

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



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Stewardship Calling

## CHAPTER 13. The Use Of Strategic Foresight With Spiritual Formation And Religious Education (SFARE).

To demonstrate how useful strategic foresight and future smart analytics can be to parishes and ministries, I will describe its essential elements and share an expanded analysis of some work originally performed for Holy Cross Seminary (“HCS”) in Brookline, MA. After completing the work and applying everything I learned from the study, I sent it to the Seminary President with the title: **“Thinking Too Small: Not Making Disciples In Our Nation Let Alone All Nations. The Case for Orthodox Christian Seminaries Ver. 2.0.”** I did this not to be provocative but rather because as I followed the data and strategic foresight process, I realized that not only had HCS been thinking too small, but my original premise of merely looking at one Orthodox Seminary was itself misguided and thinking entirely too small to solve future challenges. Strategic foresight provided me with the vision needed to see what needed to happen.

The first Christian seminarians were Christ’s Apostles. They lived and worked with the Lord and received consistent and constant religious education in words, examples, actions, and interactions. Hundreds of years later, that form of hands-on training and mentoring evolved into the innovations of theological institutions (precursors to modern-day seminaries) and monasteries designed as institutions to provide the necessary religious education.

While tools and training have evolved, if the seminaries are responsible for training the clergy who educate the laity, the decline of the modern-day church reinforces a truth attributed to too many people and sources to be confident as to its origins: “If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got” (Quote Investigator, 2016). Given the rapidly changing dynamics and demographics of Christ’s church in America today, a “future smart” reexamination of how Christ’s churches train disciple-makers seemed to be in order (Canton, 2015).

Christians need trained theologians to help them properly understand God’s and Christ’s words and deeds. Declining church engagement, the growing number of those leaving Christian churches, and the advent of unfiltered content on the internet and through artificial intelligence make **Spiritual Formation And Religious Education (“SFARE”)** more critical than ever. For all Christians, learning the word of God and the message of Christ is essential.

And yet, from an Orthodox church perspective, understanding God’s words and how they all fit into a proper life is challenging without the assistance of a trained theologian (Vassiliades, 2017). Orthodox monasteries and seminaries currently are the only sources to train Orthodox clergy to help interpret and share the words of God and Christ. In a country exceeding 330 million people, there are only approximately 353 theological seminaries (of all denominations) in the United States (Faithlife Corporation,

2023), of which approximately 270 are accredited by The Association of Theological Schools (The Association of Theological Schools, 2024).

A summary of the current state of religion in America concluded: “We’ve heard it all before: church attendance is down, seminary enrollment is on a decline, Americans are selecting ‘none’ when asked about religious affiliation—headline after headline declares either the irrelevance or obsolescence of religion” (Wenner, 2023). The acute shortage of clergy reported by every denomination partly results from insufficient institutions forming the next generation of heirs to the Apostles (Fearon & Strothers, 2023).

Research from the Center of Applied Science in the Apostolate identified 60% fewer priests over the last 50 years, with over 3,500 Roman Catholic churches without priests and with significant retirements on the horizon for Baby Boomer clergy (Fearon & Strothers, 2023). Within the American Orthosphere, almost every week, I work with a parish that needs a priest or a second one; however, with inadequate numbers graduating from our seminaries, the challenge is getting more severe each year.

This problem is exacerbated by the large number of clergy that are at or rapidly approaching retirement age, with no successors in sight. One recent statement at an Orthodox church conference estimated that as many as 33% of the clergy in this denomination would be retiring in the next 3-5 years. Nowhere near that number of seminarians are graduating to fill those vacancies, let alone the openings that exist today. Imagine what it would do to airline travel if we lost 33% of all pilots. Thus, my fervent concern shifted to how we will properly educate and train the pilots of our journey to Christ and each other.

## What is Strategic Foresight?

One of the tools that is available but infrequently used in church-world involves a strategic foresight future smart analysis. The use of these tools is not only enlightening but can lead to a transformational vision for a parish or ministry. I present these now (rather than in the previous Strategic Planning section) to show how they can be practically used to assess something critical to the SFARE efforts.

Strategic foresight is about anticipating, mapping, and creating desired futures. Framing objectives by scanning information to forecast alternative future visions with plans to achieve them is critical. “Future smart” is a process of anticipating, mapping, and harnessing the unimagined by examining and extrapolating trends to predict the future (Canton, 2015). Indeed, as Peter Drucker (and possibly President Abraham Lincoln) said: “the best way to predict the future is to create it” (Drucker, 2004). Humans have the inherent capacity to imagine the future through helpful processes and tools motivated by curiosity, fear, or need (Slaughter, 1993). This is a unique opportunity for leaders to facilitate processes that imagine better futures (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

There are six future smart steps moving from “framing” objectives through “scanning” information to “forecasting” alternatives and determining a “vision,” “plan,” and “actions” to implement the desired future state (Hines, 2006, p. 18). Being future

smart explores today’s potential to imagine an unpredictable future. An early academic article about future smart defined futures literacy as “the capacity to explore the potential of the present to give rise to the future,” focusing on greater awareness of situations and the impacts of change over time (Miller, 2007, p. 347).

