

# **A Roadmap for American Churches and People of Faith: W.W.J.D. (What Would Jesus Do?)**



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Stewardship Calling

## CHAPTER 12. The Why And How Of Spiritual Formation And Religious Education (“SFARE”).

### The Critical Importance Of Missing Spiritual Formation And Religious Education (“SFARE”).

The third of the **S<sup>3</sup>** challenges that all parishes face I call **Spiritual Formation And Religious Education (“SFARE”)**. This distinction is nuanced and differentiates all the elements of forming a spiritual Christian who understands and practices what it means to be a true and actively practicing member of your faith tradition. One vehicle to create that understanding is formal religious education. However, one can provide religious education for students of history who have no intention of spiritually forming their lives around what that historical faith teaches. For this reason, while they are interrelated, I urge parishes to consider both Spiritual Formation **AND** Religious Education (hence the **SFARE** acronym).

I am not a trained theologian, and I only minored in education and did my student teaching at Northwestern about a million years ago. Thus, I am not competent to create specific SFARE content except in particular areas in which I have some expertise. Moreover, I pray my Roadmap will benefit Christians from all Christian denominations, and thus, there will be excellent SFARE content unique to each such denomination. But there is an important point I wish to make. A SFARE ministry leader should scour ALL available content and resources to identify the best available to achieve your objectives consistent with your theology.

There is so much about which all Christians agree (I will explore in more detail in Chapter 15 of my Roadmap) that it would be arrogant, conceited, and foolish not to avail your parish of such wisdom. “Not invented here” syndrome that rejects everything not from familiar or “approved” sources is a waste of the intellect and wisdom your Creator gave you. It was Socrates who was attributed to have said: “The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.” He went on to say: “True wisdom comes to each of us when we realize how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us.”

American writer and cultural anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson summarized Socrates’s wisdom generically by concluding that what defines us is not what we know but rather what we are willing to learn. For almost forty years, I was blessed to be a partner at two global law firms. For over thirty years, I was blessed to also toil in the American Orthosphere Christian landscape, teaching, preaching, and hopefully reaching Christians willing to discover and live their stewardship callings. As I have now entered my seventieth year of life and completed my fifth post-high school degree/certificate, I am only now discovering how much more there is for me to learn.

Being hungry and thirsty for learning and wisdom is the core of what an SFARE ministry (and every clergy and lay parish leader) must inspire in the parishioners

entrusted to you. You are on a journey of learning and living with the prayer you can achieve theosis and hear “*well done good and faithful servant*” from the Lord (Matthew 25:21). You are not merely in pursuit of another degree (which is always a great thing). You and your SFARE ministry must pursue trying to know Christ better and help your fellow parishioners (and those who check out your ministry however they access it) do the same thing. One key element on my Roadmap is the critical importance of a parish providing the most effective and exhaustive SFARE programs and ministries possible.

The empirical data from every source identifies that our Christian parishes have not done the most effective job of proper SFARE. There have been educational programs, but they have been offered untethered to knowing what the specific objectives were and establishing measurement methodologies to assess success or failure. For example, as I mentioned previously, I ask every parish I present to if they have an effective “Sunday School” program for their youth. (I hate that name because, in my experience, the last thing your youth want after 5 days of regular school is another “school” experience.) 100% of these parishes respond affirmatively. I then asked them how I would know it was effective.

The typical response is something like, “Well, I think we have a good Sunday school program.” I respond: “Well, of course you do since you designed it. I hope you didn't design a crappy experience for your youth. But my question remains, how would I, as an independent observer, be able to discern that you have an effective Sunday school program.” I have timed it, and it generally takes about 5 to 7 minutes of questions before someone will finally ask the fundamental question, “How would we even measure effectiveness?”

At this point, I say, “Aha, so what you're telling me is that you have no idea what you're trying to accomplish with your Sunday school program, no data to identify if your objectives are appropriate, and you have never measured the effectiveness of your existing program. This, of course, regrettably means you truly have no idea whether or not your Sunday school is effective.” OK, I generally don't offer this conclusion this directly and harshly, but I make sure they get my point.

Once they acknowledge the harsh truth that I have spoken, they agree that they have not undertaken any systematic efforts to ascertain their fundamental objectives and then build a program that achieves those goals in the most effective manner possible. This is the moment of awareness when parishes realize that while all efforts were extremely well-intentioned and appreciated, our previous efforts have largely been potentially ineffective because we have no idea whether they have actually achieved their desired result. Think about your Sunday school program and see if you can answer my question of how an outsider could be convinced it was effective.

Now, do something more challenging and ask the same question about your adult SFARE programs, if you have any. Regrettably, most parishes that do not have a Small Group Ministry (see discussion in Chapter 11 of my Roadmap) have NO formal SFARE programs for adults, other than the occasional, sparsely attended Bible study. We will never reverse the horrible trend of religious disaffiliation and lack of spiritual formation if we do not address this critical shortcoming. I submit this should be mission-critical for your parish, and yet it is rarely addressed.

As I mentioned previously, the longest-running study of religion and youth is the National Study of Youth and Religion at the University of Notre Dame (<https://youthandreligion.nd.edu/>). If you care about youth and young adults and their SFARE, I believe required reading is one of their first books presenting their enormous data, Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers (Smith & Denton, 2009). Among their fascinating research findings is that parents are the number one predictor of the religious beliefs and practices of their children.

It is not their peers or social media or video games (which all do have some influence). It is unequivocally up to you, the parents (and grandparents and godparents), to provide the SFARE necessary to “*train up a child in the way he should go so when he is an adult, he will not depart from it*” (Proverbs 22:6). Thus, if your adult SFARE youth and young adult programs are nonexistent or ineffective, you are destined for a worse outcome for the future of your youth.

And for those clergy who complain that the attendance at their Bible studies or other educational programs is so sporadic and small, I say glory to God for those who come. But I also ask what you are doing to find out why the others are not there or how what is offered can be improved. I mean, no disrespect, but when people have a choice, they will gravitate to what is most valuable to them and the best offerings.

As I began the Servant Leadership Chapter in my Roadmap, every parish problem is a leadership problem. As a leader, you must figure out what is not working and why. Remember that leadership guru W. Edwards Deming said that when most people repeatedly act the same way (e.g., do not show up for a class or church), the people are not the problem. The leader needs to research and fix the disconnect.

If you do not know how to fix something, then you own the responsibility of finding someone in your parish or denomination with the expertise to help you figure it out. As you reflect on your upcoming II Corinthians 5:10 Moment, do you want your account to Christ to be: “Well, what I offered was ineffective, and I did not figure out why or make any corrections to bring people closer to You and each other.” Dear brother or sister of the laity who read this, you too have this SFARE obligation personally for yourselves and your children/grandchildren/godchildren/nieces/nephews, etc. We must all help our clergy offer the best SFARE resources possible.

For any Bishop reading my Roadmap, let me respectfully suggest you, too, have the calling to provide the best SFARE resources and programs for all your parishes and parishioners. Indeed, if a Diocese, or even better, a national church, were to create best-in-class and effective SFARE programs and materials, all parishes and parishioners would benefit dramatically.

And finally, for any seminary leaders who read my Roadmap, it is really in your wheelhouse to make this happen and then offer it to the parishes and parishioners, thus creating a direct connection with potential supporters. (More on that later in Chapter 13 of my Roadmap, where I present a strategic foresight analysis for a reimagining of theological seminaries). So, let us look at our parishioners through different critical lenses to discern how you can offer the most effective SFARE ministry.

## Wake Up Call To Action - Christians Want Answers.

Sixty-six percent of Christians have questioned what they believed about their religion or God (Barna, 2017). Make sure you read that right that 66% of your parishioners (and perhaps even you) have religious doubts. And while 26% say they still do, and 40% say they worked through those doubts, 46% said they worked through their doubts by leaving their church or worship gatherings (Barna, 2017). Where were your effective SFARE programs to provide faith-based answers to those with doubts and the half of them who left because you did not give the answers? I apologize if this sounds harsh; however, I wanted you to understand why my hair is on fire and why I hope my Roadmap Ignites The Flame for you and your parish!

Christians want answers to their faith questions now more than ever and will use clergy and all available technologies and resources to find them. As I will present in greater detail in Chapter 13 of my Roadmap, the research shows your parishioners desire your parish to answer their faith and life questions, especially with respect to cultural and contemporary issues (Gryboski, 2024). These answers will also help parents provide Biblical formation to their families. This is critical because most parents do not feel equipped to do so properly at present and are finding their Sunday Schools ineffective. In short, Christians seek to understand their faith tradition's beliefs about deep, critical, cultural, social, and moral questions (Moreno-Riaño et al., 2023).

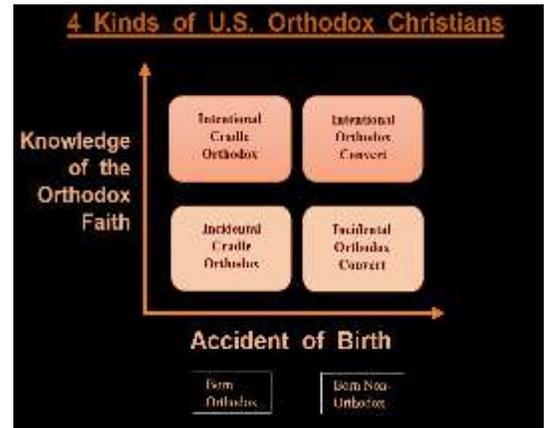
## The SFARE Job Has Gotten More Difficult - The Four Kinds of Parishioners.

I will begin by reiterating the significant demographic and sociological transformation I have discovered in the American Orthosphere churches; however, I submit the same transformation has occurred (or is occurring) in other American Christian Jurisdictions. The Pew Research Center has done extensive continuing work on the switching and intermarriage within the Christian churches in the United States. Their 2007 and 2015 Religious Landscape Studies concluded more than 34% of US Christians have switched religious affiliations (Pew Research Center, 2015). Interestingly, when Pew isolated the Protestant denominations, they discovered that the switching percentage rate increased to 42%. This high level of transition does not even include what Pew calls the "reverts," who are those who leave their denomination and then return to it later.

Some of these Christian jurisdiction transitions occur due to increased intermarriage, and others arise due to locational moves or travel convenience. However, the more interesting group is the fairly large number of Christians who change religious affiliation due to their study and belief they have found a different faith tradition that brings them closer to Christ. As I describe the impact of these transitions on the American Orthosphere, I urge you to consider how these same transitions impact the spiritual education and other activities of your faith tradition. For non-Orthodox readers, replace

the word Orthodox in the description below with the name of your Christian denomination and see if the analysis does not also apply to your church.

After three decades of working with and studying over 1,000 parishes throughout most Jurisdictions within the American Orthosphere, I discovered a fascinating sociological shift that your parish must consider and address. My model to the right demonstrates the differences in educational experiences and needs of “cradle” Orthodox (those born into the faith) and “converts” (who join later in life, usually from another faith tradition).



The cradle/convert dichotomy is further differentiated by the smaller percentage of converts (“Incidental Converts”) who merely convert to Orthodoxy for their Orthodox spouse so they can marry in an Orthodox church. They would say, “Yeah, sure, okay. I can be an Atlanta Falcons fan, an environmentalist, or Orthodox because she is, and she wants me to be.” They do not make a conscious and informed decision to understand what it means to be an Orthodox Christian. They merely decided to accommodate their new Orthodox spouse. Those Incidental Converts have no burning desire to learn about or become actively practicing members of their new faith, so they will generally do the minimum to allow their marriage to be blessed in the church. Their understanding of the faith and what it means is probably not very different from the Incidental Cradle Orthodox that describes most of us born into the faith.

