

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



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Stewardship Calling

CHAPTER 16. Orthodox Unity - The AOU (American Orthodox Unity) Roadmap.

Brief Ortho-history.

Much has been written about the formation and history of the Orthodox Church and its various iterations and divisions over time. Historians and theologians love to debate the nuances and demonstrate why their understanding of history is correct, and others are wrong. And they are more competent than I am at engaging in such scholarly discussions/debates.

If one reads the history of the early Christian Church, one cannot help but recognize that it was subject to substantial variations and differing interpretations demonstrative of humans attempting to stay true to what they thought was their understanding of the Lord's ministry and words. I express no criticism or other judgment regarding the significant number of such interpretive disagreements that one might expect when humans are involved in a deliberative process.

Thus, in keeping with the principal message of the **Oneness In Christ (OIC)** and the identified **Foundational Christian Truths** in Chapter 15 of my Roadmap, I do not engage in such discussions and sometimes arrogant antagonisms that distract from a focus on Jesus Christ. I focus on the **PAT (Practical Applied Theology)** and how one can live as a disciple of Jesus Christ in today's America as best as a layperson can understand it. I leave it to others who are more competent and willing to debate how many angels can dance on the head of a pin and to which jurisdiction such angels belong. As for me, I have enough trouble being a disciple of Christ in today's times without such distractions.

And for my Orthodox colleagues who take issue with unity (for reasons I do not understand), I offer the direct words of the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch: "**That the past and present bestowals of the ecclesiastic status of Autocephaly have only aim: 'the orderly functioning of any individual church, and not the production of false impressions and division of the One, Holy, United and Apostolic Church of God.'**" The clarity of our Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch specifically reminds us of the very call for unity. OIC began with our Lord's prayer before the end of his earthly life, which was affirmed in the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea.

As an aside, there are several treatises that I believe attempt to provide a fairly dispassionate and truly outstanding historical account, which are worthy of consulting if you have questions. Several such texts, including the well-written and thorough new history, are represented by Bouteneff (2017), Geffert & Stavrou (2016), McGuckin (2014), McGuckin (2020), and Ware (2015).

I have spent countless hours absorbing expert theologian and historian Dr. Peter Bouteneff's (2017) Eastern Orthodox history book, which provided an incredibly comprehensive explanation of the roadmap of Eastern Orthodoxy. And if you are

objective and dispassionate (which is hard for a cradle Orthodox to be), the reality is that every decision, argument, issue, and division within Orthodoxy was always the result of a couple of men arguing. And whoever had greater political (or military) clout prevailed.

A good historian is able to explain how those arguing men made logical points. Yet, we dogmatically hold onto every final decision as if it came from the Lord himself rather than honestly acknowledging it to be mostly the result of who had more power and influence and thus won the argument (or war). Perhaps you will argue that the Holy Spirit guided every decision, and I pray that is the case. However, reading the objective history tells a story suggesting that it always came down to disputes among men who used military, governmental, or other superiority of numbers to prevail. And before you argue with this conclusion and tell me where I am wrong, read Bouteneff (2017).

I recognize the **Denominational Disciple Antagonists (DDA)** who all claim extreme pioussness and confident correctness in disputing some of these historical accounts because they do not fully support their DDA purity tests. However, for purposes of my Roadmap, it is enough to assert that the Orthodox Church (in the fullest sense of that phrase) attempts as much as humanly possible to be the extension of the early church of Jesus Christ. However, like all other Christian denominations, particular practices and beliefs were resolved by different men over time using power, influence, and conquest. Something about this reality sounds antithetical to a conversation about Christ's church.

However, in making such a statement, I am not advancing a DDA argument that Orthodoxy is the only true religion, as no human is capable of making that statement definitively with assurance, notwithstanding the stridency of their advocacy. The record of men arguing and fighting (not always just politely disagreeing) tells a different story. I nevertheless concede that, for the most part, many of the leaders in charge of the Orthodox Church in history generally tried to stay as true to the teachings and practices of Christ, the Apostles, and the early Church. Throughout the messy history of disputes and disagreements, Eastern Orthodoxy has mostly maintained a conciliar approach through synods of Bishops using a consensus decision-making process attempting to mimic the Apostles closely.

Along the way, in 451 AD, a division within the Orthodox Church occurred between

(a) the "**Oriental Orthodox Churches**" (derived from the Latin word "*orientalis*," meaning "Eastern") consisting of the

1. Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria,
2. Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch,
3. Armenian Apostolic Church,
4. Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church,
5. Ethiopian Orthodox Church,
6. Eritrean Orthodox Church), and

(b) the rest of the Orthodox churches, frequently referred to as the "**Eastern Orthodox Churches**," are listed in the Section on the State of Orthodoxy below.

Simplistically stated, the division within Orthodoxy arose when the Oriental Orthodox Hierarchs did not accept the decision of the Council of Chalcedon that Jesus Christ was “one person in two natures” (simultaneously fully Divine and fully Human) vs. their belief that Christ was one nature of God. (Theologians and scholars would add substantially more words in describing this distinction that is beyond the scope of my Roadmap and unnecessary to make my point.) Nevertheless, some theologians and DDA purists continue this debate today even though it is of no consequence to the **PIPs (Parishioners In Pews)** in any Orthodox church.

I can say this comfortably because in doing strategic plans and many other programs for Orthodox parishes in both branches of Orthodoxy, the PIPs cannot describe why Eastern and Oriental Orthodox are separated theologically (although we have different rituals). It just does not matter in today’s America, especially when we have common needs to address and common enemies to fight rather than fight each other. Indeed, due to intra-Orthodox and Orthodox/Roman Catholic theological dialogues, the differences are much closer to being reconciled depending on whom you listen to, again, except for those DDAs for whom the only truth is their own.

Popes And Patriarchs Are Tired Of Division.

To make my point that it is time to move on, *Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Iwas, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, stated (Paul & Iwas, 1984):*

First of all, Their Holinesses confess the faith of their two Churches, formulated by the Nicene Council of 325 AD and generally known as "the Nicene Creed." The confusions and schisms that occurred between their Churches in the later centuries, they realize today, in no way affect or touch the substance of their faith, since these arose only because of differences in terminology and culture and in the various formulae adopted by different theological schools to express the same matter.

Accordingly, we find today no real basis for the sad divisions and schisms that subsequently arose between us concerning the doctrine of Incarnation.

In words and life, we confess the true doctrine concerning Christ our Lord, notwithstanding the differences in interpretation of such a doctrine which arose at the time of the Council of Chalcedon. Hence, we wish to reaffirm solemnly our profession of common faith in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, as Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Moran Mar Ignatius Jacoub III did in 1971. (emphasis added).

More relevant to my Roadmap is the arrival of Orthodoxy to America and the formation of what I call the **American Orthosphere**. Russian Orthodox claim the first arrival through Alaska, and others refer to the first of the immigrants from their homeland to America. Again, reconciling that history is of no importance to me, nor is it necessary for the confirmation of OIC. It is enough for our purposes to say that immigrants to America came from many different Orthodox countries at various times and to many parts of our country.

Equally true is the reality that when those immigrants arrived (like my grandparents and parents), they immediately and quite naturally congregated together with those who spoke a common language, ate common foods, celebrated common traditions, and dealt with common prejudiced behaviors directed at them by others. As a result, these immigrants formed the earliest American Orthosphere churches that continued the language and traditions of their foreign homeland.

These pioneers sought to recruit clergy from “the old country” to come to America to conduct church services. These forefathers built countless churches in every part of their new American homeland. Because they carried forward their traditional teachings, they naturally also generally continued their allegiance to the respective Patriarch of their previous homeland. Thus, the Greeks held their ultimate allegiance to the Ecumenical Patriarch (EP) in Constantinople (Istanbul), while the various branches of the Russian churches-maintained allegiance to the Patriarch of Moscow, the Lebanese immigrants to the Patriarch of Antioch, the Serbian immigrants to the Patriarch in Serbia and so on.

As a result of this approach, certain linguistic, cultural, and other ethnic traditions differed from one American Orthosphere jurisdiction to another. Yet, regardless of to which ultimate heir to the Apostles they reported, the commonality of the Orthodox faith and worship practices remained largely the same. Indeed, as we exist today, the 12 Eastern Orthodox Jurisdictions in America all remain “in communion” with each other such that I can equally attend any of those parishes and participate in the same liturgical and sacramental practice. Indeed, my wife and I are stewards of three different Greek Orthodox parishes and one Antiochian parish. As I work with parishes of every Orthodox Jurisdiction, I attend and preach in their parishes. Most importantly, the sacramental celebration of the Eucharist (body and blood of Christ) is identical so that I can partake in this most high sacrament at any Eastern Orthodox parish.

Nevertheless, language differences remain the largest distinctions. Parishes with high concentrations of PIPs from one ethnic heritage will see the language of the homeland being used significantly, even though they have been in America for over a century. The language issue is the “third rail” issue I briefly addressed in Chapter 14 of my Roadmap, and I will not reengage in that discussion here.

[What Is The Current State Of Orthodoxy “Εἰς μίαν, ἁγίαν, καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν” One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.](#)

The current Orthodox Christian Church in the United States remains divided into the following 18 different, unequal, sub-optimally resourced, and operationally challenged and struggling fragments. Each of these individual church units is referred to as a “**Jurisdiction**” within the American Orthosphere.

The list below includes the 12 “**Eastern Orthodox Jurisdictions**” present in the United States and the mother church and Patriarchate under whose “ὠμοφόριον” (O-more-fore-ion) they belong. (The ὠμοφόριον translates to “something borne of the shoulder” and refers to the pastoral vestment worn by the Bishop under whose jurisdiction they remain.)