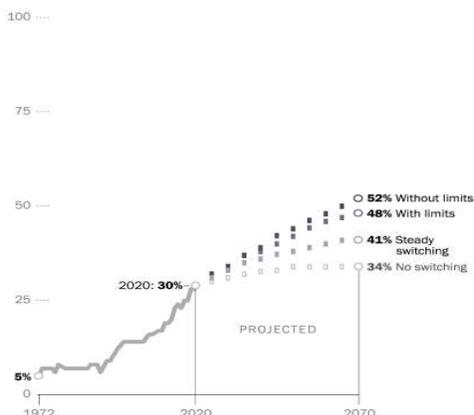
Becoming future-smart is challenging because of the various approaches to achieving it juxtaposed against the divergent cultural backgrounds and desires of diverse people and organizations. This leads to the need for a “futures literacy framework” that focuses on individuals being cognizant and conscious about the future and examining different assumptions and paths that vary depending on present desires and intentions (Benavides-Rincón & Díaz-Domínguez, 2022, p. 3).

While the future cannot be perfectly predicted accurately, the discipline of future smart studies focuses on providing examination, exploration, and mapping to partake in creating a desired future (Slaughter, 1993, p. 372). Thus, focusing on the present is predicated on seeking possible futures by “developing and interpreting stories about possible, probable and desirable futures” (Miller, 2007, p. 347).

## Horizon Scanning.

Horizon scanning systematically researches trends, threats, and opportunities on the horizon that might shape the future. Scanning the horizon involves intentional and systematic research of relevant trends and the threats/opportunities in the future that could impact an organization’s ability to achieve its objectives (Cheah, 2020). Horizon scanning can begin a process of looking to the future to identify events and results that could occur to serve as an early step in creating strategies (Cuhls, 2020).

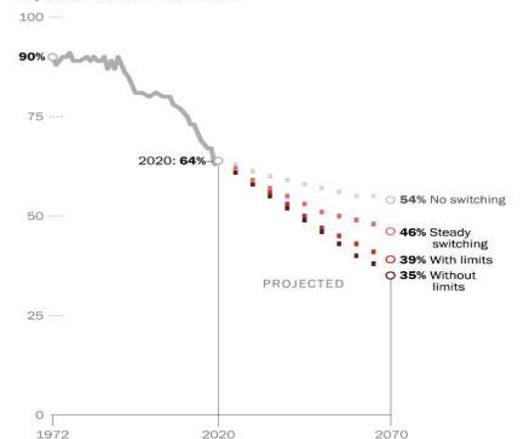
**U.S. ‘nones’ will approach majority by 2070 if recent s**  
*% of Americans who are religiously unaffiliated*



Note: Historical data describes trends among U.S. adults, based on surveys of adults. The 2020 Americans of all ages. In 2020, we estimate that the religious composition of people of all ages. Sources: General Social Survey (1972-2006), Pew Research Center surveys (2007-2021).  
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For example, as the two charts to the left and right indicate, the Pew Research Center calculates that in 40 years, if current religious attrition rates continue, 52% of the U.S. population may identify as “NONES” (with no religious affiliation) while only 35% might identify as Christians (Pew Research Center, 2022).

**U.S. Christians projected to fall below 50% of population**  
*% of Americans who are Christian*



Note: Historical data describes trends among U.S. adults based on surveys of adults. The 2020 Americans of all ages. In 2020, we estimate that the religious composition of people of all ages. Sources: General Social Survey (1972-2006), Pew Research Center surveys (2007-2021).  
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Horizon scanning is described in a straightforward video as a “systematic process of gathering information to identify future risks, opportunities, and developments” (Big Bang Partnership, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31iwzGVy10s&t=6s> (starting at the 4:30 mark).

## The Orthodox Seminary Tsunami.

So, what does the situation look like as we scan the reality of all the Orthodox seminaries? The data provided below was as of the Fall of 2021 due to the difficulty in obtaining more recent data.

<b>Seminary</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>FTE</b>	<b>Professors (FTE)</b>	<b>Jurisdiction (dominant)</b>
<b><u>Saint Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary</u></b> (Crestwood, New York)	<b>79</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>12(7)</b>	<b>Pan-Orthodox (OCA/Antiochian)</b>
<b><u>Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology</u></b> (Brookline, Massachusetts)	<b>76</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>Pan-Orthodox(GOArch)</b>
<b><u>Saint Tikhon’s Orthodox Theological Seminary</u></b> (South Canaan, Pennsylvania)	<b>43</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>10 (4)</b>	<b>Pan-Orthodox (OCA/Antiochian)</b>
<b><u>St. Stephen’s Course in Orthodox Theology / Antiochian House of Studies</u></b> (Distance/Boliver, Pennsylvania)	<b>200 *</b>	<b>192*</b>	<b>9 (3)</b>	<b>Pan-Orthodox (Antiochian)</b> * Most are certificate programs
<b><u>Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary</u></b> (Jordanville, New York)	<b>40</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>ROCOR</b>
<b><u>Saint Herman’s Orthodox Theological Seminary</u></b> (Kodiak, Alaska)	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>OCA</b>
<b><u>St. Sophia Ukrainian Orthodox Theological Seminary</u></b> (South Bound Brook, New Jersey)	<b>18</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>UOC</b>
<b><u>Christ the Saviour Carpatho-Russian Seminary</u></b> (Johnstown, Pennsylvania)	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>ACROD</b>