However, we are blessed to have the Intentional Orthodox Converts. These are brothers and sisters in Christ who were raised in a different faith, felt some inadequacy in their beliefs, and went on an intentional journey to find the “original church” and studied Orthodoxy. In contrast, the much larger percentage of Cradle Orthodox born into the faith are characterized as “Incidental Cradle Orthodox” because we were baptized and confirmed as infants with no fundamental knowledge of our faith. Given the historical and demonstrated failure of the majority of American Orthosphere youth Sunday School programs, compounded by the relative lack of depth of understanding of the faith by our parents (who themselves never learned their faith as children), this monolithic group within the Orthodox church requires significant SFARE but often do not realize it.

We can tell you when we can have peanut butter and jelly sandwiches during the Lenten fast because that's what our Yiayia (grandmother) taught us. However, the vast majority of we Cradle Orthodox were not properly or fully catechized in understanding what it means to be an Orthodox Christian. We need structured and far more intense SFARE than our Intentional Convert brothers and sisters who underwent such education in their catechetical classes. However, there are those fewer Cradle Orthodox in your parish who realized the inadequacy of their spiritual formation and undertook a journey of SFARE to become what I call “Intentional Cradle Orthodox.”

We can spend significantly more time on this fascinating transformation of Christian churches in America, but my key point is that you likely have four different constituencies in your parish. Thus, a “one size fits all” SFARE strategy will actually fit none of them. Accordingly, you now need four different SFARE strategies to effectively reach your four different kinds of parishioners as you meet them where they are and bring them closer to Christ and each other.

These four different strategies apply to every parish ministry or activity, as well as messaging. I know the church is not a business, but your parishioners are the same humans who are also customers/clients of firms. Unfortunately, they use some of the same consumer-centric psychology when thinking about their parishes until they fully understand what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Thus, I am encouraging you to appreciate that you have four different kinds of parishioners (“customers”), each with differing needs that each require different SFARE.

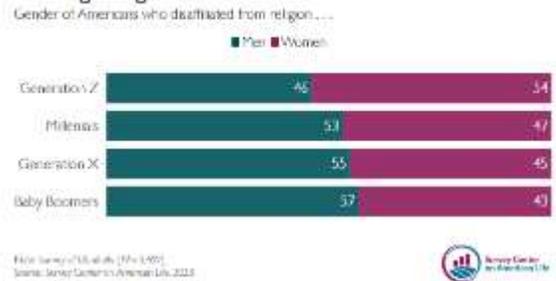
Please note, however, that I am stridently NOT asking you to bow to the demands of the ever-growing consumerist society on those things fundamental to your faith tradition. These are the elements I call the capital “T” and “B” Traditions & Beliefs. Later in Chapter 15 of my Roadmap, I will introduce you to my concept of “**Foundational Christian Truths**” to define those non-negotiable elements of being a Christian. You can add your faith’s Core Values (discussed previously in Chapter 7 of my Roadmap). However, for everything other than your Foundational Christian Truths and Core Values, I submit that you should consider the needs of your faithful and seek to help them learn their faith better.

The Pew Religious Landscape study identified that 47% of adults who were raised in the Orthodox faith left it (Pew, 2015). I am betting that you do not know why approximately half of your Cradle Orthodox adults have left your parish/church. These same (or worse) departure statistics permeate almost all Christian denominations, as I have previously identified. So, this is a universal American Christian challenge not relegated to merely one faith tradition.

If your business lost almost half of its clients or employees, you would no doubt try to find out why, whether through an exit interview or dissatisfaction survey, or call. And yet, for arguably the most important engagement a human can make (getting closer to Christ), we let them leave with nary a worry. Is it any wonder the U.S. is experiencing an unimaginable and higher-than-ever departure and churn rate for Christians? I hope you agree this is very problematic! While not every departure can be remedied or prevented through greater SFARE, the evidence from countless interviews and many surveys demonstrates a significant portion of churn would be prevented. All it takes is a greater focus on ensuring your faithful know what it means to be a Christian of your denomination through proven and effective SFARE.

The data I previously cited confirmed that 39% of Millennials are religiously unaffiliated (it was 10% in 1986). This is a 4x increase in disaffiliation in the last 35 years. Barna Research preliminary data reported on a webinar I recently attended shows that, for the first time, the number of young females leaving the church is statistically significantly higher than that of young males. This amplifies the data pictured on the right, demonstrating how younger women are leaving the church at a much more rapid pace (Cox & Hammond, 2024). Understanding why this new seismic shift is occurring and creating the most effective SFARE to address what is missing is more critical now than ever.

Women Outnumber Men Among the Young Adults Leaving Religion



While you should mourn the 40-50% of faithful you have lost, the intense need for further SFARE is equally (if not more) critical for the 50%-60% who stayed to ensure they have a strong foundation for the future. Ask yourself, how engaged are your parishioners in the sacramental or liturgical life of your church? How engaged are your parishioners in the ministries, and what opportunities do you offer to serve others? How engaged are your parishioners in ensuring that their children/grandchildren understand the depth of their faith? While I strongly advocate for work to be done to tend to the lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7), it is equally as important (if not more urgent) to critically evaluate the SFARE you are offering to ensure it meets the needs of the flock who maintains at least some affiliation.

### The First-Time Experience Educational Exercise.

I use an exercise with parishes that I take through strategic planning to open your eyes to what it is like for someone unfamiliar with your faith traditions and practices. Please try this yourself next Sunday. Go to church with a sheet of paper or index cards and pretend you are a new visitor to that parish and denomination. From the moment you drive on to the parish campus until you depart, write down all the questions you have and things you would not understand. Be diligent throughout the entire service and write down everything a first-timer might wonder about. (I hereby authorize you to tell your clergy you have my permission to be distracted on this exercise for the betterment of your parish.)

At my strategic planning retreats, I have everyone publicly share their lists with someone transcribing the questions and comments. In one parish, we came up with six single-spaced pages of questions, concerns, and items after they were transcribed. If you do this, especially with a group, your eyes will be opened to so many things you do not notice because you have been “going through your habitual motions” on Sunday. The best parishes take this list, add more observations from the parish council and others, and then create SFARE programs and strategies to ensure that not only every

visitor but every parishioner has a clear understanding of what everything is in your parish and why everything happens the way it does.

Among the statistically significant data I accumulated in my Stewardship Calling surveys of parishes I work with, within the American Orthosphere parishes, parishioners report that their minds are wandering 70% to 80% of the time during the Divine Liturgy (other than during the homily when the priest is speaking to them). Perhaps this is not as acute a problem in some mega-churches with engaging music and homilies. However, for any church with a more traditional liturgical service repeated every Sunday, the data suggests your parishioners are often zoning out. This challenge is most likely the result of one of the following three causes.

First, your parishioners do not fully understand the religious significance of everything going on. This is an SFARE issue/opportunity. You can help them spiritually and educate them on the joy and mystery of the service, and then you can observe the difference in their attentiveness and engagement. As an aside, this is where congregational singing can make a huge difference. Later in Chapter 14 of my Roadmap, I will share those insights from a very respected theologian who is one of the biggest fans of congregational singing. Those of you in African Orthodox churches, U.S. mega-churches, and some Protestant faiths understand the power of engaging the parishioners in dynamic music as part of the service. For most Orthodox surveyed, the current music is not engaging, inspiring, and merely performative by others. Let me repeat, facts do not care about our feelings!

Second, your services or homilies are not inspiring or engaging. In the next section of this Chapter, I will provide guidance on how to make homilies most effective (which are the number one thing people look at when deciding on a new church). These same best practices are also applicable to your other SFARE programs, so please stay tuned.

For those denominations with rigid liturgical practices (like my Orthodox church), the opportunity for variation is limited. However, even in those cases, effective clergy find ways to increase attentiveness and engagement. A “Teaching Liturgy” is an example where the priest, at set intervals, stops the rhythm of the service to offer a short explanation of the significance of what is happening. I know a highly effective priest who does formal Teaching Liturgies quarterly but also periodically will “break character” (what actors call stopping to engage with the audience) and merely call attention to one important thing being prayed or practiced. This is extremely effective to reengage everyone.

Anyone who sat through classes knows the difference in learning outcomes between engaged participants and those who are passively “watching the show.” Effective SFARE is a big part of that solution. But unless you survey and discuss with your parishioners what they need and want or do not understand, you are just guessing what to offer and how. The best providers of any service or teaching constantly engage with their intended recipients to find out how to deliver the information better.

One of my favorite cartoons I use in my live Igniting The Flame retreat shows a parish council meeting where the president is fussing at the pastor by saying to him:

“We’re trying to run the church, pastor, but you make it sound like you want us to do something, well, spiritual.” Every priest I have spoken to has one or more stories about a parish council member who said something similar when they confuse the parish for their business and lose sight of the WHY, Core Values, and Mission of a Christian church. I remember one Greek Orthodox priest telling me about a parish council member who inquired, “Father, can we skip offering the Divine Liturgy this Sunday so we can open our Greek festival earlier.” A truly teachable moment. Dear brother or sister in Christ, we all have much SFARE to do!

## The World Has Changed.

The Lewis Center for Church Leadership of Wesley Theological Seminary concluded that in the current age of easily accessible information and the internet, the traditional Sunday School has outlived its usefulness in providing religious information and answers (Gryboski, 2024). Recognizing these trends, Pope Francis said, “The people of God want pastors, not clergy acting like bureaucrats or government officials” (Spadaro, 2013). More recently, Pope Francis urged clergy to teach, preach, and meet the faithful where they are. Pope Francis asked Vatican representatives to avoid “rigid ideological positions” that interfere with a greater appreciation and understanding of the reality of the current times” (Winfield, 2023).

While the Roman Catholic Pope's pronouncements are not binding on clergy outside of his church, similar expressions about meeting parishioners where they are and tending to their current needs are being communicated in clergy forums that extend to all faith denominations, including my Archbishop and Ecumenical Patriarch. The question is how to create the most effective SFARE programs and ensure they are delivered in the most impactful and effective manner possible.

## Being A Human Light Bulb And The Light Of The World.

Bottom line, I believe you are a human light bulb. A light bulb is just something into which energy is introduced, and the darkness is illumined. Darkness is not a thing. Darkness is merely the absence of light. Thus, in your area, what you focus on, what you teach, what you preach, whatever the location of your ministry, you are a light bulb crushing the darkness. And this is a sacred calling.

Look no further than Holy Scripture to find guidance. You were called to be “*the light of the world*” (Matthew 5:14). Think about that. You are called to bring light into whatever dark part of the world God has placed you. And you are called to let your light shine, not for your ego, not for your self-aggrandizement, but ultimately for your salvation so that others, seeing the good you produce, will glorify your Father in heaven. Thus, every time you look in the mirror, understand that the reflection you see is the image and likeness of God and the light of the world.

There is much Scripture that talks about light. St. John starts powerfully speaking about “*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men*” (John 1:4). Very quickly, St.

John shifts to another man named John whose calling was to “*Bear witness of the Light*” (John 1:7). And then, a few generations later, you came along also to be a witness to the Light so that through you “*others might believe.*” This is what your sacred human light bulb ministry calling is all about. If you accept this call from God (not me), you might wonder how to be the brightest and most effective human light bulb. I submit for your consideration the following steps and stages for you and your fellow SFARE human light bulb guides.

## How To Improve Personally And Enhance Your Parish SFARE By Journeying From “Teacher” To “Preacher” To “Reacher.”

Let me first define terms. There are three kinds of SFARE human light bulbs: “Teachers,” “Preachers,” and “Reachers.” Throughout your life, you may fit in various places on that spectrum at different times and in different situations. I respectfully ask you and all other clergy or individuals involved in parish SFARE to read this extensive Roadmap in the rest of this Chapter and carefully assess where you are on your journey from Teachers to Preachers to Reachers.