A. Under The Ecumenical Patriarchate:

1. Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
2. American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of the USA
3. Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA
4. Albanian Orthodox Diocese

B. Under The Patriarchate of Antioch

5. Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

C. Under The Patriarchate of Moscow

6. The Moscow Patriarchal Parishes in the USA
7. Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

D. Under The Patriarchate of Serbia

8. Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central and South America

E. Under The Patriarchate of Romania

9. Romanian Orthodox Metropolia of the Americas

F. Under The Patriarchate of Bulgaria

10. Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese of the USA, Canada, and Australia

G. Under The Patriarchate of Georgia

11. Georgian Apostolic Orthodox Church in North America

H. Claiming Autocephaly from the Moscow Patriarchate

12. Orthodox Church in America

The Eastern Orthodox Jurisdictions in the United States do not include the "Oriental Orthodox Churches," which were united with the other Eastern Orthodox churches until the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD when a division occurred over differences in Christology. They are comprised of the following six autocephalous churches:

1. Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria
2. Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch
3. Armenian Apostolic Church
4. Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
5. Ethiopian Orthodox Church
6. Eritrean Orthodox Church

The above division is far from the righteous Nicene Creed Unity Vision of “ONE, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.” It also does not model the melting pot vision of the United States of America and the culture of unconditional and sacrificial love in Christ’s new commandment (John 13:34-35). Thus, the American Orthosphere in this land of religious freedom remains largely splintered along historic foreign ethnic lines with all the inefficiencies, challenges, and difficulties one would expect in a divided house.

The seminal question is: Does Christ want His Orthodox Churches in America to be a “**House Divided**” or a “**House United**” in keeping with the Nicene Creed Unity Vision? I want to explore the Unity Vision cast in the Nicene Creed by asking this seminal question in 4 parts and looking at answers from the perspective of:

Part 1. Christ and Holy Scripture,

Part 2. The presiding Patriarchs and Hierarchs of the Orthodox Mother Churches,

Part 3. The Hierarchs of the Eastern Orthodox Jurisdictions in the United States,

Part 4. Best leadership and operational practices.

If the above four perspectives support a “House Divided,” then the status quo should continue. If the answer demands a “House United,” then my Roadmap must lead to a unified American Orthodox Church (“**AOC**”), which I will present as my high-level Unity Vision. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit must provide a definitive answer and plan.

Part 1. Do Christ And Holy Scripture Call For A “House Divided” Or A “House United”?

This is an easy question to answer. I could find no Biblical authority arguing for a “House Divided.” However, it was easy to read endless authority mandating a “House United.” For example (emphasis added in each quote):

- (a) “*Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that **you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment**” (I Corinthians 1:10).*
- (b) “*In God’s House we walked in **UNITY**” (Psalms 54:15).*
- (c) “*The **UNITY** of the Church is shown by new communities being under the authority of and in communion with the Church of Jerusalem.*” (Orthodox Study Bible, 2008, footnote to Acts 8:14, p. 1482).
- (d) “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for **you are all ONE in Christ Jesus**” (Galatians 3:27-28).*
- (e) “*Here for the first time Paul rebukes the Corinthians, pleading with them in the name of the Lord to put away divisions and maintain **UNITY** in the church” (Orthodox Study Bible, 2008, Footnote to I Corinthians 1:10, p. 1552).*

- (f) “**The church is an organic whole... One who would break this unity would desecrate a sacred place**” (Orthodox Study Bible. Footnote to I Corinthians 3-17 (p. 1554).
- (g) “*Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ ... or ‘I am of Christ.’* **Is Christ divided**” (I Corinthians 1:12)?
- (h) “*For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish...lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbiting whisperings, conceits, tumults.*” “*Paul is more impressed with **the miracle of unity and harmony than with physical miracle***” (Orthodox Study Bible, 2008, footnote to II Corinthians 12:20, p.1586).
- (i) “*For He Himself (Christ) is our peace, who **has made one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation...***” (Ephesians 2:14).
- (j) “*...even when we were dead in trespass, **made us together with Christ... and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...***” (Ephesians 2:5-6).
- (k) “*I do not pray for these alone...that they **all may be one, as You Father are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us...***” (John 17:20-23).
- (l) “*Now therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but **fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God***” (Ephesians 2:19).
- (m) “*...having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, **in whom you are also being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit***” (Ephesians 2:20-22).
- (n) “**Pursue peace with all people and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord**” (Hebrews 12:14).
- (o) “*...for you were slain, and have **redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation...***” (Revelation 5:9).

I could go on, but the answer to the seminal question from our Lord and Holy Scripture is an unqualified YES to a “House United” American Orthodox Church!

Part 2. Do The Presiding Patriarchs Of The Mother Country Orthodox Jurisdictions Call For A House Divided Or A “House United”?

This question is also easy to answer. The **Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America (“ACOBUSA”)** was formed to end “Canonical anomalies” and bring about an Orthodox “House United” in America (the **“ACOBUSA’s Charge”**). The ACOBUSA was established by the **“Chambésy Decision”** of the Patriarchs and Heads of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches at

The Fourth Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference held in Chambésy, Switzerland, June 6-13, 2009.

The Chambésy Decision can be found here:

<https://www.assemblyofbishops.org/about/governance/chambesy/decision>.

The Chambésy Communique can be found here: <https://www.assemblyofbishops.org/about/governance/chambesy/chambesy-communique>).

Article 2 of the Rules of Operation of the ACOBUSA, as outlined in the Chambésy Decision, provides explicitly (emphasis added):

The purpose of the Episcopal Assembly is to manifest the **unity of the Orthodox Church**, to promote collaboration between the churches in all areas of pastoral ministry, and to maintain, preserve, and develop the interests of the communities that belong to the canonical Orthodox Bishops of the Region.

Article 5 - Section 1 of the Chambésy Decision provides the ACOBUSA is:

(a) to safeguard and contribute to the **unity of the Orthodox Church of the Region** in its theological, ecclesiological, canonical, spiritual, philanthropic, educational, and missionary obligations...

(e) The preparation of a plan to **organize the Orthodox of the Region on a Canonical basis**.

This later reference to organize on a Canonical basis refers to the Holy Canons of the Orthodox Church, which are binding on the faithful. For example, Canon 8 of the 1st Ecumenical Council prohibits “two bishops in the (same) city.” (Orthodox Metropolitanate of Singapore and Southeast Asia, n.d.) Even St Cyprian, in a letter to Cornelius in 251 AD, confirmed the One Bishop Rule as follows: “For we are not ignorant that there is one God; that there is one Christ the Lord whom we have confessed, and one Holy Spirit; and that in the Catholic Church there ought to be one bishop” (Cyprian, 251).

Thus, the Chambésy Decision and ACOBUSA's Charge point toward a “House United” American Orthodox Church. Currently, several cities in the United States have more than one Bishop (of different Orthodox Jurisdictions) presiding in violation of this Canon (e.g., New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco.)

Part 3. Do The Current Bishops Of The ACOBUSA Call For A “House Divided” Or A “House United”?

The ACOBUSA 's Charge arising from the Chambésy Decision is to end the Canonical anomalies and create a “House United.” Indeed, a critical observation is that ACOBUSA is intended to disappear once an Orthodox Unity Vision is achieved in America. Additional proof that the ACOBUSA Bishops have accepted this “House United”

American Orthodox Church Unity Vision can be found in the Statement of WHY (Purpose), Mission Statement, and Vision Statement adopted unanimously by the Bishops of the ACOBUSA in 2020. They read as follows:

ACOBUSA's Statement of WHY (Purpose)

“To bring people (the clergy, monastics, and laity) closer to Christ and each other.”

ACOBUSA's Mission Statement

“To preserve and contribute to the unity of the Orthodox Church in the United States of America by furthering her spiritual, theological, ecclesiological, canonical, educational, missionary, and philanthropic aims.”

ACOBUSA's Vision Statement

“Within the next three years, the ACOBUSA will measurably enhance (a) Orthodox Christian Unity & Outreach; (b) Common Orthodox Witness; (c) Ministries & Initiatives; and (d) Organizational Excellence.”

The Bishops of the ACOBUSA made it unequivocally clear that their objective of “bringing people closer to Christ and each other” is through a “House United” American Orthodox Church.

Part 4. Do Best Leadership And Operational Practices Call For A “House Divided” Or A “House United”?

Previously cited empirical data demonstrated that the Orthodox Church in the U.S. has (a) lost 47% of its cradle Orthodox adults, (b) a 64% youth dropout rate, (c) at least 39% of youth repudiating their faith, (d) only a 26% regular church attendance rate with parishioner minds wandering about 75% of the time, (e) experienced a 16.7% decline in parishioners in just the last decade, and (f) 99% of the parishes dependent on festivals, rentals, and outsiders to fund their churches. The fragmented approach of separate Jurisdictions is not the cause of all these challenges. Still, the Unity Vision of a unified **American Orthodox Church (“AOC”)** can develop best-in-class synergistic strategies and solutions to address most of the root causes creating these unacceptable results.

One unified organization is inevitably more robust and efficient than 12 divided and sub-optimally resourced fragments. Even leaving aside the 6 Oriental Orthodox Jurisdictions, each of the 12 Eastern Orthodox Jurisdictions has its own separate and redundant offices, governing bodies, rules, ministries, administrative functions, personnel, technologies, insurance, financial operations, etc.

None of the separate Orthodox Jurisdictions' offices or ministries are fully staffed as their needs require, and many smaller ones have virtually no staff. The technology and systems are severely lacking in most Orthodox Jurisdictions, and there is often little consistency or accountability between and among the Jurisdictions and their parishes. Best practices or metrics to determine optimum success are also usually lacking.

It is grossly inefficient to “recreate the wheel” 12 (or 18) times, with each Orthodox Jurisdiction attempting to offer the same things. The mere act of consolidating Jurisdictions will produce significant savings and economies of scale efficiencies that can be reinvested into collective ministries, staff, and services that bring people “closer to Christ and each other.” More importantly, a “House United” AOC could identify and implement best practices in ministries, services, leadership, parishioner engagement, stewardship, finance, and operational excellence across and within all Jurisdictions with greater effectiveness and efficiency.