(Sources: Krindatch, A. (2020). U.S. religion census 2020: Dramatic changes in American Orthodox churches.; OrthodoxWiki.org. (2022). List of seminaries and theological schools.)

Of the previously cited 353 U.S. theological seminaries, there are only 8 Orthodox seminaries in the United States, each of which has small enrollments and few full-time faculty, yet are extremely land-rich (OrthodoxWiki.org, n.d.).

The three major mainstream Orthodox seminaries producing clergy are St Vladimir’s - Orthodox Church in America (64 FTE), Holy Cross - Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (71 FTE), and St Tikhon’s - Orthodox Church in America (43 FTE). This represents 178 full-time equivalents across the three years of Orthodox seminary education (approximately 59 graduating each year). Not all 59 graduates will be ordained as priests, and many of those who do will wait to find a wife first since, in

the Orthodox church, clergy cannot get married after they are ordained. Thus, it is hard to envision a positive future where fewer than 59 new clergy each year are available to serve the needs of the approximately 1,348 parishes in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Orthodox Church in America, and Antiochian Orthodox Church (Krindatch, 2020).

In 2020, the median age of clergy was fifty-seven years old, according to a survey of 15,278 religious communities from 80 different denominations and faith traditions (Thumma, 2021, p. 8). Furthermore, approximately 25% of clergy in Protestant churches expect to retire before 2030 (Roach, 2023). While there is no statistically significant research on the number of Baby Boomer or “soon-to-retire” American Orthosphere clergy, the author has traveled the country for over three decades working with over 1,000 American Orthosphere parishes and can anecdotally confirm the median age is likely higher in Orthodox churches due to the small number of clergy graduates to succeed older clergy. This makes the future trends potentially worse for American Orthodox parishes.

In June of 2024, The Orthodox Studies Institute (“OSI”) published an article with data about the Orthodox priest shortages. In this analysis, OSI reported that the second largest Orthodox denomination (OCA) found that as far back as 2020, approximately 30% of their priest were already over 65 years of age (Namee, 2023). OSI attempted to calculate the expected number of clergy vacancies (for any reason, including retirement or laicization, etc.) over the next five years (starting in 2024) compared to the numbers of graduates from all the existing Orthodox seminaries. The bottom line was that they projected at least 115 vacancies a year, with all the seminaries producing only 30 ordination candidates (Namee, 2023).

These 85 net excess vacancies a year are made worse when considering, as previously noted, that Orthodox clergy who want to marry must do so before ordination, which causes some graduates to delay becoming ordained. Still others seek different ministry options. Thus, the net shortfall of 85 a year is likely undercounting the actual situation. This is a crisis of epic proportions and should make everyone associated with Orthodox seminaries and the Hierarchs who must fill parish vacancies lose sleep at night. The order of magnitude of the pending tsunami that is only visible through the horizon scanning strategic foresight lens is unimaginable.

## [Past Is Prologue For The Future.](#)

Orthodox seminaries, designed centuries ago by monastics and theologians, focus more on understanding the past rather than the present or future. First-century seminaries followed the learning of the Apostles and were hands-on communities living together with other Christians and under the guidance of an older mentor. Indeed, the first-century church was a seminary teaching and training people in experiential communion. In the 3rd-5th centuries, an “episcopal” (Bishop) model of religious education began to train clergy. At the same time, starting in the 3rd century, monastics were trained in monasteries to teach others (Viola & Barna, 2012).

Seminaries and monasteries have existed in the Orthodox Christian world for many centuries. However, the modern-day seminary movement was fueled, in part, by the Catholic Reformation and The Council of Trent as far back as 1545-1563 AD. (Espinoza, 2017). In other words, they were designed for an audience and age that has not existed in hundreds of years. Furthermore, this over 500-year-old seminary structure was not designed to be future smart or focus on trends, possibilities, and needs. Thus, the seminary model needs substantial reimagination considering new methods and modalities of teaching, a greater emphasis on community engagement, and a focus on future circumstances and needs of the faithful (Gonzalez, 2015, pp. 127-129).