**Teachers** share information. They are **informational**. **Preachers** take information and inspire us with it. They are **inspirational**. But it is the last group, the **Reachers**, who take that inspired information and actually get us to do something with it. The Reachers are **transformational**. The data from study after study show that your faithful needs substantial additional SFARE, and the individuals who are the best vehicles to take you on that journey are Reachers.

Think about it in another way. Informational Teachers speak to the neocortex part of your brain to pass along information. It's a very cerebral exercise. But inspirational Preachers are talking to your heart and gut, where our emotions control our limbic brain and how we feel. Ultimately, it is the Reachers, those transformational motivators, who get you to apply that knowledge, wisdom, insights, emotion, and feelings and use your reptilian brain to control your limbs to do something with it.

Let me provide another way to look at this. Teachers are roughly the equivalent of a 10-watt light bulb. That's fine. It produces some light, but the darkness is scattered only briefly and over a little space. But what if we 10x that? See, Preachers are 100-watt light bulbs. Oh, we love to have 100-watt light bulbs in our houses.

However, there is another 10x improvement on a Preacher, namely being a Reacher. That is a 1,000-watt floodlight that eviscerates all darkness because its reach is so powerful and widespread. It is my fervent hope and prayer that you and everyone else involved in your parish SFARE ministries (especially our beloved clergy) take the challenge to become the most effective Reacher of your human light bulb ministry imaginable.

Now, some of you are probably saying, well, Marianes, that's a nice theory, but do you have any evidence of that? To answer, I will apply the (lowercase “s” and “t”) “sacred tradition” in the Orthodox church. I humorously call it the “Orthodox Dead Guy”

rule. Our Orthodox theologians and scholars like to pick the oldest “dead guy” we can find who said something like the point we wish to make to prove we must be telling the truth. Thus, I am going truly old school and traveling to BC.

Cicero once said that the three rules for an orator are to teach, to delight, and to reach. He articulated it very clearly by saying, “Teaching is a necessity. To delight is beauty. But to persuade is a triumph.”

It is the journey of going from just teaching to preaching to reaching that your parish SFARE ministry can transform the SFARE of your parishioners. Yes, dear brother or sister, you have the opportunity to become a global human light bulb that provides your faithful and others the much-needed light by bringing people close to Christ and each other.

### The Need For A Better SFARE Formula.

So, how do you transform SFARE in your parish? I have learned there are formulas for just about everything we do. About a million years ago, I got my M.B.A. from the Goizueta Graduate School of Business Administration at Emory University, where I had an amazing professor of quantitative methods, the late Dr. Philip Carlson. One day, he was teaching us “queuing theory.” That is basically logistics optimization that involves a lot of math. My class arrogantly thought we were a bunch of geniuses, and Dr. C. taught us a lesson I have never forgotten and will share with you.

Dr. Carlson wrote a problem on the chalkboard and left the room, telling us to come to his office when we had solved it. After 90 minutes of trying, none of us succeeded. Our class spent all weekend working on that problem in small groups. Three days later, Dr. C. came into the class smiling and wrote a very long formula on the board. The dumbest kid in our class solved the previously complex problem in less than three minutes. Our wise professor looked at us and said: “I’m going to teach you the most important thing you will ever learn from your entire M.B.A. experience. Every problem is easily solvable if you have the right equation.” Take that lesson to the bank because I have learned it repeatedly in my life.

A different formulation (pun intended) of Dr. Carlson’s great advice is most often attributed to Albert Einstein but is more properly attributed to a 1966 article about manufacturing manager skills by William H. Markel (Quote Investigator, 2014): “If I had only one hour to solve a problem, I would spend up to two-thirds of that hour in attempting to define what the problem is.”

Our Creator educated us with ten pretty good formulas (read that, Commandments) in a roadmap of how to live a righteous life (Exodus 20:2-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21). Our Lord and Savior added His additional formulas in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12). Later, our Lord gave His Apostles a great formula of actions to take that included healing the sick, cleansing lepers, raising the dead, and casting out demons (Matthew 10:5-15; Mark 6:7-13). Powerfully, Christ added a most critical formula of what it took for us to be His disciples by sharing love (John 13:34-35).

## What Is The Formula For You To Become A Reacher And Transform Your Life And Your Parish SFARE?

Here is my formula for you to memorize in your Reacher journey and process to most effectively transform your parish and personal SFARE:

$$3K + 3P + 3A = \Delta$$

(Where  $\Delta$  is the changed behavior that results from an effective parish SFARE delivered by Reachers.)

Allow me to unpack my SFARE Reacher Formula as follows:

### The 3Ks involve the Reacher

1. Knowing yourself,
2. Knowing your audience,
3. Knowing your content.

### The 3Ps involve the Reacher

1. Personally communicating,
2. Passionately communicating,
3. Persuasively communicating.

### The 3As involve the Reacher effectively communicating

1. Action desired,
2. Action steps,
3. Action rewards.

## The 3Ks.

### **1. Knowing yourself**

To be most effective, every Reacher must know their WHY and how their WHY allows them to provide the best SFARE your faithful need. Here's a test for you. In one sentence, why are you here on this earth, and why do you do what you do? So, do you know what you wish to accomplish in your human light bulb ministry? It is critical for any Reacher to authentically know and live their WHY to be an effective deliverer of the message of Christ. If a Sunday school teacher, clergyman, or other SFARE Ministry

worker is not walking their talk and living their WHY, they cannot be an effective SFARE Reacher.

I left a very productive law firm and practice “to help people and parishes discover and live their stewardship callings so they can have a ‘good account before the awesome judgment seat of Christ.’” The blessing that I get to live my WHY every day and, in every interaction, inspires me to try to become a better SFARE Reacher. And for you “Potterheads” out there, look into Harry Potter's “Mirror of Erised,” and you will see what you want most for your human light bulb SFARE ministry (Rowling, 2002). What would you see in that mirror reflecting that begins to give you the point of trajectory to become a better Reacher?

The late great professor at the Harvard Business School, Dr. Clayton Christensen, was a dedicated follower of Jesus Christ. He wrote a phenomenal book called How Will You Measure Your Life. In it, he asks you to consider, “Is there something I can leave the world that is bigger than me that will help others become better people” (Christensen, 2012)? This is the journey of a Reacher seeking to transform people on their journeys. When you ask yourself how you are more effective in living a Christian lifestyle, you improve your SFARE Reacher results.

In Simon Sinek’s powerful Start With WHY TED Talk (Sinek, 2010), he challenged you, who seek to be a Reacher human light bulb, by asking you to know your purpose, your cause, and your belief. Why does your organization (parish) exist, and why should anyone care? Have you thought about it, and can you articulate the specific WHY of your SFARE ministry and parish? Because if you cannot, it is unlikely that you will be an effective transformational Reacher human light bulb. Sinek reinforces the concept that our newest homo sapiens brain, the neocortex, is responsible for our rational and analytical thought and language, which more closely aligns with what I believe Teachers do. But that part of our brain does not drive people into action.

The valuable contributions Dr. Gershon of Columbia University Medical School added in his phenomenal book, The Second Brain (Gershon, 1998) was how your enteric nervous system in your guts (the “second brain”) uses its 100 million neurons connected to your brain to form your state of mind and actions. This is the connection to our limbic and reptilian brains, which is the domain of the Reachers who drive behavioral change. It is your reptilian brain that drives you to take action. It was that part of the brain that caused cavemen who saw a dinosaur to run and hide from that danger. So, all three parts of your brain perfectly align with my human lightbulb SFARE ministry focus of Teaching (neocortex brain), Preaching (limbic brain), and Reaching (reptilian brain).

Here is the bottom line for SFARE practitioners who seek to be the most effective Reacher. Your Creator perfectly designed your parishioners and aligned their brains, hearts, guts, and limbs so that you can improve the trajectory of your SFARE human light bulb ministry. Knowing, articulating, and living your and your parish’s WHY serves as an example to help others see your light and transform their lives. This is how effective Reacher Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. inspired people by sharing his drive to ensure that our man-made laws are aligned with God’s laws. Knowing your WHY is the first step on your Reacher journey.

## 2. Knowing Your Audience.

Every effective SFARE Reacher knows their audience and tailors the complexity and elements of their message to have the greatest impact. You must think about and understand who your target demographic audience is and what kind of message will best resonate with them. You must understand who they are so that you can talk with them and not merely at them. When engaging with them, find out what they worry/wonder about. My favorite question to ask the audience is, what keeps you up at night? What questions do you ask to understand your audience better? And here is a big shocker for some people, but when you actually engage with your audience and you ask them these profound questions, they will answer you.

Once they tell you what is on their minds, you will be able to shape better the SFARE content you are delivering more effectively. You also must know what persuades them and what does not. And stop using the arguments and advancing the content that is unpersuasive. In other words, you need to speak their language, not your language. You need to learn the language of your target audience and stop trying to convince them to change to your language.

You should also ask yourself who can most benefit from what I have to say. Who are the people who could really value the content that I'm producing? Once you know your target audience, you will focus on how to reach them and not merely on how to teach them or preach to them. Everyone only has a limited amount of time every day, so anything you can do to focus your energy on what is most effective is time well spent. Albert Einstein supposedly once said, "Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler." (Not to burst your quote bubble again, but while Einstein might have said something similar, the written record seems to favor attribution to either poet Mark Scoggins or a 1950 New York Times article by composer Roger Sessions who paraphrased this quote attributing it to Einstein (Quote Investigator, 2011).)

And if you ever listened to a loquacious presentation about something that seemed to go on and on and on (you might be feeling I'm doing that right now), you will recognize that you tuned out a while back. In your SFARE presentations of any kind, ask yourself if you have lost effectiveness. Have you lost connection with your audience because you do not understand what they want and need?

One of the examples I love to use about knowing your audience is something I once communicated that had \$300 million in value for a client whose business I sold. It is powerful when you can economically quantify the value of your words. I repeat them below for you to marvel at the effectiveness of my Reacher communications skills:

### Section 9.5 Claim Against Escrow; Sole Remedy.

Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in this Agreement, any and all claims for which Buyer may be entitled to indemnification under or in connection with this Agreement (other than with respect to any Post-Closing Covenant Default, Individual Seller Closing Default, the representations and warranties in Section 3.2 and Section 3.4(b) or any

claims arising from fraud, criminal activity or willful misconduct) shall be satisfied solely and exclusively out of (i) the Escrow Fund available under the First Escrow Agreement and (ii) reduction of the principal amount of the Buyer Note, to the extent permitted pursuant to Section 2.5 and the Buyer Note, and Buyer hereby waives any and all rights to recoup or recover such claims or any portion thereof exceeding the Cap from any Seller or Seller Representative (other than with respect to any Post-Closing Covenant Default, Individual Seller Closing Default, the representations and warranties in Section 3.2 and Section 3.4(b) or any claims arising from fraud, criminal activity or willful misconduct). After Closing, (i) the provisions of this ARTICLE IX shall constitute the sole and exclusive remedy available to any party to this Agreement for any claims (other than claims arising from fraud, criminal activity or willful misconduct or with respect to any Individual Seller Closing Default) for any breach, misstatement, misrepresentation or omission by any other party relating to any representation or warranty contained herein (except the representations and warranties in Section 3.2 and Section 3.4(b)) or a certificate delivered hereunder or for any breach of any covenant or agreement that is not a Post-Closing Covenant Default or Individual Seller Closing Default and (ii) each party hereby unconditionally waives any other rights against any other party hereto that it may have at law or in equity for Losses occurring as a result of or in connection with the transaction contemplated by this Agreement (other than with respect to any Post-Closing Covenant Default, Individual Seller Closing Default, the representations and warranties in Section 3.2 and Section 3.4(b) or any claims arising from fraud, criminal activity or willful misconduct).