For example, there are at least 8 Eastern Orthodox Seminaries among the ACOBUSA Jurisdictions:

1. Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary (Crestwood, NY),
2. Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology (Brookline, MA),
3. Saint Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary (South Canaan, PA),
4. St. Stephen's Course in Orthodox Theology / Antiochian House of Studies (Distance/Boliver, PA),
5. Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary (Jordanville, NY),
6. Saint Herman's Orthodox Theological Seminary (Kodiak, AL),
7. St. Sophia Ukrainian Orthodox Theological Seminary (South Bound Brook, NJ),
8. Christ the Saviour Carpatho-Russian Seminary (Johnstown, PA).

There are at least four more Oriental Orthodox Seminaries;

1. St. Nersess Armenian Seminary (New Rochelle, New York),
2. & 3. Pope Shenouda III Coptic Orthodox Theological Seminary (New Jersey and Los Angeles),
4. St. Athanasius Theological Seminary (San Antonio, Texas).

None of these Seminaries have enough seminarians to fully support all operating and capital expenses of the Seminary and fill all the current church clergy vacancies, let alone the significant number of imminent “Baby Boomer” clergy retirements. I recently heard one estimate suggesting as many as 20%-30% of clergy are within five years of retirement.

While some of the Seminaries are land-rich, they are often cash-flow-poor. They also frequently lack faculty with extensive publications and scholarly works, sufficient seminarian scholarships and financial aid, and other resources to be top educational theological institutions that properly prepare clergy to excel in today’s challenging times and environments. Some seminary consolidation could be extremely beneficial, as discussed in my strategic foresight future smart analysis for Orthodox seminaries previously addressed in Chapter 12 of my Roadmap. In this way, a “House United” can inevitably improve resource allocation and many measurable aspects of clergy and laity spiritual education.

A "House United" Unity Vision provides many other substantial operational synergies. Due to various surveying inadequacies, the current number of faithful in each ACOBUSA Jurisdiction is impossible to identify accurately. However, the last attempt to do so resulted in the "2020 Orthodox Census" based on research conducted for the 2020 Faith Communities Today survey (Krindatch, 2020).

Leaving aside the Oriental Orthodox parishes for now, this 2020 Orthodox Census of the Eastern Orthodox within the ACOBUSA showed the parishioners are most significantly consolidated in the "Big 4" Jurisdictions, which account for over 86% of the total number of all ACOBUSA parishioners:

- (a) Greek Orthodox Archdiocese (GOA) has approximately 55.7% of the faithful,
- (b) The Orthodox Church in America (OCA) has approximately 11% of the faithful,
- (c) Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese (AOCA) has approximately 10.6% of the faithful,
- (d) The Serbian Orthodox Church in North America (SOCNA) has approximately 8.9% of the faithful.

The other 8 ACOBUSA Jurisdictions combined comprise only about 13.9% of the faithful. This concentration of faithful should make unity easier in one sense. However, the degree to which parts of three of the Big 4 Jurisdictions are strongly tied to a foreign homeland ethnic identity presents some practical challenges that must be addressed.

What is more telling is the size of the parishes in each Jurisdiction. The 2020 Orthodox Census found that the median number of adherents across all ACOBUSA parishes is 130 per parish (whereas it is approximately 292 in the Oriental Orthodox parishes) (Krindatch, 2020). However, the number of adherents varies widely by Jurisdiction. For example, there is a median of approximately 350 and 300 adherents in the GOA and SOCNA, respectively, versus only 150 and 95, respectively, in the AOCA and OCA (Krindatch, 2020).

Obviously, the smaller the parish, the harder it is to have the staffing, critical mass, support, ministries, volunteers, financial stewardship, and many other resources that some of the larger parishes have available. The FACT 2020 analysis concluded that the larger the parish, the faster it grows (Thumma, 2021).

In addition, most Bishops identified parishes in their Jurisdiction without clergy or sufficient parishioners or resources that will likely need to be closed or consolidated. The massive shortage of clergy both now and projected into the future portends another adverse trend for the American Orthosphere parishes (Namee, 2023). Thus, inevitable parish closures and consolidations must occur. By strategically consolidating parishes without clergy or sufficient critical mass or resources, we create more robust and effective parishes to bring people closer to Christ and each other.

The Failure Of The Existing American Orthosphere Jurisdictions To Provide Proven And Practical Solutions To Address Their Parishes Most Critical S³ Challenges - Change Is Needed.

By the grace of God through my Stewardship Calling ministry, I have now completed free strategic plans for Orthodox Jurisdictions, Metropolises/Diocese, and parishes that, taken together, include 26% of Eastern Orthodox Christians in America. In addition, this extensive statistically significant data plus the additional empirical results from the greater than 50 American Orthosphere parishes that have completed my **Effective Parish Assessment (EPA)** (discussed in Chapter 7 of my Roadmap) have demonstrated that given the relatively small size and insufficient resources in most parishes, Dioceses, and Jurisdictions, shared solutions to address identical or similar problems are not being developed or efficiently disseminated from the national churches.

My Roadmap humbly attempts to address the most significant **S³** challenges (**S**ervant Leadership, **S**tewardship & engagement, and **S**piritual formation and religious education) identified from the American Orthosphere data, as confirmed by other empirical data in Christian churches. Here is the most significant indictment of the existing jurisdictions. **None of the American Orthosphere jurisdictions have developed proven, best-in-class, and comprehensive processes, programs, or teams to address the major S³ challenges their parishes are facing**, as identified in my Roadmap. If the national Jurisdictions had complete and proven programs to address the S³ challenges, my Roadmap would be unnecessary.

Thus, if the proven solutions in my Roadmap or other tested and validated solutions to the major parish S³ challenges were developed and delivered by the national American Orthosphere Jurisdictions, the parishes' most significant root cause problems would be addressed. My Stewardship Calling ministry, on its own, and a few others, have done what they can to address these S³ issues when parishes have requested assistance.

However, the continued failure (regardless of reasons) of the national American Orthosphere Jurisdictions to provide bona fide best-in-class solutions their parishes can successfully implement to address their biggest challenges is proven by the declines previously noted in the data. Overall, as previously presented, Orthodoxy in America has declined from 0.5% of the U.S. in 1922 to 0.3% in 2022. This failure, plus the identified continued struggles of so many of our parishes, demonstrate the status quo cannot continue. Again, all this makes me and others feel bad; however, facts do not care about our feelings.

By consolidating into an AOC that re-organizes around the best practices identified in my Roadmap or other sources and with a team trained and competent to assist the parishes in their implementation, the health and effectiveness of ALL parishes can be materially addressed. As it is, the parishes are left to fend for themselves. With inadequate resources to do the research and provide effective solutions, all American Orthosphere Jurisdictions and parishes are not thriving.

This massive and repetitive failure alone merits developing a “House United” approach with best practices, proven solutions, and trained teams achieving measurable results using my Roadmap or other best practices. As happens in the most effective mergers, an organized and unified AOC could aggregate all the talent, time, and resources necessary to develop best practices and programs to be delivered to strengthen the health and operational excellence of all Orthodox parishes.

There is much more I can say about the Orthodox Church’s operational assessment. However, after reading the above issues, it is easy to see that the Unity Vision of a “House United” American Orthodox Church can better address the challenges, reverse the dangerous parish health trends, and help bring people closer to Christ and each other!

“Woe To You Teachers Of The Faith!” - The Wake-Up Call.

Dr. Cyril Hovorun, in his outstanding book Scaffolds of the Church Towards Poststructural Ecclesiology, noted that in the mid-nineteenth century, Metropolitan Filaret of Moscow stated: **“I dare not to call as false any church which believes Jesus is Christ”** (Hovorun, 2017). I submit for your consideration what I believe is the un-Christian inhumanity of criticizing those who similarly believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, God, and the Holy Spirit but whose faith traditions and practices are different. Such an approach strikes me as arrogant, lacking in humility and love, and thus un-Christlike.

I sincerely find it reprehensible to criticize a person just because they think differently than me, or worse yet, condemn someone who, for whatever reason, does not know what I know. Note I am not suggesting any of our fellow Christian brothers and sisters are ignorant or less intelligent merely because they may be at a different place on their spiritual journey toward theosis. Just as we are called to love and help everyone, I find it personally abhorrent when we write or speak deprecating criticism of other Christians. Thus, I intentionally choose a different path.

I know the previous sentences may be taken poorly by those who have self-righteously criticized or belittled other Christians. However, I ask you to check your humility coefficient and challenge you to understand why you feel the need to put others down, call them names, or declare them to be wrong for you to feel more justified or right. I know just reading these words sounds wrong even to you. So please prayerfully consider why any of us feels it so important to proclaim our faith practices as “The Only Truth” and everyone else as an apostate or sinner and unworthy of the grace of God and Christ. The very history we love to cling to clearly shows how many (not all) expressions of our faith have been changed over time, even within each of our Jurisdictions. Please let us be humble and honest.

For those who must be right (regardless of the reason you use to justify it), perhaps you can help me understand your thinking by providing examples of where Christ criticized those sincerely on the journey to find Him. For most of those who did not fully understand His words or teachings, He was patient-loving and encouraged them to

continue their spiritual journey to a greater understanding of Oneness in Christ (OIC). There is a big “but” coming, though!

I have, however, found numerous examples where Christ very aggressively chastised the Pharisees and Sadducees for attempting to enforce a rigid adherence to their man-made rules and practices as they justified them as divinely provided and the only proper belief and practice. To those self-proclaimed “defenders” of their version of true faith, Our Lord had a harsh rebuke for their unloving and un-Christ-like care for their brothers and sisters.

I am always struck by Matthew 23, where the Lord repeatedly says “**WOE**” to you scribes (i.e., teachers of the faith) and Pharisees (the “separated ones” with their own beliefs surrounding Biblical Judaism). I confess that I wish we would rebuke people with the word “WOE” more than the many other words we use in modernity. However, particularly in Matthew 23:23, the Lord chastises those “spiritual leaders/teachers/clergy” by accusing them of focusing on certain important worldly things (“paying the tithe of mint and anise and cummin”) but neglecting “the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith.”