## The Five “A” Seminary Trends.

When examining the most significant current trends facing Orthodox seminaries that will significantly impact the future, limiting the list to five is difficult. Many additional independent and interrelated global, cultural, socio-moral, familial, technological, and ecclesiastical trends play a role in challenging the future smart journey of Orthodox seminaries. However, these five “A” trends are critical to understand and consider in horizon scanning and providing strategic foresight to institutions attempting to teach a timeless theology in an ever-changing world. Here is a concise summary of these top five trends.

### **Antiquated:**

Seminary education today is much like it was a century ago, with a few theologians teaching historical truths. The ancient model of seminary religious education was predicated on theologians speaking to informed, reasonably educated audiences. While that may work for seminarians seeking formal training, the changing world and communications landscape requires a greater emphasis on **Practical Applied Theology (“PAT”)**, which is sometimes referred to as “stories of doubt and information” (Muller, 2023, p.4). The father of practical theology, Friedrich Schleiermacher, inspired subsequent practical theology futurist George Lindbeck to conclude: “The structures of modernity press individuals to meet God first in the depths of their souls, and then, perhaps, if they find something personally congenial, to become part of tradition or join the church” (Lindbeck, 1984, p. 22).

The Lewis Center for Church Leadership of Wesley Theological Seminary noted that the “faith formation by osmosis” of focusing on Sunday worship for what I call the **“PIPs” (Parishioners In Pews)** is insufficient. Even loyal followers are reducing their Sunday attendance and, therefore, may require different future smart alternatives for **those** things that can be offered in alternative forms (Gryboski, 2024). Consideration of these alternatives raises natural resistance from many Orthodox Christians, who are traditionalists by nature, and because the Holy Eucharist can only be offered during a Divine Liturgy or Baptism (absent exigent circumstances before earthly death).

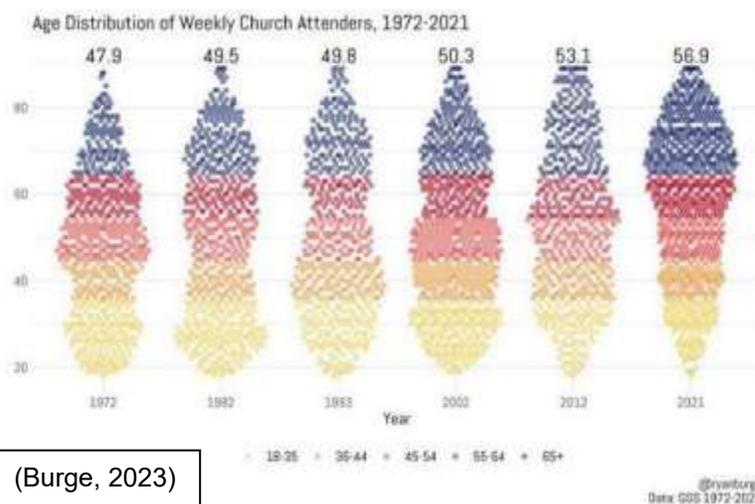
However, an exponentially changing world with massive innovations in communications, social media, and access to seemingly endless information sources creates a greater desire for learning PAT that people can apply in their modern lives

(Muller, 2023). The ineffectiveness of merely a Sunday school and weekly worship approach requires updating with future smart alternatives (Gryboski, 2024; Lindbeck, 1984; Muller, 2023).

### Aging:

As the chart below demonstrates, the PIPs are aging fairly rapidly (Burge, 2023). The average age of weekly PIPs increased from 47.9 to 56.9 over the last 50 years, while the overall age of Americans has only increased from 43.8 to 48 (Smith, 2023). In addition, the numbers of clergy facing retirement and seminarians are materially increasing.

A demographic and empirical study of the Pinetops Foundation estimated that by 2050, 40 million young people with current affiliations with American Christian churches could become disaffiliated “NONES” (with no church affiliation) (McDowell, 2023; Pinetops Foundation, 2018). The current trend is a noticeable shift from younger seminarians to older ones, with a 12% decline in seminarians in their 20’s compared to a 6% increase in those over 50 (and even a 3% increase in those in their thirties) (Tanner, 2017, p. 22).



(Burge, 2023)

The Orthodox Church jurisdictions are experiencing relative growth in older men enrolling in one of the newly expanded diaconate programs. Indeed, the most recent class at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary has 60 adult men in a diaconate program (Orthodox Observer, 2023). This growth in adult men willing to explore vocation fulfills St. Paul’s instructions to St. Timothy: “...then let them serve as Deacons...” (1 Timothy 3:10). While not yet ecclesiastically approved, a future smart trend could result from early efforts within Orthodoxy that are focused on restoring an ancient female diaconate (St. Phoebe Center for the Deaconess, 2023).

When looking strategically, it is clear that the basic model of Orthodox clergy formation in seminaries has not materially changed over time or with the times. The actively engaged Orthodox Christian faithful and clergy are aging at increasingly rapid rates and are not being replenished by greater or equal numbers of younger parishioners or seminarians (Smith, 2023; Tanner, 2017). The younger generations are increasingly disconnected from their churches and faith and require different strategies from what worked for the older aging populations (McDowell, 2023; Pinetops Foundation, 2018).