If you are a normal human, you stopped reading after about one sentence to prevent your head from exploding. You would call my great wordsmithing above **“Legalese”** because this was not written for you or using phrases you would use or appreciate. It was written for a judge who might resolve a claim against my client. That judge, my intended audience, would know why every word or phrase was there. Knowing your audience and tailoring your SFARE message to them is critical.

And don't use words they might not understand when more accessible words are more effective. As I began my religious studies several decades ago, I once objected to someone who I thought kept talking about “exiting Jesus.” They said they wanted to talk about “exiting Jesus this” and “exiting Jesus that.” I powerfully objected and said, “We should be inviting Jesus in and not exiting Him.” I was standing up for the truth!

I was eventually told they were just trying to impress me by using the term “exegesis” and not “exit Jesus.” Many normal people have no clue what exegesis means, but theologians, educators, and clergy throw it around like we use it every day. It is wonderful when they are talking to peers, and it is likely meaningless when they are talking to the average PIP (Parishioner In Pews). These wise theologians merely mean an explanation or interpretation of a text that is usually Holy Scripture. Put another way, it means “an explanation.”

I use this as an example of what I call “**Theolese**” (the theological version of legalese). So, to all clergy and SFARE Reachers, if your target audience is theologians and academicians, by all means, “exegesis them” to death. Exegete everything. But for everyone else, use the language of the people. See, I believe Pentecost has a lot of meanings, one of which is being a more effective human light bulb Reacher by speaking the language the audience can understand.

One last exercise I like to use when training SFARE Reachers is to put a saying on the screen and force them to vote for one of three choices. Either the saying is 1: the absolute truth, 2. NOT the absolute truth, or 3. they don’t know. When I am before a non-Greek speaking audience, this is what I display:

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος, καὶ ὁ Λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ Λόγος.

(If it is a Greek audience I use: “В начале было Слово, и Слово было у Бога, и Слово было Бог.”)

Everyone generally votes, “I don’t know.” Then I put the following on the screen, and I ask them to vote again:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Everyone recognizes the words from John 1:1 when they are in a language they understand. The point is that you can speak the absolute truth, but no one will know it unless you talk to them in the language they can understand! See, there comes Pentecost again with the Holy Spirit teaching the Apostle Reachers to speak in the various tongues to which they would minister.

I carry an icon of Pentecost with me to remind me of this event and what it means for my communications. I celebrate those little burning flames over the heads of the Apostles where the Holy Spirit came down, teaching them to speak in tongues because not everybody they would Reach spoke the same language. My dear brother or sister, you are an heir of the Apostles. So, please learn and speak the language of your target audience if you hope to Reach them as a most effective human light bulb SFARE evangelist.

### **3. Knowing Your Content.**

The third K rule is to “Know thy content.” And this one is really, I think, encapsulated by Stephen Covey’s work, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, where he says, “Begin with the end in mind” (Covey, 2004). Can you tell me what the ending conclusion you want your audience to reach with your message? If you cannot, then stop delivering your message because you’re probably not going to get anyone where you want them to go.

To be effective, you need to do three things: 1. tell them what you're going to tell them, 2. tell them, and 3. tell them what you told them. It's that simple. So, what is the most effective way to deliver and communicate your message? Sometimes, it might be a little counterintuitive. You might think that because you are a good writer, you ought to communicate in writing. However, perhaps your audience would respond better to another medium, tool, or technology. A one-size-fits-all message fits no one. You must explore how you can best deliver your content to your target audience. If your homily or SFARE content is the same for older adults, young adults, and teenagers, you can be sure you are probably not Reaching them all.

Here is a data point I previously shared with you that blew me away. Statistics show that only 20% of email messages are ever opened. Approximately 61% go straight into people's spam filters, and the other 19% just do not get read. However, 98% of text messages are read, and 95% are read within three minutes. If you are wondering why your parish emails are not getting the responsiveness you want, perhaps it is because you have not adapted to the ways your parishioners are communicating.

Another consideration is the necessity to proofread everything you put out so many times you are sick of reading it. Once people find the first typo (as you did somewhere in my Roadmap for the intentional typo I left in), they begin to wonder about your credibility or professionalism. With the advent of spell check, Grammarly, and other automated tools, there are few excuses for ineffective Reacher communications.

You have heard the phrase practice makes perfect. This is the secret sauce of any presentation or SFARE program you deliver. You must have rehearsed it so many times that you can deliver it in your sleep and regardless of what technology calamity occurs.

If you ever drive by me in the week before a live presentation, you will always see my mouth flapping. It is not merely because I am loquacious or talking on my phone. I use drive-time to practice the next presentation (or portions of it) as close to 50 times as possible before I deliver it. How many times have you listened to people speak, and every third word is "uhm" or "aw" or "right?" (The latter phrase is my worst habit.) All these filler words are used because you do not know your material or feel comfortable speaking it to reach people. This is why repeated practice is so critical.

And there is nothing better than recording yourself before you present. You will notice the distracting things you do that reduce your Reacher effectiveness. A Federal Judge preparing me for a moot court competition once praised me after my oral argument by saying I would make a great aircraft parking attendant because of how distracting my constant hand motions were. Obviously, that was not what I was going for, and I went to work by duct-taping my hands to the podium until I could deliver my argument without distraction. (Intentional, powerful, occasional, and well-timed hand gestures are critical, so I added them back in later.)

Practicing your presentation repeatedly is the analog to proofreading your writing. Nothing makes you a more effective Reacher than having absolute command of your content as you look your audience in the eye. This is why I tell clergy to please get out of the pulpit and stand on ground level, and even move into the congregations' space to

make it more interactive and interpersonal (and to make sure they are not sneaking peaks on their smartphones).

If you are making a SFARE presentation online, make sure there is a chat room or place for people to ask questions or interact. If it is a public presentation, make sure the chat is monitored to keep the whackadoodles in check. Creating a personal relationship is very important in effective Reacher communication.

It is also helpful to ensure all your SFARE content uses pleasing graphics, pictures, and fonts and provide footnotes or cross-references to any authorities or data cited. Make it easy for people. In my live Igniting The Flame program, anytime I cite authoritative content, you will see a footnote or other reference indicator to let my audience know I am citing facts and not opinions.

It is also critical to know your audience in the fonts you use in your materials. Those wonderful creative scripts and small fonts that young people can see, we older Baby Boomers cannot read clearly. Ensure you know your audience and tailor the appearance of what you present to them and their styles of learning and visualizing.

Don't ever read your presentation. Don't ever read your presentation. Is this clear? If you want to be a Reacher of anything important, NEVER READ your presentation! If you want to read something to me, skip the presentation and email it to me. You are wasting my time if you do not wish to have a personal conversation with me.

I know some of you take a lot of time to get your words perfect, and writing it out helps you. But when you look down and read, it is highly impersonal, and you have no idea when your audience has checked out and start smartphone scrolling. And trust me, they will check out of your presentation on and off no matter who you are or what your message is if you merely read it.

Plus, there is something about reading that makes most of us do so in a monotone and without the inflection changes, modulation, and passion that we use when we make eye contact with our audience. Reading is not the way to communicate the Word of God or Christian teaching. Sorry, clergy and Bishops, but this is the truth! Please stop it.

No one likes to be read to unless you're a little child at bedtime. Look at your audience. Look around the room/church and try to see every person at least once. Force yourself to make eye contact. You will never know if that "perfect" phrase you wrote made an impact on me if you just look down and read it rather than see how I react. And I know that when you look down and read what you wrote, you are not trying to make a connection. You will sound "scripted" because you are, and you can't help sounding that way when you read.

There will also be no flexibility or impromptu additive commentary that is normal in interpersonal communications when you "read" (not read to) your audience. Some of my best one-liners and self-deprecating humor that create maximum engagement and enjoyment are ad-libs, impromptu reactions to the audience, or random neuron firings. **Skip your version of "perceived perfection" and go for "engaged impact!"** We would all much rather you forget some great phrase you wrote if you look at us, engage with us, and make an interpersonal connection. That is what the Reachers do.

I'll never forget a Bishop who tended to read his remarks and asked for my advice. I told him to stop reading and, if necessary, have a bullet point list with one word for each topic or point he wanted to make. He could periodically glance down at his list as he kept talking. He was still on the fence until I good naturedly asked him why he didn't trust the Holy Spirit to guide him.

He smiled at my "upstream teachable moment" and gave it a try in front of a large audience. It included many people who did not know him, which is a classic time when readers like to stick to their prepared text. After the presentation, I had to stand in a very long line of people congratulating him and thanking him for the profound and meaningful message he had spoken with such passion and impact. That night, he was a true Reacher.

I know another foreign-born clergyman who told me he wrote and read his remarks because he was not as comfortable with the English language. I gave him all my pep talks and research on why that was not the most impactful. He gave me the "you don't know what it's like to be a foreigner like me" look of continued doubt.

Because I could read my audience of one, I told him about the time I served in a high international office in a nonprofit and had to make an address in front of a room full of successful businessmen and politicians in Athens, Greece. Growing up with immigrant parents/grandparents raised in the mountains of Greece, I learned χωριάτικος Greek. This is the colloquial (informal) villager version rather than the formal educated Greek.

With all the caveats at the beginning of my speech about how messed up my Greek would be, I delivered my entire remarks with great passion and from memory but in the version of the villager version of the native tongue I knew. It was riddled with wrong tenses, declensions, pronunciations, and even some wrong word versions. Yet the impact of the standing ovation at the end was only surpassed by the number of leaders who commended me for showing them respect for trying to communicate with passion in their native language (even though their commendations were delivered in almost perfect English). Personal connection, passion, and respect make all the difference in the world. And this is the Reacher word I hope all laity, clergy, and Bishops reach for (pun intended). Just trust the Holy Spirit and speak from your heart!

As far as we know, Christ never read a Parable. I know you are not Christ, but if you are representing Him, then Reach people by showing them respect by looking at them and seeking to have a dialogue engaging with them. To review, the best SFARE Reachers Know themselves, Know their target audience, and Know their content (the 3Ks).

## The 3Ps.

### **1. Personally communicate.**

Let's unpack the three Ps, starting with personal communications. A very interesting analysis identified storytelling as perhaps the most powerful technique in delivering content. The researchers tested interpersonal communications and

discovered that about 65% of them were made up of social topics and personal stories (Hsu, 2008). By the way, this includes gossip because those are individual stories of a different nature.

Storytelling engages your brain because you are trying to follow the tale and are wondering what comes next. It is one of the most natural ways of communicating and an effective way to impart actionable content and communicate. Is it any wonder that Christ's principal messaging form was the Parable? Be like Christ if you want to be a human light bulb, SFARE Reacher!

Remember when Christ was asked, "*Why do you speak to them in parables*" (Matthew 13:10)? He never seemed to give them a lecture, or study guide, followed by a test. Christ's answer to that question was (and I will paraphrase to make the language more accessible).

I use parable stories to help them see the picture of what I am saying to help them get its impact. Sometimes, people hear Me speak but don't really appreciate My message. Has that ever happened to you? Now, imagine I tell them a story. Think of the last time you heard a good story told by a great storyteller. Could you relate to their message and engage with them in a more accessible way? I once told a story, and when the person saw themselves in the story and took the same action as my story hero, their life was much better. Would you like to hear that story and improve your life?

If you paid attention, all I did was take Holy Scripture, and rather than merely quote it, I summarized it in contemporary language as if we were speaking to each other. When you make a story realistic, your message is more approachable and understandable, and people can figure out how to apply it. (But we will get to that when we cover the "3 As" later).