I humbly request that all Christians irradicate our attitudes of superiority (or “privilege” as it is now frequently called). Instead, we can embrace ALL believers in the divinity of Christ, OIC, and Foundational Christian Truths as brothers and sisters at different places in our spiritual journey to theosis, even as we practice our faith differently or speak in a different language.

The Convert Conundrum.

While the continued emphasis on religious differences is dissonant to me, please do not take the title of this section wrong. God bless all the converts! They can save the church. Still, in three decades of work throughout the Orthosphere, I have found this DD advocacy more common and vociferous among converts (clergy and laity) to a faith tradition than those born in it. Speaking with a dynamic convert clergyman finally allowed me to understand the reason for this general feeling and conduct. He said it far more articulately than what follows.

Essentially, he and others had believed in another Christian faith and eventually discovered inadequacies or unanswered questions and decided to see if they could find the “original church.” Upon discovering Orthodoxy and enthusiastically studying it in sufficient detail to accept it as “the truth,” when I told these convert sojourners that I thought something (read that, anything) might need to change in their Orthodox parish or church, it caused them to begin to question if they made the right decision to convert. Accordingly, they pushed back against my suggestions for improvement with extreme vigor, hiding behind the concept of a (misperceived) unchanged and unchanging true faith.

I finally understood the dilemma some of our beloved converts were facing that caused them to dig in their heels, resist all change, and announce others as heretics. But it also helped me understand the inadequacy of our catechetical education. I once

asked the most prominent Orthodox scholar and seminary faculty member if the Orthodox church had changed any over the centuries. (I will protect his anonymity even though he is quite public about his answer.)

He laughed vigorously and said the Orthodox church has been changing constantly throughout time. My previous discussion about the truth of history, as reported by Bouteneff (2017) and other accurate Orthodox historians, demonstrates how the Orthodox faith has changed over time as men, Bishops, clergy, disciples, Apostles, politicians, and warlords fight endlessly for “their” version of the truth.

Thus, to argue for rigid absolute consistency without any change whatsoever is not accurate Orthodoxy or historicity. Of course, what has not changed are certain **Foundational Christian Truths** that I attempted to begin to define in the “House of God” metaphor section in Chapter 13 of my Roadmap). There are, and must be, some immutable truths regarding Christ. However, the minute we believe we cannot change any of the operational aspects of our church or the way we practice our belief is the time we destine it to demise.

This is precisely the dispute that occurred in the early church that required the First Ecumenical Council, where the Apostles concluded the Jews could practice Christ’s teaching consistent with their traditions and practices (e.g., circumcision). At the same time, the Apostles concluded that the Gentiles could practice different rituals (e.g., non-circumcision, etc.) and still be considered disciples of Jesus Christ. It is easy to see that in the beginning, Christ’s church was defining itself, its practices, and even its traditions.

[The Gospel According To Whom?](#)

Eventually, with the writing of Holy Scripture, there was a document to which one could refer. While scholars disagree on the dates, the early church existed for approximately 35 years before St. Mark wrote his Gospel, approximately 55 years until Sts. Matthew and Luke wrote their respective Gospels, and perhaps 65 or more years until St. John completed his Gospel. The time for St. Luke's Acts of the Apostles and St. Paul’s many letters to be compiled and the length of time before the New Testament (as we know it) was prepared meant Christ’s early Church must have operated in quite a dynamic and everchanging environment without a clear and definitive roadmap.

Add to that the inevitable iterations and dynamism experienced as St. Andrew tended his Greek flock, St. Thomas to his flock in India, St. Matthew to the Ethiopians, St. Jude in Antioch, St. Matthias in Cappadocia and wherever else the Apostles or their Disciples ventured. This was not the one-size-fits-church we imagine today. Nor was there a common playbook with everything spelled out. When you research when the first full New Testament was created, the plethora of answers is interesting (and often denominationally different).

Try researching it. I found mentions of the Bible’s origin date among the early Christian church fathers St. Irenaeus (c. 180 AD), St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 AD), Muratorian Fragment (c. 170 AD), the Paschal Letter of St. Athanasios (367 AD), St. Jerome (around 400 AD), the Councils of Laodicea (c. 363 AD), Rome (381 AD),

Hippo (393 AD), Carthage (397 AD and 419 AD), Trent (1546 AD) and too many more with contradictory dates to cite or list, including scholars who take issue with dates chosen by other scholars.

This lack of clarity or academic rigor in the preceding sentence can be used to either indict this sentence in my Roadmap or the belief that there exists only one, consistently agreed-upon, exact date for the compilation of the inspired word of God we know today as the New Testament. Imagine what it would mean to American jurisprudence if there was that much confusion about the dates of the U.S. Declaration of Independence or the U.S. Constitution.

The Orthodox Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew Bibles referred to as the Septuagint, was translated in the third century BC. The Council of Carthage in 397 AD is often credited with the finalization of the New Testament Books; however, one of my favorite quotes about the early church is found in the Preface to the Orthodox Study Bible (Maximos et al., 2008, p xxi) which succinctly concluded:

The Church was a dynamic organism, the living Body of Jesus Christ. She made an indelible impact on the world, and those who lived in her life and faith were personally transformed. But we also discover in the New Testament itself that the Church had her share of problems. **All was not perfection.** (emphasis added)

Wait, what? **“ALL WAS NOT PERFECTION?”**

Now, fast forward through history and consider our current arguments that split Christ’s church repeatedly. There was one loosely affiliated and ever-changing evolving church until the “**un-**Great Schism of 1054 AD (I again refuse to call a church division “great”). However, the Oriental Orthodox schism of 451 AD preceded that big historical divide. The massive number of schisms from the Roman Catholic church that followed through the creation of literally thousands of Protestant and progeny churches is mind-numbing to someone looking at Christ’s one church throughout history.

Before I reveal what I believe is a workable roadmap for the organization of a fully unified **American Orthodox Church** (the “**AOC Roadmap**”), there are several books I read thoroughly that detailed some of the tortured history of Christ’s church. I highly recommend them all, in no particular order,

- (a) The Orthodox Study Bible (with extensive commentaries and footnotes) (Maximos et al., 2008),
- (b) Scaffolds of the Church Towards Poststructural Ecclesiology (Hovorun, 2017);
- (c) Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity (Brown & Anatolios, 2006);
- (d) A Church at the Crossroads: The Crisis in American Orthodoxy and the Decisions Needed for Renewal (Bakalis, 2014);
- (e) Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work (Tomberlin & Bird, 2020), and
- (f) The Kingdom Divided: Paul’s Letter to the Romans (Holmes, 2023).

There are many other titles from scholars and theologians focused on similar issues, and many more sources are listed in the References portion of my Roadmap.

I also consulted with countless (but certainly not all) Orthodox Bishops, clergy, lay leaders, theologians, academicians, and even a few clergy outside of the Orthodox ecosystem who offered insightful and challenging ideas for my evolving solutions. Perhaps most importantly, I prayed for guidance and wisdom. I prayed a lot and intently.

I do not suggest my prayers were answered, but I am committed to offering one AOC Roadmap. My Roadmap humbly offered here will assuredly not be the final, or perhaps even the best, roadmap. However, often, a written framework is easier to edit to make it better than to start writing from scratch. Until now, I have not been aware of any other similar, written, fairly comprehensive roadmap, which further prayer and discussions can no doubt inevitably improve.

While I do not have any expectation that my AOC Roadmap will be adopted as is or even with substantial or minor modifications in my lifetime, I acknowledge I am an old man. The miles in the front windshield of my life are far fewer than those in the rear-view mirror of my life. However, my faculty advisor and devout Christian, Dr. Barry Doublestein, reminded me that Lord Belfour's 1917 Declaration for the creation of the country of Israel was not adopted until 1948 with appropriate modifications. Given the old Greek saying that "Great men plant trees in whose shade they will never sit," it is with prayerful humility (recognizing I am Greek but not "great") and a fervent desire to advance OIC during my lap in the relay of life, that I offer this AOC Roadmap.

[The Evil/Disease Of Ethnophyletism.](#)

One of the recent leaders of Orthodoxy in America and a former Dean at St Vladimir's Seminary, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, acknowledged that trying to meld together the unique historical and ethnic Orthodox national cultures that created all the American Orthodox churches is difficult but necessary. However, a significant challenge to achieving the ACOBUSA's Charge is the practice of "ethnophyletism" (coming from the Greek words ἔθνος (nation) and φυλετισμός (clannish)). This practice of conflating one's country and church traditions accelerated in the 18th and 19th centuries as mass migration occurred in the United States and Europe.

Recognizing this as a significant problem, the Orthodox Great (Μείζων) Local Synod in Constantinople (1872) specifically published a "resolution" that officially condemned ethnophyletism in the Orthodox Church. Yet ethnically oriented Orthodox Churches and Jurisdictions in the United States proliferated. This is another Orthodox Canonical anomaly the ACOBUSA is to address in America as a part of the ACOBUSA's Charge.

At its core, ethnophyletism is the conflation of the church and one's nation that leads to ethnic divisions within a Church. These issues were formally addressed during the Council of Constantinople in 1872, where ethnophyletism was declared a heresy. According to The Very Reverend Dr. Cyril Hovorun, the Council of Constantinople was

convened to specifically deal with the issue of nationalism during the time of the Bulgarian “national awakening” (Hovorun, 2017b).

More recently, in 2016, the Pan-Orthodox Great and Holy Council in Crete (the “**Crete Council**”) reaffirmed the Orthodox Church's position against all forms of nationalism, reiterated the condemnation of ethnic nationalism, and again endorsed the Council of Constantinople of 1872, emphasizing the universal mission of the Orthodox Church.