## Antagonism:

Orthodox Christianity in America is declining and under attack from secularism, governmental interference, other faith traditions, and internal missteps. From the beginning of America's founding, President James Madison did not trust the government or courts to preserve religious freedom, thus necessitating the 1st Amendment to the United States Constitution (Iwuchukwu & Stiltner, 2012). This belief has proven well-founded as secular America is increasingly banishing religion to private churches and banning it from any public square presence (Iwuchukwu & Stiltner, 2012, p. 96).

Much has been written about the attacks of secularism and governmental interventions against Christianity, especially for those who believe religion is more relevant for the "infancy of human history" versus more mature humanity (Byrd, 2017, p. 7). Over the next 40 years, Muslims are expected to achieve 45.7% population growth compared to only a 21.4% population growth for Christians (Dyvik, 2023).

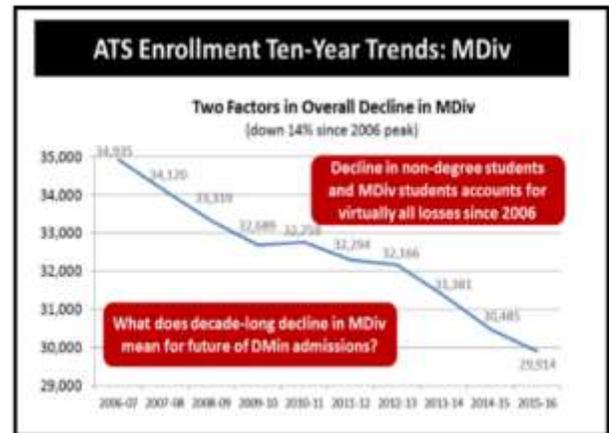
While, due to current events, the modern American focus is laudably on antisemitism and islamophobia, the underlying dogmatic and historical antagonism between Islam and Christianity remains and is a growing trend globally (Ibrahim, 2023). Roman Catholic Pope Francis sounded the alarm about clergy misconduct by stating: "When ministers overstep in their service and mistreat the people of God, they disfigure the face of the church with chauvinistic and dictatorial attitudes" (Wooden, 2023).

Following the original "kiss of peace" in 1964 between Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I and Pope Paul VI, repeated by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis in 2014, the seminaries and theologians of the future should make more significant efforts to reunite Christ's fragmented church. This is more in focus because 2025 will be the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea that gave Christians the Nicene Creed (Wooden, 2024).

Bottom line, the level of antagonism to Christianity is growing from multiple places, including increased intolerance from various governmental, non-Christian, and secularist sources (Byrd, 2017; Iwuchukwu & Stiltner, 2012). In addition, anti-Christian sentiment is the focal point of an increasingly unaccepting Muslim population who seek to replace a Judeo-Christian approach with one in keeping with some of the stricter elements of Islam (Ibrahim, 2023).

## Apathy:

As the chart to the right demonstrates (Tanner, 2017), seminary enrollment is declining, and the church engagement data is trending in the wrong direction. One of the most identified modern trends is the growth of the NONES who claim no religious affiliation. Current estimates are that NONES comprise 30% of American adults (Michel et al., 2024). Many millennials and Gen Zers are also NONES, many of whom attended church as children and then left (Michel et al., 2024).



As of 2015, 47% of the “cradle Orthodox” born into the Orthodox Christian faith had already left the church (Pew Research Center, 2015). In addition, 22% of Americans form a new fraternity of “**SBNRs**” or “**Spiritually But Not Religious**,” with varying definitions of what that means (Alper et al., 2023). The children of NONES now claiming no religion, unlike their parents, have lost a church connection, which will inevitably make reaching them more complicated. Lord Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, warned, “**Christian faith is always just one generation away from extinction**” (Bingham, 2013). A significant trend is a substantial decline in enrollment for Master of Divinity degrees, which represents the typical degree for an American Orthodox clergyman (Tanner, 2017).

## Answers:

In increasingly tumultuous times with a constant stream of alternative forms of information and messages, Christians are looking to their churches and seminaries to provide them with the correct theological answers (Moreno-Riaño, et al., 2023; Winfield, 2023). With the growing recognition that past sources of spiritual formation are ineffective and insufficient, the seminaries must provide the answers people seek and help clergy articulate theologically sound information regarding thorny contemporary social and moral issues of the day (Gryboski, 2024).

A panel of religious experts using Pew Forum data concluded that American Christians want their church to answer their questions, especially on cultural and contemporary issues. 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 parish youth and adult 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).

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 Pope's pronouncements are not binding on Orthodox clergy, and these sentiments are not universally shared within the conservative Orthodox church, messages about meeting parishioners where they are and tending to their current needs are being communicated in clergy forums from the current Greek Orthodox Archbishop of America and Ecumenical Patriarch.