You have a unique voice and should speak in your voice. You can't speak as effectively in anybody else's voice. So, tell them your story the authentic way you tell stories, and people will relate with you the more you use real-life examples. They don't have to all be your personal examples or stories. It is OK to use stories of others from which your audience can learn a key message as long as you can tell it as effectively in your voice. When you make your Reacher message personal, you make it understandable, realistic, approachable, achievable, meaningful, and coming from you in your voice.

### **Context and Relevance are Critical.**

One of the most important Reacher effective SFARE points that clergy and lay leaders get wrong all the time is forgetting to provide context. In every homily I preach, I will remind the parishioners several times that unless you know the context of the Holy Scripture, you will miss a big part of the message.

Let me give you a practical example. Every Christian has heard countless Luke 15 sermons about the Parable of the Lost Sheep. The problem is that the people you are preaching to are, for the most part, not shepherds. I grew up in the city. What do I know about sheep? So, a shepherd looking for a lost sheep does not resonate with me.

Now allow me to give you that same homily a little differently. "You have four children and are at the airport. One of your children wanders off and disappears. Do you say, no worries, I have three other kids? Or do you go after the one that ran away?"

See, you get that example because it is contextually relevant to any parent. And for those of us who have lost kids at airports (fortunately temporarily, and it wasn't my fault), we really get it. For audiences who are not parents, a different story would be more impactful. Always explain it in terms that provide relevance.

Let me provide a second example of the importance of preaching context to be a SFARE Reacher. Many of you have preached or heard Matthew 6:25, where Christ says, essentially, don't worry about the food or drink, and don't worry about your clothes. This message does not resonate with the typical American congregation because most parishioners have plenty of clothes and have not missed many meals. But once you look at the context of the time, the story becomes more impactful.

The people Christ was speaking to generally had to work all day so that they would have enough food to eat that night with only a little to spare. They also generally had two frocks; one they had washed for the next day and the other they were wearing. They constantly worried about whether they would have enough food and clothes to wear. When the Lord told them to ignore those critical things that were top of mind for them and instead focus on God and their life and broader purpose, He got their attention. He was Reaching them by telling them not to worry about what they probably worried about the most. Next time you share that parable, ask your parishioners to imagine not worrying about having no car (or internet if preaching to youth).

When I preach the Parable of the Good Samaritan, I go to great lengths to make sure the modern parishioners understand how much the Samaritans and Jews hated each other and never could interact in any way. I sometimes joke and pick the sports team most "disfavored" by people in that city and ask them what would happen if someone entered their church wearing the jersey from that team. They laugh, but they get it. This makes the story of the Jews ignoring the stricken Jew but the Samaritan touching and helping him much more impactful. If you do not share the context of the Holy Scriptural parable, your parishioners may miss a critical message that is relevant to them today.

Reachers want to reach their audience and make it meaningful and relevant, whereas Teachers merely want people to hear the historical story even if they cannot apply it in their lives. This is why, in the most effective Reacher SFARE programs, the context and modern relevance of Holy Scripture are critical if you wish to be that human lightbulb that causes people to change their behavior.

## 2. Passionately Communicate

The best Reachers speak with such passion that you are ready to follow them into the battle. Some do it with drama, some with voice modulation, and some with examples of ultimate humility. Regardless of the vehicle, passion is powerful! It remains one of the most potent motivators.

I will say it bluntly now. **If you cannot preach the word of God with passion, you have no business preaching it.** If you cannot talk about Christ with passion, you will never convince someone He is your Lord and Savior. Among my biggest pet peeves are clergy or laity who read the Gospel in a service as if they were reading the next stops on the subway. Read it like you mean it and are pronouncing the word of God and Christ to the hungry and thirsty people. Because you are! Pretend Christ is right next to you when you share His word. Preaching is not enough if you want to create disciples of Jesus Christ. You must be a Reacher!

SFARE Reachers must be humble and real, and at times even self-deprecating. The only TED Talk I know of that was permitted to go on for over 26 minutes, rather than the mandated 18 minutes, was the late Billy Graham's (Graham, 2008). He was speaking to a polite but relatively unusual audience of technology people (likely non-Christians). He started by completely disarming them with the following self-deprecating story:

Some years ago, I was on an elevator in Philadelphia coming down. I was to address a conference at a hotel, and on that elevator, a man said, "I hear Billy Graham is staying in this hotel." And another man looked in my direction and said, "Yes, there he is. He's on this elevator with us." And this man looked me up and down for about ten seconds, and he said, "My, what an anti-climax." I hope that you won't feel that these few moments with me is an anti-climax (Graham, 2008).

After raucous laughter, Reverend Graham immediately transitioned to this engaging story:

I was on an airplane in the East some years ago, and the man sitting across the aisle from me was the mayor of Charlotte, North Carolina. His name was John Belk. Some of you would probably know him. And there was a drunk man on there. And he got up out of his seat two or three times, and he was making everybody upset by what he was trying to do. And he was slapping the stewardess and pinching her as she went by.

And everybody was upset with him. And finally, John Belk said, "Do you know who's sitting here?" And the man said, "No!" He said, "It's Billy Graham, the Preacher." The drunk said, "You don't say." And he turned to me, extended his hand, and said, "Put her there." He said, "your sermons have certainly helped me." And I suppose that that's true with thousands of people (Graham, 2008).

Even one of the most incredible and effective Reachers who spoke to millions and converted countless souls to Christ showed the personal humility to begin with self-deprecating humor that completely disarmed any hostility in the audience and made him equal to everyone there. After disarming and engaging this atypical audience, they were ready to hear his talk about technology, science, and God, where he offered:

Albert Einstein. I was just talking to someone when I was speaking at Princeton. And I met Mr. Einstein. He didn't have a doctor's degree because he said nobody was qualified to give him one. But he made this statement. He said, "It's easier to denature plutonium than to denature the evil spirit of man." And many of you, I'm sure, have thought about that and puzzled over it (Graham, 2008).

Reacher Graham went on to blow their minds by closing with:

Your soul is that part of you that yearns for meaning in life and which seeks for something beyond this life. It's the part of you that yearns really for God. I find young people all over the world are searching for something.

They don't know what it is. I speak at many universities, and I have many questions and answer periods. And whether it's Cambridge or Harvard or Oxford, I've spoken at all those universities.

I'm going to Harvard in about three or four, no, it's about two months from now to give a lecture. And I'll be asked the same questions that I was asked the last few times I've been there. And it'll be on these questions.

"Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? What's life all about?" Even if you have no religious belief, there are times when you wonder if there's something else. Thomas Edison also said, "When you see everything that happens in the world of science and in the working of the universe, you cannot deny that there's a captain on the bridge"...

I didn't make good grades in high school. I didn't make them in college until something happened in my heart. One day, I was faced face-to-face with Christ. He said, "I'm the way, the truth, and the life." Can you imagine that? I am the truth. I'm the embodiment of all truth.

He was a liar. (LONG PAUSE) Or he was insane. Or he was what he claimed to be.

Which was it? I had to make that decision. I couldn't prove it. I couldn't take it to a laboratory and experiment with it.

But by faith, I said I believe him. And he came into my heart and changed my life. And now I'm ready when I hear that call to go into the presence of God (Graham, 2008).

The long pause after he suggested Christ might be a liar caused everyone in the room to be speechless and stop breathing. Listening to the talk, you might think the pause lasted 15 minutes long before Billy Graham followed it up by suggesting perhaps Christ was “insane.” As he slowly laid out his story, they wondered if they had just heard one of the greatest Christian Reachers call Christ a liar or insane. But it was only a matter of seconds before he confronted them with the third option: “Or He was exactly who He said He was” (Graham, 2008). By the time he added that option, they realized he had sucked them into a powerful, personal, confessional commitment.

Many famous people (including President John F. Kennedy) have said, in some version, “**The only reason to give a speech is to change the world.**” If you are not prepared to change the whole world, perhaps you can be a Reacher of one person and transform their understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Interestingly, studies routinely show that most things sound or read better when delivered with passion. No doubt, you would agree. You have attended passionless presentations where the presenter might have been sharing incredible jewels of wisdom. But during the boring talk, you were wondering if, when committing hara-kiri, you stab yourself in an upward or downward stroke. However, I am confident you have also heard presentations where a Reacher has inspired or motivated you, such that you felt better, more empowered, and/or perhaps even ready to conquer the world.

There is a great saying in the business world that people buy on emotions and justify with facts. That's essentially what Simon Sinek was telling us happens if you start with why and captivate people (Sinek, 2010). When you reach the parishioners and get their attention on something that matters, you are a SFARE Reacher.

Passion creates several phenomena: energy, contagious enthusiasm, and dedicated disciples. All three of those things are essential if your human light bulb SFARE ministry is going to the Reacher level. The curator of all the TED conferences, Chris Anderson, routinely says that most successful TED Talks are delivered by speakers who have a passion for their ideas and consequently deliver their talks with emotion and imagination. Notice he didn't say they are always passionate, but they have a passion for their idea that they can communicate in a very effective way.

Every one of us speaks differently. Every one of us has a different presentation style. Some of you like some person's style and dislike another person's communication method. But you can be passionate about things that matter, and that is how you need to communicate.

Melissa Cardin from Pace University is a management professor who has researched passion in communications. She routinely identifies a direct correlation between the presenter's perceived passion, or how the audience perceives that person's passion, and the likelihood that people will do what is asked of them (Cardon, 2009). So, the moral of the story is that if you want to move to the Reacher status, you must elevate your passion in messaging and communicating.

Here's an interesting byproduct about why you should learn to be more passionate. Scientific research shows passionate leaders are more creative, set higher

goals, exhibit greater persistence, and record better performance consistently. So, the level of passion permeates more than just your communication style.

Nick Morgan is the CEO of a group called Public Works and is a top communications theorist and researcher. He has concluded (Morgan, 2014):

Passion is authentic and charismatic....

We don't fully trust people until we've seen them get emotional – angry, sad, ecstatic - because these moments allow us to take measure of their values....

...because someone who is radiating a strong emotion is fascinating, eye-catching, and lit up in a special way that we call charismatic.

Being a Reacher involves being charismatic. There is a way that you can do this. If you can see somebody get angry, then you have a better insight into that person. You can connect with them at a different level. Even if what gets them angry does not make you angry. However, they seem more real and authentic in that regard.

In a Harvard Business Review article, Nick Morgan said: “Focus not on what you want to say, but why you're giving the presentation” (Morgan, 2008). In other words, go back to your WHY to be an effective Reacher. He added: “Let the underlying emotion come out in every word you deliver...Then raise the stakes... **Imagine that somebody in the audience has the power to take everything away from you unless you win him/her over with your passionate argument** (Morgan, 2008).

For those of you who say, “I can't give a passionate speech like Reverend Billy Graham,” then focus on why you are doing what you are doing and why doing it is so important. If that does not provide the necessary passion in the way you communicate, then do not try. But it is important not to be afraid to be vulnerable to the people you communicate with in whatever way you are comfortable being vulnerable. All Reachers and the most effective SFARE human light bulbs have their style that always includes a commitment to being passionate about what they deliver that can bring people closer to Christ and each other.

### 3. Persuasively communicate.

Among the most effective messages are those that are persuasive. You are not just sharing interesting information. You are trying to get someone to agree with what you are sharing. Unless that is your motivation, you will never be a Reacher. Persuasion is the essential ingredient in making effective SFARE programs and messages and the personal and parish systemic change that can occur. If you have not been uncomfortable with anything so far, this is your time to get uncomfortable because being outside your comfort zone is where the magic happens.

To begin, let me share with you the difference between persuasion and manipulation for those worried about evangelism and direct messaging. Manipulation involves the dishonest presentation of information, whereas persuasion requires

education and information to help inform desired behavior. So, let us explore some nuances you can consider in your SFARE messaging and programs.