As an aside, the Pan-Orthodox Great and Holy Council of Crete in 2016 was originally to be an ecumenical council, and at the last minute, the Moscow Patriarch decided not to attend. A few Jurisdictions (e.g., Georgian Church, OCA, and Antiochian Church) followed his lead, thus ruining the full conciliarity of what could have been an ecumenical council within global Orthodoxy. I express my opinion that DD issues, together with the grant of autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, prevented OIC progress at the Crete Council.

Nevertheless, the Crete Council consisted of over 150 Bishops from throughout the world representing the following Mother churches (and various of their eparchies): Church of Constantinople, Church of Alexandria, Church of Jerusalem, Serbian Orthodox Church, Church of Romania, Church of Cyprus, Church of Greece, Church of Poland, Church of Albania, Church of Czech Lands and Slovakia. Several important decisions, joint pronouncements, and encyclicals were agreed upon at this first attempt at an ecumenical council in over a millennium. These decisions include:

1. **Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church**
(<https://www.holycouncil.org/encyclical-holy-council>)
2. **Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church**
(<https://www.holycouncil.org/message>)
3. **The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today**
(<https://www.holycouncil.org/fasting>)
4. **Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World**
(<https://www.holycouncil.org/rest-of-christian-world>)

This encyclical specifically stated: “The responsibility of the Orthodox Church for unity as well as her ecumenical mission were articulated by the Ecumenical Councils. These stressed most especially the indissoluble bond between true faith and sacramental communion. The Orthodox Church, which prays unceasingly “for the union of all,” has always cultivated dialogue with those estranged from her, those both far and near.”

5. **Autonomy and the Means by Which it is Proclaimed**
(<https://www.holycouncil.org/autonomy>)

This pronouncement was notable and is worthy of some discussion, given the subject matter of my Roadmap. This decision concluded that throughout history,

autonomy has been proclaimed or achieved in a variety of different manners, but it is not always consistent.

(As a related aside, while technically not “autonomy,” the Patriarchate of Moscow initially began by a council of Russian Bishops self-elected autocephaly by electing their own Metropolitan (Jonah) on December 15, 1448, without the consent or blessing of the Ecumenical Patriarch or other Orthodox Jurisdictions. Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks a few years later, in 1453. As with most such things, there are differences of opinion as to when the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople finally recognized the Patriarchate of Russia, most likely somewhat informally and in the general time frame around 1589-1593.)

However, this 5th Decision of the Crete Council regarding Autonomy provided a more formal process, list of criteria, and set of implications for a church that wanted to be autonomous from one of the autocephalous churches. Among the critical distinctions is that under this pronouncement, “The bishops of the autonomous Church are elected, appointed and judged by its appropriate ecclesiastical organ. In the event that the autonomous Church finds this absolutely impossible, it receives assistance from the autocephalous Church to which it refers” (Section 3.d. <https://www.holycouncil.org/autonomy>).

Relevant to my Roadmap and the American Orthosphere are provisions in Section 2.e: “Each autocephalous Church may only grant autonomy within the borders of its canonical geographical region. Autonomous Churches are not established in the region of the Orthodox Diaspora, except by pan-Orthodox consensus, upheld by the Ecumenical Patriarch in accordance with prevailing pan-Orthodox practice.” The upshot of this decision is that since the United States is considered part of the Diaspora, there could not be an autonomous American Orthodox Church without approval by pan-Orthodox consensus that the Ecumenical Patriarch upholds.

6. The Orthodox Diaspora (<https://www.holycouncil.org/diaspora>)

This decision (among other things) reaffirmed and continued the mission of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States (ACOBUSA) and its objective of addressing the canonical anomaly prohibiting more than one Bishop in any city. It reassessed the Orthodox Diaspora and the Rules of Operation of Episcopal Assemblies in the Diaspora, which were submitted by the Fourth Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (Chambésy, 2009), and by the Synaxis of Primates of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches (January 21-28, 2016).

Critically, provision 2.c. reiterates:

The work and the responsibility of these Episcopal Assemblies will be the concern for manifesting the unity of Orthodoxy, the development of common action of all the Orthodox of each region to address the pastoral needs of Orthodox living in the region, a common representation of all Orthodox vis-à-vis other faiths and the wider society in the region, the cultivation of theological scholarship and ecclesiastical education, etc. Decisions on these

subjects will be taken by consensus of the Churches who are represented in the particular assembly. (emphasis added)

Thus, unity and Oneness In Christ remain a central focus of the ACOBUSA. Accordingly, I believe my Roadmap furthers the objectives of this important decision by the Great and Holy Council of Crete.

7. The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments (<https://www.holycouncil.org/marriage>)

“Inquiring Minds Want To Know”

While the brokerage house E.F. Hutton or tabloid The National Enquirer first coined the above phrase to promote their products, this saying has come to be used by those who want to know what certain leaders believe about an important topic. Given the critical importance of ethnophyletism and the role it plays in the division of OIC and impediments toward **American Orthosphere Unity (AOU)** and a possible **American Orthodox Church (AOC)**, it is helpful to understand what the current patriarchal leaders of Orthodoxy think about this issue.

The Ecumenical Patriarch On Ethnophyletism.

Current Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has been a consistent and vocal opponent of Ethnophyletism. In a 2008 address to the European Parliament, Patriarch Bartholomew underscored the importance of moving beyond nationalistic divisions, advocating for a Church that embodies universal values and embraces all of humanity.

Furthermore, in a keynote address on September 12, 2019, at a conference titled “The Problem of Ethnophyletism in the Orthodox Church: From the Bulgarian Schism to Today,” Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew stated: “Ethnophyletism has led to the weakening of the consciousness of the Church’s eucharistic realization. In the name of nationalistic expediencies, the priority of the Church’s eschatological identity and eucharistic Ecclesiology has been sacrificed.”

In a keynote address on September 12, 2022, at the International Theological Conference titled “Saint Gennadius Scholarius—Between East and West, Patriarch Bartholomew firmly stated: “Ethnophyletism is a permanent thorn in the relations of the Orthodox Churches.”

Patriarch of Antioch On Ethnophyletism.

The Antiochian Orthodox church has a history of being an Arab-Christian Orthodox community with some multi-ethnicity. This Patriarchate has historically emphasized that Orthodox transcends ethnicity and national orientations. Patriarch John X of Antioch has promoted unity among Orthodox Christians and has cautioned that nationalistic divisions are deleterious to the Orthodox Christian faith.

Patriarch of Alexandria On Ethnophyletism.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa has been a historically strong opponent of ethnophyletism, emphasizing his church's mission as a multi-ethnic Church that serves a diverse Orthodox population in Africa. In maintaining the universality of the Orthodox church, this Patriarchate has rejected a church bound to any particular nationality. In particular, the current Patriarch Theodoros II of Alexandria, has been vocal against ethnophyletism, going so far as to recognize the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine ("OCU") in 2019.

Patriarch of Jerusalem On Ethnophyletism.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem has been more reserved regarding ethnophyletism. Notwithstanding the Patriarchate's strong Greek hierarchical dominance, the majority of its faithful are Palestinian and Arab Christians, which has led to some internal struggles between Greek Hierarchs and some Arab clergy and laity. This Patriarchate has avoided explicitly endorsing ethnophyletism and has been embroiled in a controversy with the Patriarchate of Antioch, who accused the Patriarch of Jerusalem of violating canonical boundaries by appointing a Bishop in Qatar. Some have observed this is an issue of ethnophyletism. However, the Patriarch of Jerusalem defended his actions based on his understanding of its historical jurisdiction.

Patriarch of Moscow On Ethnophyletism.

This one is trickier because of the strong unity that exists between the Patriarch of Moscow and the Russian government and citizens. This Patriarchate, for obvious reasons, has always held a strong pro-Russian position and yet, at times, has tried to walk a line approaching a rejection of Ethnophyletism. The aforementioned 2019 grant of autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church by the Ecumenical Patriarch has negatively impacted those relations and reignited certain ethnophyletism positions.

"Anybody That Ain't Confused Don't Know What's Going On."

The above quote attributed to baseball legend Yogi Bera might be used to describe the complex landscape of the global Orthodox church on Ethnophyletism. It is basically accurate to say that most of the global Orthodox church is united against Ethnophyletism, except in Russia or other specific countries where the mix between ethnicity and religion has been blurred for centuries. However, that is not the case in the United States. While all the different Orthodox Jurisdictions celebrate (to differing degrees) their ethnic heritage, the drive for Orthodox unity provides the backdrop that could make an AOC possible in the fullness of time.

Closer to home, Archbishop Elpidophoros of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, the largest (by far) of Orthodox jurisdictions in the United States, and Chairman of the ACOBUSA specifically condemned ethnophyletism, even calling it a "heresy" that has no place in the church

in America or the modern world. This position aligns with the Ecumenical Patriarch, of which he is the Exarch to America.

Archbishop Elpidophoros has repeatedly celebrated the Greek heritage of his jurisdiction but firmly stated that Orthodoxy in America must be pan-Orthodox and inclusive and that it can move beyond historic ethnic boundaries. While in his capacity as Chairman of the ACOBUSA, he acknowledged the overlapping geographic boundaries, his advocacy for a unified Orthodox church and voice in America in both witness, mission and practice has been consistent and exemplary.

In full disclosure, I must acknowledge that Archbishop Elpidophoros is my Archbishop, and I serve on his Archdiocese Council as well as the Secretariat of the ACOBUSA, which he chairs. However, those positions did not in any way influence my objective reporting of the facts of his position or the expression of my opinions in this Roadmap. There are certain things about which His Eminence and I respectfully disagree, even while the vast majority of our views regarding Orthodoxy in America are aligned. He is aware I am writing my Roadmap and has not attempted to influence my content or conclusions in any way, which I deeply respect and am grateful for.

