not lead a team. The vice president is responsible for the ministry team process and serves as the liaison to the board for the ministries lead by volunteers. Four of our ministries are lead by staff. *(Since we adopted this system, we have never had a serious disagreement in a parish council meeting. There is healthy dialog and debating of issues to come to a consensus. There has never been a raising of voices except in laughter and a 100% consensus on just about every issue, because the emphasis is no longer about my opinion or your opinion, it now is upon; What is the best way to fulfill the mission of the Church. Also, the budget process now is driven by the ministry rather than the ministries being restricted by the budget.)*

Parish Council