As it turns out, humans are hardwired biologically, psychologically, and socially to react to certain magic **W**ords, **A**ctions, and **P**hrases, what I call “**Magic WAP.**” This is not just my opinion. Science validates this conclusion.

A study on gratitude and generosity by Francesca Gino of Harvard Business School and Adam Grant of Wharton School discovered that, as it turns out, your mama was right. Saying “please” and “thank you” is an incredibly persuasive thing. In their scientific study, they discovered that a sincere thank you results in a 50% increase in the amount of additional help that is offered as a result of the appreciation (Gino, 2013).

Think about this as you consider how to engage your parishioners better. Or how about the next time you go up to somebody in line that has ticked you off? You have two choices. You can go in “guns blazing,” or you can enter smiling and loving. What science tells you is that sincerity, thank you, please, and helpfulness will be more effective.

Here is another simple example of the power of the word “because.” Did you know that the word “because” is one of the most powerful words in the English language because it substantially increases the likelihood of people doing what you want? And yes, I have tested it in person. An example of this is discussed in a 1989 study by Harvard social psychologist Ellen Langer cited in Robert B. Cialdini’s fantastic (must-read) book, Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion (Cialdini, 2006).

In this experiment, someone tried to cut in front of a group of people standing in line to use a photocopy machine. In the “control group,” the person cutting in line said, “Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the copy machine?” Interestingly, 60% of you chuckleheads (I mean nice people) said OK. That means 60% of you are really wonderful people and show patience and kindness. Bravo.

In the first experimental group, the person cutting in line said, “Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the copy machine because I’m in a rush?” Fascinatingly, the experimenters found that 94% of the people agreed. Almost everyone allowed the cutter to go in front of them, and the only thing that changed was the words “because I’m in a rush.” Now, you might think it was the “I’m in a rush part” that made the difference.

Then, these smart experimenters used a third group where the cutter said: “Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the copy machine because I have to make some copies.” Well, duh, that’s what everyone in line at the copy machine had to do. Shockingly, 93% of the people still said yes. This demonstrates that “because” works even when what you say afterward makes no difference. I wanted you to know this because your SFARE messaging and programs can be better. (See what I did there?)

Think about how many times we say things based on our lived experience that make no sense today or to someone who is of a different culture or age. When my younger daughter was about 7 years old, from the back of the car, I heard her ask: “Dad, why do you keep saying roll up the window?” Now, for any of you who are too young to remember, all we had was crank windows when I was growing up in the dark ages. My daughter was blessed to grow up only in vehicles with electric windows. Thus, as it turns

out, it is critical to make sure that the WAP (Words, Actions, and Phrases) you use have the greatest understanding and impact. (And, by the way, the phrase “as it turns out” has also been shown to create the impression of more importance of what you say next.)

Let us focus on how you can embrace what Robert Cialdini’s research proved are the seven principles of persuasion: 1. reciprocity, 2. liking, 3. consensus, 4. authority, 5. scarcity, 6. commitment and consistency, 7. unity (Cialdini, 2006). Let me unpack them quickly.

**1. Reciprocity.** People say yes to those whom they owe. It is human nature. If somebody does you a favor, you are more inclined to want to reciprocate with a favor. Further, personalizing the offer makes people feel special. That is why those of you who are in parish/ministry fundraising know you always write a little personal note at the bottom of every letter (especially on form letters). When you write a little personal note on a letter, it makes a much greater impact.

This is why Chapter 10 of my Roadmap emphasized the critical importance of having a Thanking Ministry at every parish. Furthermore, reciprocity is amplified if you go first and the favor is meaningful, unexpected, tailored, and or personalized. Let me share a great study of the power of reciprocity.

At a restaurant, in the control group, the waitress/waiter just presented the bill. Later, they checked the number of tips to get a baseline. In the first experimental group, the waitress/waiter would present the bill and give each person a mint. On average, the tip was 3.3% higher. Now, 3.3% more does not seem like a big number. But what if your parish or ministry consistently got 3.3% greater financial contributions, volunteer time, and people engaging with your church services or listening to your homilies, webinars, Bible studies, podcasts, blogs, etc.? That is probably worth a little mint (or its equivalent).

However, the next experimental group got two mints each. Amazingly, tips were 14.1% higher. An insignificant additional gift got more and better attention and responsiveness. However, these great experimenters went further, and in the final group, the waitress/waiter would give everybody a mint, start to walk away, and then come back and say, “For you nice people, here’s a second mint each.” In this specific special recognition, tips went up a shocking 21.3%. The power of your thanking actions and reciprocity can powerfully drive behavior.

I am not suggesting you give out mints at the end of each parish service or SFARE program; however, if you think about reciprocity and thanking, the results of every ministry you offer will improve. And for those who come to our Orthodox church services, everyone (including non-Orthodox) receives a piece of blessed bread at the end of each service and has an opportunity to be personally greeted by the clergyman who hands it to you. Clergy, please don’t underestimate the value of this personal time and gift experience.

**2. Liking:** The second principle of liking reflects that we prefer to work with and say “yes” to likable people. Hopefully, this is a “BGO” for you (Blinding Glimpse of the Obvious). Working with people who are similar to us and giving us genuine compliments or other interactions that improve likeability makes a difference. Clergy and those delivering

SFARE programs, please do not lose sight of how valuable likability is in increasing attendance and retention.

In addition, physical attractiveness helps. And if you are not physically attractive, no worries; just make sure the SFARE and other work that you produce is appealing, neat, and well-designed. This is important for all your online SFARE and other programs and social media where you try to increase intimacy with your target audience.

**3. Consensus:** Uncertain people are far more likely to follow similar people or when someone else like them follows a leader. One of the best examples of this is the hilarious and informative 6-minute TED Talk by Derek Sivers, which includes a 3-minute video about how to start a movement (Sivers, 2010). Take a break from my Roadmap and enjoy: [https://www.ted.com/talks/derek\\_sivers\\_how\\_to\\_start\\_a\\_movement](https://www.ted.com/talks/derek_sivers_how_to_start_a_movement). Please think about these elements of group dynamics when you begin a new SFARE program or another parish ministry.

There is also a comfort level created when we're acting within a social norm or group. This was tested in a hotel using those infernal "save the planet/water/etc." messages to encourage you to recycle your towels. For the baseline group of guests they used no message, and the first experimental group received the standard message focused on "save water/," "save energy," "save the planet," or "save the whales," etc., which got 16% of the people to recycle.

However, when they changed the message to show a building consensus by saying: "The majority of people who stay at our hotel recycle towels at least once," the towel recycling rate jumped to 44% of the guests. However, the winning message was "The majority of people who stayed in your room recycle towels at least once." When they showed a narrow consensus around your room (even though it was a temporary room), almost 50% recycled. People you did not even know created this social norm. By changing the messaging to help you see yourself as a recycler, you became part of the consensus social norm.

Creating positive social norms, building consensus, and ensuring effective communications are critical in designing the best SFARE programs and parish messages, especially for youth and other new or impressionable parishioners. You may recall a similar discussion about the criticality of positive communications and building a consensus when I presented the best practices in the Stewardship & Engagement Chapter 10 and the Strategic Planning Chapter 7 portions of my Roadmap. This should underscore how foundationally integrated the Stewardship Calling S<sup>3</sup> model is such that when all three elements are fully and effectively implemented, your parish can be the healthiest and most effective.

Unsurprisingly, approval from certain types of individuals or groups matters. This is true whether you are following an expert in a relevant field or past participants/users. For this reason, ratings, reviews, and testimonials have a powerful influence. The Parable of the Samaritan Woman at the well was made more powerful because she went back to her village and said: "*Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah*" (John 4:29)?

This is why, in the Stewardship and Engagement Chapter 10 of my Roadmap, I stressed the importance of having testimonials in your parish. This is equally valuable for your SFARE Programs, as word of mouth will spread the value of your SFARE ministry more than your flyers. How much time have you spent reading reviews from people you did not know about a product on Amazon before you clicked to buy it?

The wisdom of large crowds creates consensus power over you, whether they are peers, friends, people like you, celebrities, etc. And it does not matter if those with authority are paid or unpaid. Thus, the most effective Reachers and providers of SFARE focus on building that consensus.

**4. Authority.** The fourth category of persuasion is authority. People say yes to requests consistent with the counsel of legitimate experts. Believe it or not, titles, positions, and experience can matter in such cases. Not only does the degree matter but where you got the degree from may also be considered. Notice how many times I've dropped the "H-bomb" (Harvard) when citing some of the research sources in this Chapter. We do not want this to be true, and it should not matter, but it does in the area of persuasion. So, what happens if you do not have any credentials? You earn them or cite other authoritative sources of authority.

At the first parish I delivered my live Igniting The Flame of True Stewardship and Engagement program, someone asked me how many times have you done this? I said, I have an "N" of one, and you're it. Decades later, having presented to over 1,000 parishes and completed strategic plans covering over a quarter of the American Orthosphere, parish leaders assume I am an expert. But anyone who buys into that hype is missing the opportunity for further growth and to stay abreast of constantly changing environments and information. Nevertheless, in SFARE, you must know what you are doing and speak the truth with accurate data, information, and confidence. However, as shallow as it may seem, clothes and appearance are superficial cues that sometimes signal authority.

Please do not forget to flip this around. When speaking to a very youthful audience, do not show up looking like you are going to a Fortune 100 board meeting. The way we use our appearance to create authority should be context-specific. By definition, when a clergyman wears his collar (or Cassock in the Orthodox tradition), there is an immediate attribution of theological authority.

At the risk of offending you, please think about the authorities you cite. If you are talking to a youthful crowd and you tell them about the ancient practices and the lifestyle of a monastic living in the desert in the third century, they may politely listen but wonder how that experience is relevant to them. If your SFARE message is important, and it always should be, you must find a way to make your SFARE content relevant and relatable to a young person in 2025. Thus, again, thinking about the context of your audience is critical in every SFARE program or activity because something or someone credible to one audience may be irrelevant to another.

Trappings, accessories, and indirect cues accompany authoritative roles and can create a different impression. Now that I am not actively practicing law and am exempt from jury duty due to my age, I can share this true story where I used the authority of the

appearance of a Bishop to persuade a judge. My “pro bono client,” Metropolitan Alexios, was called for jury duty. He called me to get out of jury service because he said his ecclesiastical position refused to allow him to sit in judgment of another human. As rational as that was, I had to tell him that clergy in Georgia, including Bishops, were not exempt from jury duty. He nevertheless insisted he could not sit in judgment of anyone and told me I had to do something about this! Well, that’s what a lawyer whose WHY was being a “problem solver and dream facilitator” did!

On the morning of his first day of jury duty, I picked him up at the Metropolis where he resided, and he came out in his plain black cassock. I made him go back in and put on his most ornate engolpion (the long gold chain with an icon of a Saint in the middle of a large medallion), plus his black miter headgear with the flowing black robes and had him carry his metal staff. You must show up for jury duty by 8:00 a.m. in DeKalb County and sit in the big auditorium with approximately 300 other potential jurors to see who will get called. When we arrived early, we intentionally hung out outside.

Promptly at 7:55 a.m., when everybody was seated and quiet in the massive and packed auditorium, His Eminence and I slowly processed down the main aisle from the top. I told him to smack his metal staff on the ground with every step he took. Boom! Boom! Boom! We made an entrance. If you could have seen the expressions on the people's faces, you would have been captivated by the scene unfolding.

On top of everything, Metropolitan Alexios actually looks like Santa Claus with a thick white beard and bushy white eyebrows, all surrounded by the black cape attached to his Mitre hat. I, of course, was dressed in my finest black lawyer’s suit, white shirt, and red tie. I had gotten a haircut and polished my shoes for the occasion. With everyone watching, we powerfully approached the Clerk of the Court. The two of us were a sight to see. Do you have the picture?