[Chambésy And ACOBUSA.](#)

As the various Patriarchs and foreign heads of the American Orthosphere parishes looked at their offspring in America, they obviously noticed the differences in linguistic and some traditional practices. They also saw a more significant issue. Under the Orthodox Canons (think of it as the Constitution and laws of Orthodoxy), a legal anomaly exists that must be addressed. Canon 8 of the First Ecumenical Council precludes there from being more than one Bishop in the same city. Yet, due to the arrival of the Orthodox churches from different foreign countries and the growth of these parishes in America, it was not uncommon in larger cities for there to be a Bishop of the Greek Orthodox Church (under the omophorion (jurisdiction) of the Ecumenical Patriarch) and a Bishop from one of the Russian church under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Moscow and a Bishop under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Antioch or Serbia, etc.

As the American Orthosphere evolved, the cultural, linguistic, and practices began to diverge, Canonical Anomalies developed in multiple cities, and the foreign Patriarchs gathered in dialogue. This ultimately led to the 4th Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, convoked in Chambésy, Switzerland, June 6-12, 2009. Representatives from all the universally recognized autocephalous Orthodox churches gathered to address these issues in the exact spirit of the Ecumenical Councils of the early church.

The relevant part of this history is the formation of **The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America (ACOBUSA)**, which is comprised of ALL Bishops in the American Orthosphere Eastern Orthodox Jurisdictions. Again, in the interest of full disclosure, I am one of a handful of laity who are honored and blessed to serve on the Secretariat of the ACOBUSA, which is responsible for its ongoing administration and work in between the annual gatherings of the Bishops. That role has helped me work on AOU and

allowed me to see its challenges up close, but it has not impacted the objectivity of my recommendations described in my Roadmap.

For background, I quote extensively from the website of ACOBUSA to most efficiently explain some of its background most pertinent to my purposes in my Roadmap. (See full description here: <https://www.assemblyofbishops.org/about/overview>)

The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America is made up of all the active, canonical Orthodox bishops in the United States of America, of every jurisdiction. The Assembly was established in accordance with the Decision of the 4th Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, convoked in Chambésy, Switzerland, June 6-12, 2009, at which met representatives from all the universally recognized autocephalous Orthodox churches.

These representatives recognized substantial canonical "anomalies" in the organization and life of the Church in these regions, and realized that, though these anomalies had arisen from specific historical circumstances and pastoral needs, they nonetheless present a number of serious problems for the faithful; moreover, they give an appearance of disunity in the one holy Church. As such, these representatives unanimously agreed to the formation of assemblies of bishops throughout the world to heal, as quickly as possible, these anomalies.

The Bishops in the USA, Canada, and Central America were originally together in one Assembly, called the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America; in April 2014, it was announced that, in order to best respond to the cultural diversity and pastoral needs in the region, the Canadian and US bishops would form separate assemblies and the Central American bishops would join the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of Latin America.

To accomplish its purpose and vision, the Assembly has as its goals:

1. the promotion and accomplishment of Church unity in the United States
2. the strengthening of the common pastoral ministry to all the Orthodox faithful of the region
3. a common witness by the Church to all those outside her
4. the organization of the Church in the United States in accordance with the ecclesiological and the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church

In this way, the Assembly is both consultative and programmatic. It is consultative insofar as, while it has no administrative authority, it is a forum for the exchange of ideas and creation of templates, best practices, and models for each Bishop to implement as he sees fit in his own diocese. At the same time, the Assembly is to be programmatic in its goal to coordinate and ultimately unite the common ministries and pastoral practices of the various jurisdictions.

The Assembly meets annually and functions by consensus of all its members. At its inception, it established a number of committees with specific tasks to help accomplish its goals. Each committee consists of member bishops who are assisted by clergy and lay advisors. The Assembly understands itself to be the

successor of SCOBA, and as such, has assumed all its agencies, dialogues, and other ministries.

Unlike SCOBA, the Assembly is a transitional body. If it achieves its goal, it will make itself obsolete by developing a proposal for the canonical organization of the Church in the United States of America. This proposal will in turn be presented to the universally recognized autocephalous Churches, gathered in council. Should this proposal be accepted, it is hoped that the Assembly of Bishops will be succeeded by a governing Synod of a united Church in the United States.

I was blessed to lead the strategic planning effort of the ACOBUSA several years ago, which developed the original (short form) WHY Statement that defined its essential purpose “**to bring people closer to Christ and each other**” (which is the default WHY Statement I use throughout my Roadmap because of its impact, simplicity, and universal applicability).

In the same interest of brevity and focus, I summarize the key objective of the ACOBUSA, namely, to bring about **American Orthosphere Unity (AOU)** consistent with the Canons of the Orthodox Church. Of course, that work must address any Canonical anomalies and, much more importantly, transcend the differences in historical practices and language. In that regard, the ACOBUSA is working on the ultimate objective of AOU.

[Where Is ACOBUSA On Achieving Its Unity Vision And The ACOBUSA’s Charge?](#)

While the Assembly has existed for approximately a dozen years, in 2020, I was blessed to help lead its strategic planning efforts to establish a Vision Statement that was focused on:

“Measurably enhancing:

- (a) Orthodox Christian Unity & Outreach,
- (b) Common Orthodox Witness,
- (c) Ministries & Initiatives, and
- (d) Organizational Excellence.”

ACOBUSA made minor progress on the critical first two goals when we look at the results empirically and honestly. The American Orthosphere Hierarchs (whom, for convenience but with the utmost of respect, I will refer to as “**Bishops**,” which includes those who have the added rank of Metropolitan or Archbishop) gather annually to concelebrate the Divine Liturgy. Beyond the annual gathering, until the nascent **InterOrthodox Parish Association (IPA)** work, not much other “measurable enhancement” in Orthodox Christian Unity & Outreach or Common Orthodox Witness has occurred. Even various ACOBUSA efforts to harmonize common Orthodox prayers and religious practices are incomplete after over a decade.

The new IPA exists to: “

“...promote communication, camaraderie, and cooperation across Orthodox Christian parishes of all jurisdictions in a given geographical area. They are local (i.e., the city/town level) and include both clergy and laity. Their purpose is to break down barriers across Orthodox Christian jurisdictions and, as a unified Orthodox Christian community, witness Christ's love in local society (Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, n.d.).

ACOBUSA relies exclusively on the work and generosity of the Bishops, clergy, laity, and donors dedicated to the mission of AOU. Even then, the Jurisdictions are not completely supportive of every volunteer initiative. For example, a simple Chaplaincy certification process has met with resistance from some Jurisdictions. After forming a separate and new pan-Orthodox youth entity to address the critical needs of our youth and young adults, some Jurisdictions continue to maintain their own separate individual youth departments, each doing their own activities and programs.

Finally, from time to time, various ACOBUSA Jurisdictions “boycott” (or intentionally absent themselves from) ACOBUSA meetings or activities, usually because of some position of a foreign mother Patriarchate (e.g., the grant of autocephaly in Ukraine) or a decision or statement made by one of the other Jurisdictions. Without taking a side on any of those divisive issues, what the boycotting or threats or actual absence of participation in activities demonstrate is that OIC and AOU are not a top priority of all Jurisdictions because if they were, then such differences of opinion would lead to dialogue and not dissension.

The current part-time ACOBUSA Director of Operations has worked heroically and with great dedication, as have some other volunteers. However, an independent observer would honestly conclude that the ACOBUSA's “measurable improvements” they called for in their Strategic Goals and its 2020 Vision are exceedingly hard to find and quantify.

Indeed, very few Orthodox Christians in the United States know the ACOBUSA exists, let alone what it is supposed to accomplish. To be direct and precise, after over a dozen years of existence, ACOBUSA has a fairly weak brand and track record of visible empirical results for its target stakeholders. The continued division and lack of progress on achieving the ACOBUSA's Charge, or its self-imposed 2020 Vision, requires a fresh look if we are to realize any significant progress toward the Unity Vision of “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church” and a “House United” American Orthodox Church.

[What Specifically Has Worked And Not Worked Over The Last Dozen Years?](#)

As a layperson intimately involved in the ACOBUSA from almost its beginning, I will very briefly summarize my personal opinion of some of the key ACOBUSA actions that have worked and things that have not worked. This is my best-informed personal opinion from an insider but could differ from the list of another insider. I will not outline all the detailed minor successes or failures and merely focus on those I believe are more material and related to the ultimate purpose of ACOBUSA.

SUCSESSES

1. Interpersonal Relationships

Prior to the formation of the ACOBUSA and its regular meetings, many, if not most, of the Bishops of different Jurisdiction did not know each other very well personally and had few interactions. As the first section of my Roadmap underscored repeatedly, Trust is the essential sine qua non of any team effort or organization. If the leaders and key players do not even know each other, trust cannot exist regardless of a common faith tradition. However, after over a decade of annual meetings, plus countless opportunities to pray communally and work together on committees in various ministries and programs, a positive result is that collegiality and interpersonal connection among the Bishops generally have been established.

While I cannot and will not disclose any specific dialogue that happens in ACOBUSA meetings or name names, I find it highly refreshing and rejuvenating that most interactions are extremely professional, collegial, respectful, and enjoyable. Even when differences of opinion are expressed, the respectfulness of the interactions is highly enlightening and rewarding to witness. Indeed, our Bishops have mastered the ability to disagree agreeably.

Earning and granting trust is never over. Nevertheless, more than a decade of meeting together has done wonders to breed familiarity and general foundational trust. AOU will be impossible without this trust. Nonetheless, I occasionally sense or hear about pockets of mistrust on certain issues and impediments to unity, which, in my opinion, are mostly attributable to what will be discussed later below that presumptuously suggests why the current ACOB USA process cannot succeed at its primary goal.

2. A Few Committee

Several of the Committees of the ACOBUSA have proven effective and made progress on specific initiatives. For example, ACOBUSA now has a formal Chaplaincy program (although not all Jurisdictions participate), a diligent financial committee (with audited financial statements), and an enhanced (but by no means ideal or comprehensive) communications program. The potentially transformational **IPAs** (referred to previously) are promising developments if successfully implemented.