## **Eight Strategic Foresight Implications Of The Data And Trends.**

### **1. Seminaries must stop thinking too small – their mission has changed.**

Orthodox seminaries think too small because they focus on merely training a few priests rather than also being the source of religious education for all laity faith formation. Instead of simply being an exclusive venue for a select few men who can live on a central campus for three full years, the future smart Orthodox Seminary will realize they are now meant to be the source of theological understanding and education for laity and clergy alike, regardless of geography. While they must continue teaching the timeless Orthodox theology, they must move beyond reciting history lessons from the Holy Gospel and explain what those parables mean to contemporary Americans. This is an entirely different Practical Applied Theology strategic education orientation and direction than is currently pursued.

### **2. Seminaries must use every available tool, technology, and technique to reach the current faithful and future converts.**

The Orthodox seminary degree and educational model must expand to include different types and categories of learners, including (a) those of different ages (second/third careers), (b) those on different educational tracks and journeys that may take much longer, (c) embracing part-time students and converts to the faith that have different faith formation needs and abilities, (d) more significant roles for deacons and lay religious educators, (e) some form of female diaconate, which is a theologically controversial issue within Orthodoxy today, and (f) eventually some form of artificial intelligence/robotic students/teachers.

### **3. The seminary model must evolve to embrace new types of “students.”**

Seminary training is based on a centuries-old model that does not work as effectively with today's environment and students. Not everyone learns the same way, so different teaching modalities must be deployed. In addition, the three-year classroom-only journey has not prepared clergy for the real-world experience they face in their parishes. The curriculum must expand to include leadership development, greater homiletical and communication skills, and contemporary issues and crisis counseling, to name a few highly demanded skills of the current laity. In addition to substantially expanding the technologies used to learn and teach, asynchronous tracks with selected extended residential experiences must be offered. In addition, an apprentice program must be formalized so that new clergy can learn “on the job” with experienced and accomplished older clergy and laity.

#### **4. Seminaries must tackle the tough questions and teach a way of life.**

Specific outreach and recruitment of converts to Orthodoxy are essential to address the aging clergy who are soon to retire and provide a clergyman who knows the unique journey and challenges that converts to Orthodoxy experience. With fewer than 1,000 Greek immigrants arriving in the United States each year and an estimated 90%-95% of marriages that include a spouse who is a convert to Orthodoxy, the future smart Greek Orthodox Seminary must have a distinct shift to fully engage converts. This includes recruiting diverse clergy and preparing all clergy to deal with the melting pot reality of the United States, which is the opposite of Greece, where most of the population claims to be Greek Orthodox Christians, and the Greek Orthodox church is incorporated in Greece's constitution.

Seminaries have historically tended to be more traditional rule enforcers than modern disciple-maker teachers. Thus, future smart strategies must thread the needle of addressing contemporary moral issues in a Christ-centered manner that does not depart from the doctrinal truths of the Orthodox faith. Youth and adults alike want to know what the Orthodox Church teaches about the day's critical social and moral issues. Rather than merely teaching history and avoiding controversial issues, seminaries must move their graduates from mere "Teachers" to effective "Preachers" and ultimately to "Reachers" who meaningfully tackle the challenging issues and change behaviors as Christ did. This involves a teaching style that provides a loving pastoral road map that the faithful of modernity need and want. In short, the future smart Orthodox Seminary will migrate from offering merely institutional theology by adding compelling Practical Applied Theology.

#### **5. Seminaries must expand their donor base and who they consider "customers."**

Orthodox seminaries currently do not provide what donors are willing to fund based on their meager development successes. The seminarian scholarships are fine but are not attracting the significant charitable capital available within the American Orthosphere. Major Orthodox donors are contributing tens of millions of dollars to other colleges and universities because of a perceived value proposition or impact that the Orthodox seminaries have not articulated.

#### **6. The disparate, fragmented, and under-resourced Orthodox seminaries must merge to form a few fully effective theological centers.**

One reason significant donors are not providing needed funding to Orthodox seminaries is that too many are land-rich but have insufficient students or faculty. In short, there are too many inefficiencies in the Orthodox theological education system. The substantial land holdings of several Orthodox seminaries should be sold and consolidated into two (or three) Orthodox seminaries of excellence in the East, Midwest, and possibly the West. The massive duplicative inefficiencies result from historical Orthodox Jurisdictional differences and exclusivity that cannot continue if the paradigm is to change. The Orthodox Patriarchs formed the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America (on whose Secretariat I am blessed to serve) to

pursue Orthodox unity in America. The seminaries must lead the way in that critical mission essential to Orthodoxy surviving and thriving in America.

### **7. Orthodox seminaries must offer programs of excellence and impact.**

There is no convincing evidence that the current Orthodox seminaries are programs of academic excellence. The sparse publications of their small faculties are not extensive or frequently cited. The faithful do not turn to Orthodox seminaries for guidance when seeking Orthodox information and thought leadership. Academic excellence and rigor must be the new standard, along with consistent Orthodox theology.