We processed all the way to the front of the big auditorium, where I announced to the County Clerk that I represented this Metropolitan of the Greek Orthodox church, who could not sit in judgment of another human and thus had to be exempted from jury service. I then received the expected lecture from the Clerk, who reminded me that no such exception existed in the law. I eloquently argued my case citing ancient ecclesiastical authority, blah, blah, blah, blah, yet the Clerk of the Court stood firm. She was the only one in the room trying to pretend she was not impressed by the “bling” my Metropolitan was wearing.

I told her I would take my case to the Presiding Judge. She argued I could not do so, which was probably correct. Nevertheless, I reminded her that the Presiding Judge was the presiding judge for a reason, and I would take my argument to him. She demanded to join us, and I agreed. As she told us to exit the large auditorium and wait outside for her, we turned around, and the unimaginable occurred. I wish I had been smart enough to have scripted it.

As we turned to leave, by the grace of God, with over 300 people in the auditorium staring, it just so happened that a parishioner of the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Annunciation (the Metropolitan’s home parish) was sitting in the front row. So, Gunther (a German convert professor married to a Greek woman) stood up, bowed down, and

kissed the Metropolitan's hand (as is our custom). This was pure gold and high theater that even impressed the unshakeable, long-time Clerk of the Court.

The Clerk joined us before the Presiding Judge. I got a minute or two into my argument, and the Judge, likely feeling uncomfortable with the obviously holy man of God who looked like Santa, quietly smiling at him from his dark robes, hat, and holding a metal staff before the judge interrupted my "attempted eloquence" and furtively asked: "Counselor, what do you want from me?" I asked to excuse Metropolitan Alexios from jury duty because he could not sit in judgment of another and would thus be excused anyway during voir dire (jury selection). To everyone's shock, including the Clerk and me, the Judge immediately agreed.

Now, the first rule of negotiation is when you get what you want too early, thank the other party, and see what else you can get. So, I asked the judge what would happen a year later when His Eminence was called again for jury duty. (Using titles also helps.) I wondered how we would get him out of having to come for jury duty then. The Judge, wanting to get us out of his Chambers, asked: "What do you want me to do?" since we both knew that only the Georgia Legislature could change the law to grant such an exemption. So, I did what Reacher lawyers have been doing for millennia and made up a creative remedy on the fly.

I asked the judge if he would permit me to get all the Superior Court judges to sign an Order excusing Metropolitan Alexios from having to come back for jury duty. (In modern parlance, we now call this a preemptive pardon.) I was not asking for an exemption (which only the Legislature could grant) but merely a "you do not have to show up" Order (something which does not really exist for potential jurors in cases such as this). He smiled and told me that it would be fine with him if I could get an Order signed by all the Judges. Of course, I asked him if he would be the first signature. With the holy man of God (who looked like Santa) staring at him intently, the judge smiled again and agreed.

This good judge had no clue that I would enlist the assistance of a good Greek Orthodox judge I knew to help me. Six months later, all the Judges signed the Order. About a year after that, guess what happened? Yes, Metropolitan Alexios got another jury summons and called me. I told him not to worry (although I was concerned since such an Order was unprecedented and untested). I called the Clerk of the Court (now a full 18 months after the "Grand Entrance," as it later became known) and started to explain who I was. Before I could finish the first sentence that began with: "I am sure you don't remember me..." she interrupted and said let me guess, Metropolitan Alexios got another jury summons, and you want him excused. Before I could respond in the affirmative, she said: "Send me that Order you got signed and tell him to have a good day, and he doesn't need to show up."

Now, I don't know if what persuaded the Clerk was the appearance of an impressive-looking authority person (Metropolitan Alexios, not me), my appeal to the Presiding Judge's authority, or my obtaining an unprecedented signed Order (or the tickets to the Greek festival I sent her with the thank you note after the Grand Entrance, which is not a bribe since technically she had not done anything for me). But at least one lesson is that authorities can be persuasive and persuaded. The second takeaway is not

to call me if you want to get out of jury service. It is your public duty! (And thirdly, see how captivating a good story can be when you are trying to make a point?)

**5. Scarcity.** People say yes to scarce, rare, or dwindling opportunities. People want more of the things they can have less of. This is just human nature. So, you need to inform people of the unique features, how uncommon or rare something is, or a unique opportunity that is coming up. Have you ever had a chance to venerate the remains of a Saint? This is perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for many.

Do you know when they sold the most regular Coca-Cola? In 1985, they announced they were going to stop selling the original formula and switch to a new formula. Sales of original Coke went through the roof. If you've ever participated in eBay auctions and you see people who win at the end, they have a word for them. Snipers. They're waiting in the weeds for the scarce last 10 seconds to out-bid you.

If you ever book on hotels.com, they are phenomenal at doing this scarcity thing, which Amazon has now copied, when they tell you, "there are only a few left, so order now." Everywhere we go, we are being persuaded to act by a sense of scarcity. So, where does this fit in with your SFARE ministry?

What is the most valuable thing for a Christian? Time is a major scarce asset, but nothing is more valuable than salvation. And how much time do you have left before your II Corinthians 5:10 Moment when you account before the awesome judgment seat of Christ? You don't know.

If it comes soon, are you ready? If not, what are you doing now? Our lives compete against the scarcest commodity on the earth, namely time. The one thing your parish can do is use its SFARE ministries to make maximum use of that scarce commodity to help your parishioners hear "*well done good and faithful servant*" when it matters most in their II Corinthians 5:10 Moment. Tell me it is not worth communicating to your faithful that you have the anecdote to the scarcity of earthly time in the form of eternal life with their Creator. Now, that is something you cannot get anywhere else.

**6. Commitment and Consistency.** People say yes to requests aligned with their existing public actions, commitments, and statements. Experiments have proven that if you want somebody to do something, get them to allow you to put a sign on their front lawn for whatever that is. Regardless of what the issue is, the minute they put that yard sign up, studies show they are far more likely to continue to act consistently with that public statement and action.

I can affirm that once I put the license plate holder on my car that says "Orthodox Christianity" on the top and "for 2,000 years" on the bottom, my driving improved. I no longer cut people off or exchanged dirty looks. After all, I didn't want them to think that is how Orthodox Christians acted.

It is important to reward your audience for investing their time with you. Whether you are delivering a church service, homily, or SFARE program, find a way to reward your audience for the sharing of the opportunities you have with them. They have given you that valuable asset of time, and the more they feel the reward, the more consistent and loyal they will become. If they offer a testimonial in church about the power of your

Small Group Ministry or Bible study, it will make them far more likely to continue to engage at a higher level and encourage others to join with that to which they publicly associate themselves.

If you ask people to take a small step, studies show that they will do a lot more to continue to be congruent with that first step. By the way, this is why people always ask you to “like and subscribe” to their post/website/reel/program. Do you really care whether some random person in Poughkeepsie, New York, “likes” your parish or SFARE program? YES, because that public action makes them more likely to continue to tune in or join you or invite others. We are social animals.

The same thing is true when people forward your latest homily or SFARE webcast/podcast. By encouraging public comments, you drive congruence and support. This is another reason it is so critical to have parishioners give testimonials before the dismissal from your church services. If you can get people to make a public commitment or endorsement of any nature, to any degree, the impact will be great for them and others.

Let’s briefly return to Robert Cialdini’s great book on Persuasion, where he discussed that the more we share an identity with someone, the more we will say yes to them. Create a connection or commonality, and you will get a commitment that will drive consistency. This is as critical in attending church service as it is for the salvific SFARE ministry you will offer.

There are some additional wonderful talks on the most effective ways to communicate and persuade by psychologists Steven Pinker, Robert Cialdini, and Steve Martin that I think are essential for all clergy and lay communicators who wish to be more effective Reachers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJPPVDnvhRs>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFdCzN7RYbw>

To review, the best SFARE Reachers Personally communicate, Passionately communicate, and Persuasively communicate (the 3Ps).

The 3As involve the Reacher effectively communicating.

## The 3As.

I will end this section of the formula for the best Reacher communications and SFARE ministry programs by briefly focusing on the three **As**, by reminding you to identify the always: 1. Action desired, 2. Action steps, and 3. Action rewards. They are all interrelated, but when aggregated, they drive the most effective human light bulb Reacher effectiveness, with powerful SFARE ministry offerings being the secret sauce.

You must begin by explaining the action you wish to take from any SFARE activity or program. Reachers are not merely passing along information (like Teachers). Reachers are trying to change your behavior. Thus, it is always critical to remember to

“make the ask.” Your SFARE programs are not complete until the dots are connected with a concrete desired action.

After asking for a particular behavior or action as a result of your SFARE program, you should provide the action steps the parishioner should take. What sometimes seems obvious to you may be novel to your parishioner because they have never thought about the Action you requested. Or perhaps they do not know how to do what you have identified. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard PIPs (Parishioners In Pews) honestly admit they do not know “how to pray.”

All their life, they have been told to pray and have attended church services, which are often nonstop prayers. But somehow, flying solo in prayer is a dialogue with God many PIPs are unprepared to undertake. Providing helpful action steps can be the difference between a great idea never being implemented and a new righteous habit being formed. This is similar to the Action Plans I identified in the Strategic Planning Chapter 10 of my Roadmap.

Finally, nothing makes a difference or creates a new habit more likely than focusing on the action’s reward. Ultimately, an effective Reacher explains what they want you to do, how to do it, and how it will make you feel or what you will receive. And there is probably nothing easier to promise (or “sell” if you prefer) than a SFARE program that brings you closer to Christ.

Understanding the salvific message of our Lord is perhaps the greatest gift you can offer any parishioner. And this should be the end result of your best-in-class SFARE programs. You should recognize that this message is a persistent theme in my Roadmap. Your SFARE ministry must be leading your parishioner someplace with the best of rewards and an achievable path to get there.

To review, the best SFARE Reachers clearly identify the Action desired, Action steps, and Action rewards (the 3 As).

### One Size Fits No One.

Please do not assume that a one-size-fits-all SFARE pathway will work. If you return to the beginning of this Chapter 12, where I present the four different types of parishioners in your parish, you will remember the critical importance of meeting people where they are and giving them what they need. Therefore, do not expect an Incidental Convert to react as positively to an intense study of the Book of Revelation when they could probably benefit more from a rudimentary SFARE program about your faith or Christ.

It is also critical to create multiple feedback loops from and with your SFARE participants to build rapport, find out about issues/questions before they just leave, and share new ideas, successes, transparency, and accountability. Christianity has the most valuable offerings of anything, and for reasons that cause me to write my Roadmap, we are keeping them well hidden, under-promoted, and less effectively delivered. Your SFARE ministry offerings should be some of the most valuable things available to your parishioners.

However, if you have not taken the time in your parish to deliver SFARE excellence, tailored to the audience, clear about what you are teaching and asking, with supportive ways to achieve that rich reward that comes from your ask, then you will continue to have the negative trends I previously identified. However, I am confident that if you have read this far, you are either a Reacher human light bulb or using my Roadmap to help you on that journey. Either way, this SFARE ministry work is among the most important your parish can do as you bring the light of Christ to a dark world. All you have to do is remember my simple Roadmap formula where  $3K + 3P + 3A = \Delta$  (effective parish SFARE).

Simon Sinek actually put the Reacher journey into a great context by advising: “Words may inspire, but only actions create change. Most of us live our lives by accident. We live life as if it happens. But fulfillment comes when we live our lives on purpose” (Sinek, 2017). Please let those words sink in for a moment. Because the difference between the Teacher or Preacher and the most effective Reacher is the application of the above formula that drives you to be unsatisfied until parishioners put your SFARE wisdom into action. Live on purpose!