Additionally, an ACOBUSA committee of Bishops has developed and released some common statements of position on a few contemporary moral issues, with supposedly more in the works. Another committee has systematically reviewed all agencies and affiliates of the ACOBUSA to ensure consistency, fit, and operational excellence.

A powerful and effective mental health ministry with great offerings is another helpful and productive accomplishment. A homeless guidebook has also been created

and released. The ACOBUSA has been instrumental in continuing a wonderful dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church.

Additionally, the Canonical Regional Planning committee worked diligently in the past on creating one roadmap for AOU to address the canonical anomaly of multiple Bishops in the same city. This thoughtful proposal was rejected in the early days of ACOBUSA. Perhaps it was offered before sufficient trust had been established, but its good foundational work facilitated a helpful dialogue.

Some work has been done on common liturgical practices. However, regrettably, recently, a common liturgy and Nicæan Creed for the celebration of the Sunday of Orthodoxy was not finalized at the last ACOBUSA meeting because of a lack of consensus on grammar. Fortunately, it was subsequently finalized and released by the Executive Committee.

Further accomplishments include the ACOBUSA's creation of two new Agencies with promising futures. The Orthodox Volunteer Corps (OVC) (<https://www.orthodoxvolunteercorps.org/>) has several years of successful operations in recruiting young adults to give a year of service. The Orthodox Youth Agency (OYM) (<https://www.theoym.org/>) has begun operations to develop content and programs to focus on youth. While its programs are not yet extensive or well-known, more troubling is that some Jurisdictions continue to "do their own thing." Thus, a common youth ministry focus has not occurred, and any possible benefit of synergy of efforts has been mitigated. A list of other ACOBUSA committees can be found here: <https://www.assemblyofbishops.org/about/committees>.

Out of humility, I saved my favorite for last. I was blessed almost immediately after the ACOBUSA was formed to host in my Atlanta law firm's offices the first gathering of lawyers from nearly all Orthodox Jurisdictions to discuss creating a completely pan-Orthodox group of volunteer lawyers that would work together to assist the ACOBUSA with its own legal needs (e.g., incorporation, 501(c)(3) status, trademarks, legal contract review, etc.) and also begin to share resources and best practices to assist all Orthodox Jurisdictions and parishes with their needs and issues. A few of us have also strongly urged the ACOBUSA to pursue a much more visible and active profile in filing Amicus Curie (friend of the court) briefs before the United States Supreme Court or Supreme Courts of various states on issues of particular importance to American Orthosphere parishes.

For example, our ACOBUSA legal committee, which includes representatives of the various Orthodox Jurisdictions and virtually all major areas of the law, has partnered with other Christian religious denominations (e.g., Roman Catholics, Baptists, Mormons, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, etc.) and other Christian advocacy groups (e.g., Becket Legal Fund, etc.) to file multiple Amicus Briefs. This includes United States Supreme Court Amicus Briefs in connection with the revolutionary abortion case of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* that overturned *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*.

We have also vetted and obtained ACOBUSA approval to file other Amicus Briefs or requests for the United States Supreme Court to consider cases (Writs of Certiorari) always seeking to protect religious freedom, the separation of church and state, the Ecclesiastical Abstention Doctrine, etc. This group of multijurisdictional lawyers also freely share best legal practices from their Jurisdiction and discuss other critical issues. As an item of humorous personal privilege, I find it fascinating that the lawyers (of all people) are, in some respects, leading the way toward AOU. (Please insert your favorite lawyer joke here or recognize that God has a sense of humor.)

3. The Hiring Of A Director Of Operations/Executive Director

Leadership and constant focus are essential. In the early years of the ACOBUSA, without a full-time person devoted to its work, progress could not be material. It is rarely effective when an always busy employee of one Orthodox Jurisdiction is asked to take on additional voluntary work for the ACOBUSA. However, starting several years ago, an extremely talented and dedicated clergyman was hired to assume essentially full-time responsibility for the operation of the ACOBUSA. Given Fr. Nicholas Anton's many talents, substantial progress has been made on many fronts. Most notably, he was able to obtain a \$1.25 million Lilly Foundation grant to facilitate the IPAs, which allowed ACOBUSA to hire some greater talent to support these and related initiatives.

4. Modest Greater Visibility

With part-time assistance, press releases and announcements are distributed, and the more professional ACOBUSA website (<https://www.assemblyofbishops.org/>) and social media sites (<https://www.facebook.com/assemblyofbishops>) are updated. Until a full-time expert communications professional can be hired, this effort will not be fully successful. Indeed, in my travels throughout the American Orthosphere, I rarely find PIPs who know anything about ACOBUSA or have even heard of it.

FAILURES

I acknowledge ab initio that calling something a failure might offend those with greater sensitivity or who always want to be positive. However, as a pragmatist, lawyer, and honest change agent, I mean no offense when I call a spade a spade. I truly celebrate those things that failed as progress and lessons learned we do not have to repeat. I also mourn and regret those ideas and paths that have not been tried, and I am willing to admit failures. Indeed, my Roadmap is not critical of those past failures but rather attempts an honest self-assessment and the presentation of a possible Roadmap to provoke thought for a bright new future.

Following Stephen Covey's admonition to begin with the end in mind, I respectfully submit that ACOBUSA's failure is largely due to the following "Five Truths of Failure":

1. Those not committed to the WHY will ignore or fight it.
2. If something is everyone's job, it is no one's.

3. Busy people asked to work on something unrelated to their core job rarely do.
4. If no deadline exists, it will certainly be met.
5. What gets funded gets done.

1. Lack Of Resolution Of The Canonical Anomalies

There remain multiple Orthodox Bishops in certain major cities (e.g., New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, etc.), and thus, the main Canonical Anomaly has not been resolved. The ACOBUSA's Canonical Regional Planning Committee presented a proposed solution many years ago that entailed moving some Bishops, which was rejected. There are interesting suggestions in the Canonical Regional Planning Committee proposal that should be revisited by the **AOC Implementation Team** that I call to be created later in this Chapter 16 to refine the final elements of the **AOC Roadmap**. However, after this first attempt by this committee, no further efforts have been made in many years to address this principal reason for the formation of the ACOBUSA.

2. Repeated Schisms In American Orthodox Churches Due To Foreign Matters Or Influences

With no intention to anger or disrespect anyone or engage in what I consider to be unproductive arguments, foreign Patriarchs have had disagreements and misunderstandings that have negatively impacted the ACOBUSA and progress toward an AOC. The most recent significant dispute is between the Ecumenical Patriarch and Patriarch of Moscow over the grant of autocephaly of a branch of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Much has been (and will be) written about this dispute, and each side has its arguments that are irrelevant to my Roadmap.

The Ecumenical Patriarch explained the basis for his grant of autocephaly based on the foundational canonical order of the Church, which grants to the Church of Constantinople the responsibility to adjudicate disagreements between Churches. Canon 9 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, which was held in Chalcedon in 451, states: "If a bishop or cleric has a disagreement with the metropolitan of the province, let him appeal to the Exarch of the Metropolis, or to the throne of the Imperial City of Constantinople, and let him be tried there."

However, once that schism occurred between the two Patriarchs, several of the American Orthodox jurisdictions that reported to (or were affiliated with) the Patriarch of Moscow severed their engagement with ACOBUSA. While hope and prayers remain that this disengagement is temporary, regrettably unresolved foreign issues spill over to affect the American Orthosphere. These foreign issues will continue to do so until some form of AOU is developed that can isolate those foreign differences and prevent them from dividing the faithful in America.

3. Lack Of Consensus Roadmap To Achieve Orthodox Unity

After over a decade of trying, and while acknowledging the previously-mentioned successes, it is fair to say we are essentially no closer to a workable road map for AOU. To put it bluntly, if the objective was the agreed-upon AOU Roadmap, the ACOBUSA has failed. A public acknowledgment of this failure was the inability to meet the deadline of offering such an AOU roadmap at the previously discussed Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church that took place in 2016 in Crete.

Being a bottom-line and results-oriented person focused on the critical OIC mission, I must acknowledge when our efforts have failed to achieve a major objective. This is a requirement of having integrity and humility, admitting failure, and then deciding to change course to achieve a righteous goal. As I (constantly) consider my II Corinthians 5:10 Moment when I stand to account for my life to the Lord, I find it unacceptable to leave this critical work undone if there is anything I can do to advance the objective. This is the reason for this part of my Roadmap.

4. Lack of Tangible Accomplishments, Visibility, Or Brand Identity

Notwithstanding the heroic efforts of the part-time ACOBUSA Director of Operations, several dedicated Bishops, and a few other volunteers, an independent observer would honestly conclude that the ACOBUSA's "measurable improvements" in achieving its 2020 Vision are exceedingly hard to quantify. Indeed, very few Orthodox Christians in the United States know the ACOBUSA exists, let alone what it is supposed to accomplish.

As noted previously, after about a dozen years of existence, ACOBUSA has an extremely weak brand and track record of visible empirical results for its target stakeholders. Clearly, the continued division and lack of progress on achieving the ACOBUSA's Charge, or its self-imposed 2020 Vision, requires a fresh look if we are to realize any significant progress toward the Unity Vision of "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church" and a "House United" American Orthodox Church.

Thus, the ACOBUSA relies exclusively on the work and generosity of the Bishops, clergy, laity, and donors dedicated to the mission of such an independent organization. Even then, the Jurisdictions are not completely supportive. For example, not all the Jurisdictions or Bishops are able to fully fund their required contributions to maintain and operate the ACOBUSA. Furthermore, a failure to completely embrace the Chaplaincy certification process, pan-Orthodox Youth Agency, or support fully functioning committees and the lack of attendance at the annual meeting that makes a quorum always a challenge are signs that the ACOBUSA is not functioning optimally.

Why The Current Approach Has Not Worked And Cannot Work.