### **8. Orthodox seminaries must lead the way in unity and evangelism.**

Similarly, the Orthodox seminaries must be the institutions that reach out to their religious counterparts to find common ground and work together to advance Christ's teachings and church. It would be easiest to first expand the dialogue with the Roman Catholic institutions due to historical commonality and closeness of doctrine. However, with a dedicated Christ-centered focus, all Christian institutions can find some common ground and work together to strengthen Christ's church in America until we overcome our doctrinal differences.

## **The Holy Scriptural Path Forward.**

"The best way to combat Antiquity, Aging, Antagonism, and Apathy is for Orthodox Seminaries to lead the charge by providing Answers through teaching laity and clergy alike how to follow Christ's example and the Holy Gospel in America today. In following the call of the Lord to "*love one another*" (John 13:34-35) and "*make disciples of all nations*" (Matthew 28:19-20), these strategic issues can be addressed, and a brighter future can be fulfilled. Seminaries provide the opportunity to follow the advice to "*Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old, he will not depart from it*" (Proverbs 22:6).

## **An Entirely New Strategic Plan Suitable For A Strategic Foresight Future Vision.**

### **WHY: "Share Christ"**

This Call to Action focused initially on Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary in Brookline, Massachusetts. However, based on the future smart analysis and research, I believe it applies equally to all Orthodox seminaries. Indeed. If they each embraced this call to action simultaneously, the strategic objective of Orthodox unity would be more easily attainable.

The most critical thing every person and organization must know is their WHY – the fundamental purpose for which they exist. In the beginning, the WHY of the Apostles was clear: they were to **Share Christ**. That critical WHY has been lost or watered down over the generations and replaced with tactical objectives that obfuscate the essential

WHY. Sharing Christ is a powerful calling for a seminary, seminarian, and Orthodox Christian.

The historical view of preparing seminarians is necessary and must continue with excellence. But it is no longer future smart and sufficient. Orthodox seminaries have thought and acted too small. The fundamental WHY a seminary should exist is to fulfill the Apostles' job, which was to "Share Christ." Thus, every decision and strategic investment must be evaluated against whether it will better help Share Christ.

### **Mission: "Make Disciples and Disciple Makers"**

Similarly, the Mission must not be too small. The Apostles' original disciple-making mission statement has been lost in the (necessary) minutiae of accreditation and survival in modernity. The seminaries must reclaim the original Mission instead of merely granting a degree to a few clergy. This includes making clergy and laity disciples and empowering them to make other disciples in the future. The loss of focus on the "what we do" that a Mission Statement provides helps explain some of the significant numerical and other negative trends.

Ultimately, a future smart Orthodox seminary will train the clergy disciples and disciple-makers and make itself effective at interacting with all laity with the same objectives. All laity should look upon their Seminary as a place where they can become better disciples of Jesus Christ and learn how to prepare themselves, their children, and others with whom they interact to become disciples. Every seminary decision must be calibrated against the objective of making a disciple of Jesus Christ and transforming them into disciple-makers.

Thus, the seminaries need to use their faculty, students, research, scholarships, technology, and asynchronous classes to prepare and provide religious education materials for the laity of all ages. This would solve one of the most critical challenges in every Orthodox parish that I identified from all the results of the Effective Parish Assessment (<https://www.effectiveparish.org/>) and Stewardship Calling Vision and Planning Process (<https://stewardshipcalling.com/strategic-planning/>), namely the need for high-quality, appropriately **Orthodox Spiritual Formation And Religious Education (SFARE)** content, materials, and programs.

### **Strategies:**

Thus, seminaries must invest in high-quality content preparation/accumulation and effective technology delivery platforms. This will (a) expand the offerings of the seminaries, (b) introduce them to a greater pool of potential candidates, (c) endear the seminaries more directly with the faithful PIPs, (d) create a broader potential donor base of PIPs willing to pay for selected educational programs and contribute to the Seminary to expand its offerings, (e) better address the religious education needs and stresses of their graduate priests in the field, and (f) provide high-quality evangelism content to potentially better reach NONES and converts.

## Strategic Plan:

I cannot stress enough that every Seminary undergoes a comprehensive, strategic planning process. While there are various ways to undertake such a task, I am extremely biased toward the version of strategic planning described in Chapter 7 of my Roadmap, which takes best practices and modifies them for use and effectiveness, specifically within the American Orthosphere. This Stewardship Calling Vision and Planning process answers four fundamental questions: 1. Why do we exist? 2. Where are we now? 3. Where do we want to be? and 4. How will we get there? It is specifically focused on addressing the current issues and opportunities to meet the needs of the future.

Ultimately, the extensively diverse Seminary **Strategic Planning Team (SPT)** will determine the most critical strategic focus areas after accumulating all the necessary research and data. This would entail assembling a very broad and diverse SPT comprised of not merely the members of the Board but also representation from the full set of stakeholders so that Smallthink and Groupthink are banished. However, this future smart analysis has identified at least three significant strategic focus areas for which future smart seminary strategies must be developed. These include the following areas:

1. academic excellence and effectiveness,
2. stakeholder outreach, and
3. innovation.