### [A Few Final SFARE Reacher Thoughts and Suggestions.](#)

People tend to suppress new ideas. We basically focus on what we know and are comfortable with. Christ faced this challenge throughout His ministry. On top of that, Groupthink is a very powerful tool that keeps people from considering new ideas, approaches, or options and keeps them rooted in the tyranny of the past (Janis, 1972).

This is when we stop looking for or exclude new data experiences or research that is inconsistent with our preconceived notions. My PhD scientist daughter and I joke about this all the time when I tell her, “Wait, I don't want to read that additional scientific study because it may be inconsistent with my pre-conceived conclusion.” You have to be able to look at what you do not know more robustly and become obsessed with acquiring more knowledge because otherwise, your conclusions can become faulty or suboptimal or lack credibility when assessed by an objective audience.

I have seen too many Christian parishes subject to Groupthink, where we stop considering other options or questions and refuse to embrace them. I have also seen even greater examples of parishes stuck with Groupthink's first cousin, what I call “**Smallthink.**”

**Smallthink** is the disease of the devilish drive to act insignificantly or put band-aids on problems rather than think big and solve root causes. Our fear of failure or fear of anything new keeps us from experimenting, learning, innovating, and ultimately succeeding with the critical work of SFARE. Smallthink is what I see most frequently in parishes and church-world, and thus have to battle most fiercely as I pursue my Stewardship Calling ministry.

Some attribute this to the “evil one.” I do not know its source or origin, but I affirm that fear is the biggest impediment to transformation and freedom. Many times, the issues are complex. But more often than not, they are simple and right in front of us.

You have probably heard of Occam's Razor, the problem-solving construct made famous by "William of Ockham" (not Occam). Reportedly, English theologian, logician, and friar William wrote the Latin phrase: "Numquam ponenda est pluralitas sine necessitate," or alternatively "entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem" (Plurality must never be posited without necessity) (Borowski, 2012). The more modern colloquial version of Occam's Razor holds that in the face of two or more competing theories, the simpler explanation should be preferred. This is great wisdom in trying to describe how to create the most effective SFARE program.

Let me provide an example I call the "two, four, six paradox" to see if I can prove the Groupthink or Smallthink hypothesis by running an experiment with you. I will give you a sequence of numbers. I have determined the relationship between these three numbers. You have to experiment by telling me what the relationship that I have determined between these three numbers is.

Here is the way I conduct the two, four, six paradox experiment in some of my Leadership Training programs. I will pretend you are a participant. You will write down a sequence of three numbers and give it to me. I will either say YES, it is consistent with the relationship I have determined, or NO, it is inconsistent with my relationship. You can send me as many sequences of three numbers as you want until you are convinced you have scientifically determined what is the relationship I have determined between these three numbers.

I wish we could do this together in real-time. I love doing this in my Igniting The Flame and other live programs, and you should try it sometime. When a professor did this experiment, the smartest kid in the class stopped after sending him four three-number sequences. After only four tries, this bright student was convinced they knew the professor's pre-determined relationship between the three numbers.

The "slowest" (read that, most methodical) student took 17 exchanges of sequences of numbers before they announced they understood the professor's relationship between the numbers 2, 4, 6. All the students came in with an amazing array of three-number sequences and theories of the relationship the professor had created, which they proudly shared with great confidence.

Some said the number in the middle is the average of the numbers on either side. Others postulated they must be all even numbers. There were even more creative suggestions. Every student was told they were wrong in their guess of the professor's theory. I have had the same experience when I tried this. What is your theory about the relationship in that sequence?

The actual relationship was merely that each succeeding number was larger than the preceding number. It did not matter by how much. It was just bigger. Did you get it right? This is proof of Occam's razor "simplest is best" theory!

The best way I've heard this concept articulated was again from Robert Cialdini's book about Persuasion. He said we all fool ourselves from time to time in order to keep our thoughts and beliefs consistent with what we have already done or decided. We will discount those theories that are inconsistent with our actions (Cialdini,

2006). Sherlock Holmes said the same thing in more detail: “It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts” (Doyle, 1891).

Do you really know why your SFARE or any other ministries are not succeeding, or are you just stuck in Groupthink or Smallthink and doing the same thing over and over and hoping a different result occurs? If so, here is a freebie if your parish or ministry has a website with SFARE content.

This came from great research done by Nielsen Norman Group - Dr. Jakob Nielsen with co-founder Dr. Donald A. Norman (former VP of Research at Apple Computer). Notice how I am credential-dropping with the Apple reference to persuade you as to the validity because you've never heard of these guys. When they tested people reading websites, they found that 79% of users merely scanned any new webpage they came across (Nielsen, 1997). Only 16% read word by word.

This led the Nielsen Norman Group to develop some great techniques to improve your webpage presence and effectiveness. I will briefly share six ideas that you should consider now by looking at your parish or ministry website or other SFARE content (Nielsen, 1997).

1. Use highlighted keywords. Use technology to highlight what you want people to focus their attention on.
2. Have meaningful, not clever subheadings. Those cute ideas that you came up with, like my “WAP” and “human light bulbs,” may not always be as effective in every context.
3. Bulleted or numbered lists are far more effective than prose. Notice my current use of these numbered items.
4. One idea per paragraph. Users will skip the other ideas. So those of you who, like me, have written a thesis on each web page, forget it.
5. The inverted pyramid style. This means start with your conclusion and then build it out. As Steven Covey said, “Begin with the end in mind” (Covey, 2004). Tell them what you want them to learn. Tell them. And then tell them what you told them.
6. Half the word count or less than conventional writing. So, go back and cut whatever you have written on each web page in half.

Yes, I confess that I am “guilty as charged” for violating every rule on my Stewardship Calling website. However, I violate the rules intentionally because I am not selling anything. I merely use my website as a web-based public filing cabinet of content to help you and your parish. However, your parish that is trying to drive behavior from its website would be wise to re-evaluate everything using the above rules.

I will give you one more test that I perform before my first ZOOM session with a new parish. Read and review every page of your website at least once a quarter and

keep editing. I will guarantee you there is outdated information, dead links, old photos, and many other things that need to be cut out or revised on your website or other online SFARE content. Do it now before you give the wrong impression to a seeker. Remember, you only have one chance to make a first impression, and first impressions are extremely hard to overcome.

## The Best Reacher Talks.

I am a huge fan of TED Talks. Their motto is “ideas worth spreading.” I believe that a Reacher’s motto is to have an idea that’s actually worth sharing and transforming someone’s behavior.

Chris Anderson, the curator of TED, was asked what the biggest secrets of the most effective TED Talks are. Chris offered four keys (Anderson, 2016):

1. Pick one single idea and explain it. Just one idea, that’s it.
2. Give your listeners a reason to care about that idea.
3. Build your idea piece by piece by piece. Don’t give them too much. Tell them what it is and then build it up so that they get to the end and go, “OK, yeah, I get it now.”
4. Make your idea worth sharing.

## The Importance Of Religion And The Best SFARE.

I want to prove what Chris Anderson said by sharing one of the most powerful 1:38-minute talk on the importance of religion and SFARE (Christensen, 2014). The late, great Harvard Business School professor and visionary Dr. Clayton Christensen recorded it. (Notice how I dropped the H-bomb again to persuade you it must be an important message of truth.)

Now, I will take a “shot” at Harvard (sorry, Harvard grads). They apparently made Clay include the heading next to his name and the title of the talk: “His personal views, not HBS.” When you watch it or read it below, you will realize why, God forbid, Harvard, formed by the Puritans, actually had to make someone who was advocating for the importance of religion disclaim their association with that important message!

Here is the link. I hope you watch it because it is so powerful and expertly produced. But I am including the transcript below for those not near a computer or iPhone. (Is that anyone anymore?) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjntXYDPw44> (Christensen, 2014):

Some time ago, I had a conversation with a Marxist economist from China. He was coming to the end of a Fulbright Fellowship here in Boston.

And I asked him if he had learned anything that was surprising or unexpected. And without any hesitation, he said, yeah. I had no idea how critical religion is to the functioning of democracy.

The reason why democracy works, he said, is not because the government was designed to oversee what everybody does, but rather democracy works because most people, most of the time, voluntarily choose to obey the law. And in your past, most Americans attended a church or a synagogue every week, and they were taught there by people who they respected. My friend went on to say that Americans followed these rules because they had come to believe that they weren't just accountable to society, they were accountable to God.

My Chinese friend heightened a vague but nagging concern I've harbored inside that as religion loses its influence over the lives of Americans, what will happen to our democracy? Where are the institutions that are gonna teach the next generation of Americans that they too, need to voluntarily choose to obey the laws?

Because if you take away religion, you can't hire enough police.

This is a mic-drop moment! You got it, didn't you? Did it make an impact? This is how powerful one minute and thirty-eight seconds can be in the hands of a Reacher. Do you appreciate how critical your SFARE ministries are and why I spend so many words on providing you with a Roadmap to improve them?

As I have repeated throughout my Roadmap, Pastor Rick Warren said that leaders of a church are either risk-takers, caretakers, or undertakers. Think about that because the job of the Reacher is not to be an undertaker. I never signed up to help bury any of Christ's churches under my watch.

Steve Jobs put it in a different perspective when he had an imminent death sentence facing him. He said, "Remembering that you're going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose." Take the moment when you have it and where you have it. (Jobs, 2005)

My favorite basketball coach, John Wooden, who won 10 NCAA men's championships in 12 years (including seven in a row), once said: "Don't measure yourself by what you have accomplished, but by what you should have accomplished with your ability." In other words, it is not good enough to be at the top of the game if your game can elevate the game to a new level.

This is the Reacher's way to look at the gifts God gave you. Remember the admonition of St. John Chrysostom, who challenged all leaders "to discern the spiritual gifts of all those under his authority and to encourage those gifts to be used to the full for the benefit of all." Again, notice it requires you to inspire those in your parish to use ALL their gifts to the FULL. And not just for their benefit but for the benefit of ALL.

In this Chapter 12 of my Roadmap, we explored the difference between being a Teacher, a Preacher, and a Reacher. You have the choice. You can be an informational

Teacher 10-watt bulb, and there's nothing wrong with that. Or you can elevate your game to a 10X multiple and be an inspirational Preacher 100-watt light bulb. Or you can take it to where God has probably asked you to go and become a transformational Reacher of a thousand-watt floodlight.

One road to get there is by my  $3K + 3P + 3A = \Delta$  (where Delta = effective parish SFARE). Know your why, target audience, and content. Personally, Passionately, Persuasively communicate. Give people your Action desired, Action steps, and Action rewards.

As I wrap up this Chapter by providing you with a Roadmap to hopefully help you on your Spiritual Formation And Religious Education journey, whether clergy or lay leader, you have reached another of my Matrix Moments (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999). You are Neo, and I am Morpheus. So, given what you have just read, which one will it be? Take the blue pill, and you remain a Teacher. The green pill, and you elevate your game to a Preacher. Or you can take the red pill I have offered you and become the Reacher God has called you to become.

Choose wisely, my friends, because what may hang in the balance is the most important thing. We all seek “*a good account before the awesome judgment seat of Christ.*” When I wake up every day, I ask myself what I ought to do. My motivation is the knowledge that we, as Christians, have in front of us the most extraordinary gift of 24 hours to make a difference in the world as a Reacher. But the most incredible day you will ever see is when you get to stand in front of your Lord and account for your life.

Perhaps you will consider this as your call to action to be the Reacher God has destined you to be. Maybe this is your call to be the “light of the world.” The beautiful thing is you have the free will to decide how you will answer it. Will you choose an effective SFARE path, or will you just live life as it happens? I have provided you with one Roadmap. If you don't like mine, please find another. Regardless of which roadmap you choose, I pray you use the powerful gift from God of free Will wisely! Godspeed on your Reacher journey.