Unless these types of methodical, systematic, and comprehensive processes are undertaken, there is no catalyst to change the vision and direction of the seminaries, which will merely continue to struggle in survival mode.

In Chapter 7 of my Roadmap, I laid out the comprehensive multi-month process I recommend to determine the appropriate WHY Statement, Core Values, Mission Statement, Strategic Areas of Focus, S.M.A.R.T. Goals and Action Plans, and other elements of a best-in-class strategic plan for each Seminary. This future smart analysis has identified the following suggested WHY and Mission Statements and at least three significant Strategic Areas of Focus for which future smart seminary strategies should be developed.

Seminary WHY Statement: **“Share Christ”**

Seminary Mission Statement: **“Make Disciples and Disciple Makers”**

Seminary Strategic Areas of Focus:

- 1. Academic Excellence and Effectiveness**
- 2. Stakeholder Outreach**
- 3. Innovation**

## The Best Way To Predict The Future Is To Create It.

To truly dream of and plan for the future, we must look to the ultimate day of renewal and reunification. At that time, the Lord returns to unite His people. This second Singularity event brings all of God's creation back to the Eden He originally created for us, by whatever name each faith tradition calls it.

Preparing our earthly lives to be worthy of that sacred place should always be a central focus of Christians. It must, therefore, also be at the core of what every Orthodox Seminary prepares Christians and their clergy to work toward and receive. Much has been written about the “Σύμβολον τῆς Νικαίας” (Nicene Creed), originally inspired by the Holy Spirit in 325 AD when the first Bishops of the Christian church gathered in Nicaea (Burn, 1909). While historical and interpretive differences exist to this day among various Christian churches, including the pesky “Filioque,” there is a general consensus that this prayer includes the affirmation of a belief in “one, holy catholic and apostolic church.”

The only of these clear words that may require explanation is the word “catholic.” It is lowercase and does not refer to the Roman Catholic church of today. It is the translation of the original Greek word καθολικός, which means universal (and derives from the Greek word καθόλου, which is often translated as “according to the whole”) (Wilson, 2021). Lest we be guilty of the earlier criticism of seminaries focusing on historical teaching rather than Practical Applied Theology, what does this have to do with Orthodox seminaries 2.0?

The “moon shot” future smart call to action is that the Orthodox Church, which claims its founder as the first-called Apostle St. Andrew, leads the way for the singularity of Christian churches in America. This is not just unifying the 12 Canonical Orthodox Jurisdictions and the 6 Oriental Orthodox Jurisdictions or, with its twin, the Roman Catholic Church, but also with ALL Christian churches. In this way, we prepare mankind for the second coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The Orthodox Seminary version 2.0 must include a team and effort focused on the earthly Christian singularity to prepare for the Divine singularity. Leadership requires leading. And there is arguably no more significant leadership challenge than truly becoming “one holy catholic and apostolic church.” Inspired by the Holy Scripture, we can pray: “*Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all **boldness** they may speak Your word*” (Acts 4:29)!

Given this preliminary horizon scanning and trend analysis, one could argue that the Orthodox seminaries in America are at the most critical crossroads ever. With an aging population of PIPs and clergy, an increasing number of NONES, migration away from theology by young adults, secularization and hostility toward religions in America, and many of the other negative trends identified in this preliminary future smart analysis, one could quickly lose faith and hope.

Yet, none of what is identified here that faces the current American Orthodox church or its seminaries comes close to rivaling the challenges faced by the first clergy and trained theologians, the 12 Apostles, and other disciples of Christ. They faced hostility, ignorance, and threats of earthly death. Along the journey of evangelizing the

teaching of Jesus Christ in prior centuries, the Apostles and their successors took detours, had disagreements, resolved conflicts, and regrettably, all too often fragmented Christ's church. With that track record, why should anyone have a positive perspective for the future?

Each person and leader must prayerfully answer for themselves why they have faith they can do this critical hard work of making Orthodox seminaries better suited to address the present and future challenges. However, in so doing, people of faith working on version 2.0 of Orthodox seminaries who recognize their inadequacies for this critical work might be wise to consider at least four messages from their Creator:

- (a) *"But Moses said to God, 'Who am I to go to Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt?' Then God said to Moses, 'I will be with you'"* (Exodus 3:11-12).
- (b) *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"* (Hebrews 11:1).
- (c) *"For I shall consider a plan of peace for you, to give you good things and not calamities"* (Jeremiah 36:11). (Other versions of the Holy Bible place this passage in Jeremiah 29:11 and translate it as: *"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.'"*)
- (d) *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day..."* (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Today can begin the journey of making all Orthodox seminaries future smart so they may become the *"City on the Hill"* (Matthew 5:14). ALL GLORY TO GOD!