In over four decades of mergers/consolidations/outsourcing/acquisitions legal work in the profit and non-profit sectors and over three decades of extensive work with American Orthosphere churches, I acknowledge a merger or unity cannot be achieved if there is no cultural and fundamental overall fit of the organizations. If they do not have

the same WHY and Core Values, the ultimately merged organizations will not survive or thrive. The good news in AOU is the absence of this foundational impediment.

While most American Orthodox churches of all Jurisdictions have never intentionally thought about developing and writing down their WHY Statement or Core Values when I share the WHY Statement I was blessed to help the ACOBUSA create, the parishes and PIPs are in enthusiastic agreement. Thus, I feel comfortable in saying AOU can focus on “bringing people closer to Christ and each other” driven by the OIC desire: *“that they all may be one; as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that You have sent Me”* (John 17:21).

After identifying a cultural fit and a common WHY, Core Values, and Mission, I have discovered that the three biggest impediments to successful mergers (stated bluntly) are control, finances, and lack of commitment. Let me briefly explore all three in connection with the work of ACOBUSA.

Control Issues – The “E Gene”

I wish to be respectful, but for every merger I have seen or negotiated, one of the biggest challenges includes the questions of who will be in “control” of the merged entity and who will have what “title” and authority from among the leaders of the merging entities. Of course, having the right leaders in the right positions is always critical to success. As Jim Collins advised in Good to Great, having the “right people on the bus, the right ones off the bus,” and, of course, having the right people sitting in the right seats on the bus makes a huge difference (Collins, 2001). Thus, leadership concerns in mergers/consolidations are critical.

However, merger/consolidation issues are often disguised as leadership questions and instead focus on the negative human side for which the root cause is characteristic of ἐγώ (ego). This Greek word means “me” and focuses on the concept of self. As with any human attribute, there can be positive and negative applications.

On the positive side, leaders of highly effective merging entities believe their organization has implemented the most effective approach. Thus, they are less willing to consider accepting what they perceive as a less productive approach deployed by the other merging organization. If a process or approach is indeed better, there should be sufficient metrics and evidence to justify their adherence to their strategy, which should objectively persuade the other party seeking to implement best practices.

The negative side of this ἐγώ attribute is the critical ingredients that are missing when Servant Leadership is not the dominant universal leadership approach. In this case, the “E Gene” (as I refer to the negative ἐγώ manifestation) is displayed by a leader who does not want to give up control, title, or perceived influence. My extensive work in this area has demonstrated that there are at least four causes of this negative E Gene characteristic.

1. The desire to maintain control is often rooted in insecurity. Sometimes, such “leaders” need their title or status as a crutch to maintain a positive self-image. This

involves who will lead the merged entity (i.e., who is the Chairman, CEO, COO, CFO, GC, etc.).

2. The absence of great Servant Leadership traits is another unproductive behavior when someone with a title expresses an E Gene arrogance that is not present in the best “Level 5” leaders. Jim Collins identified these best-in-class leaders as those who “build enduring greatness through a paradoxical combination of personal humility plus professional will” (Collins, 2001). This characterization perfectly defines our Lord. However, those “leaders” rooted in the past with arrogance or fear tend to be unwilling to accept that someone might have a better idea or method and should be in charge.

3. Another negative manifestation of E Gene control syndrome occurs when “leaders” resist change. They fear that a change might fail or suggest that either they were not doing things optimally or leave them with no title or position of power or influence. Their fear causes them to be more comfortable with the status quo, where they remain in charge of whatever they have, even if their organization is not going in the right direction.

4. A fourth control E Gene symptom rears its ugly head when someone wishes to have a perceived legacy maintained. For example, in all mergers of professional service organizations (e.g., law, accounting, engineering, consulting, etc.), one of the most difficult decisions involves the new entity’s name (i.e., will my name survive in the newly merged firm’s name). This often implicates any currently alive name partners or their families, which can have emotional attachments. I know of law firm mergers that should have occurred but foolishly were prevented primarily because the “leaders” could not agree on the name of the new firm and which of the dead partners’ names from the two firms would be dropped or re-ordered. If a Goliath swallows a David, the big dog usually wins, and its name is used (e.g., Vodafone adopted the bigger Verizon name, and Warner-Lambert adopted Pfizer’s name).

What’s In A Name?

In the case of AOU, this would present an emotional and ego problem. All the Jurisdictions (except one) bear the name of the original foreign homeland from which their immigrant forefathers/mothers came. Nationalistic pride (ethnophyletism), contemporary issues, and other ego factors would make it hard for, hypothetically, the current Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) to lose its name and be required to take the name of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the United States (i.e., something that would never happen).

The typical merger solution of just adding all the names of the merging entities (ExxonMobil, Bristol-Myers Squibb, J.P. Morgan Chase, ConocoPhillips, RJR Nabisco, etc.) would not work given twelve different Orthodox Jurisdictions, each with their own individual identity and name. When the Goliath approach or name-mashing does not work, the usual merger protocol is to invent a new name that none of the merging entities previously used. Thus, when pharmaceutical giants Ciba Geigy and Sandoz merged, they chose the name Novartis. Bell Atlantic Corp. and GTE Corp merged and became

Verizon. This seems like the best overall solution for AOU and avoids ethnophyletism challenges.

However, complicating this matter is the previously mentioned branch of Orthodoxy in America that was granted autocephaly (independence) from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1970 with the hopes that it would be the church that unified all Orthodox in the United States. Accordingly, it took the new and descriptive name Orthodox Church in America (**OCA**). For all the previously mentioned ego reasons, it is unlikely any of the other ethnically named churches would submit to the name given to the Russian independent church. This leaves us with the dilemma of creating yet another new name that is true to Orthodoxy but generic enough that it would not inhibit the other Jurisdictions from adopting it.

American Orthodox Church (AOC).

Accordingly, I propose that the **American Orthodox Unity (AOU)** be achieved by the formation of the **AMERICAN ORTHODOX CHURCH (AOC)**. It would be a newly formed legal entity into which all the existing Jurisdictions would merge by operation of law. Using this mechanism would be the most efficient way to start from scratch and create a new umbrella universal Orthodox church in the United States with no prior legal baggage.

If the process I will describe later for achieving the merger identifies certain operations or subunits that should be separated out and not part of my AOU Roadmap (whether due to potential liabilities, independence reasons, etc.), they could be stripped out before either the merger is consummated. This is the kind of thing M&A lawyers do all the time and, thus, does not reinvent any wheel. For the rest of my AOU Roadmap, I will use the abbreviated **AOC (American Orthodox Church)** to refer to the newly formed entity into which the other Orthodox Jurisdictions operating in the United States are merged.

Other E Gene issues complicate mergers; however, I submit that all four of the above are currently major impediments to **AOU**. Some leaders fear they may not survive in leadership in a combined entity where there may be better leaders in the merging entities. Similarly, the ethnic origins of the Orthosphere organizations play a prominent role in many of them. Proof of this is the continual dissension around the language in the church services and whether the respective ethnic festivals or foreign language programs will continue. There are some leaders of larger Orthodox organizations who feel that because of their size, they should have control or outsize influence. And the fear of the unknown and change is always present to some degree.

There are other impediments to AOU, to be sure. However, at the core, there is an absence of a commitment to Oneness in Christ and the very purpose for which ACOBUSA was created. The AOU opponents will certainly attempt to cloak their opposition with other more noble justifications, such as maintaining the purity of their practice or understanding of the faith or loyalty to a foreign Patriarch or ancient tradition. I do not suggest they are insincere, but perhaps they have merely prioritized those justifications over the very OIC and AOU for which the ACOBUSA exists. This is difficult

to admit, and I expect some serious pushback for my calling this out. Yet, integrity demands nothing less.

The Dreaded Oxford Comma and Other Unity-Destroying Linguistic Debates.

For example, I have witnessed several theologians from multiple Orthodox Jurisdictions work for over a year on creating conformity of a particular church service common to all Orthodox Jurisdictions, including a common translation of the well-established Nicene Creed. Instead of reaching consensus conclusions, a spirited debate arose about punctuation for over thirty minutes. Each side argued for the linguistic and historical integrity of their position. The discussion was collegial but never reached a consensus resolution. Footnotes and end notes were invented for those who want to expand on linguistic conventions. But I fervently maintain that comma placement should never impede AOU or OIC.

During that theoretical discussion, all I could think of was that the PIPs were the ones who were not considered. The PIPs merely want a common service and prayer and do not care about comma placement or grammar, particularly when it would make no difference in the humble opinion of this professional wordsmith who spent 40 years as a lawyer arguing over words.

With the utmost respect, I attribute no bad faith to anyone participating in such dialogues. Let me be absolutely clear that I have substantial respect for all the Bishops I have met and worked with. I find them to be wonderful people and dedicated men of God. However, endless dialogues are frustrating and lead participants to increasingly deem them to be a waste of valuable time, often leading to dissension rather than unity. Regrettably, there is a growing number of Bishops who privately share frustration with the lack of significant progress, which causes them to increasingly not wish to participate in ACOBUSA meetings or events.

Nevertheless, unity is impeded by the need to be right rather than focusing on what is best for the faithful PIPs. I expect criticism (or worse) from those who want to argue that comma placements and grammar are significant. I have experienced this in parishes I work with on strategic plans and who wish to have endless debates about the Oxford comma. However, I submit that leaders must always put first things first. The PIPs who seek to worship together will accept any comma placement but find it disconcerting when something as essential as the Nicene Creed, Lord's Prayer, or other supposedly common prayers or hymns are different from one Orthodox church to another.

We should not care if we refer to the devil in the Lord's prayer as "evil" or "the "evil one" when the meaning is the same. Nevertheless, the words are different in various Orthodox Jurisdictions. Leaders, on behalf of all laity, we urge you to quickly please pick one version and tell us. If leaders cannot reach a consensus on simple words, how can they be expected to do the much weightier task of leading lay people closer to Christ and each other? While we argue about grammar, the data are clear that the number of Orthodox Christians in the United States and globally is declining.

Achieving a successful merger requires reasonable compromise. No compromise should be expected on anything that rises to a Foundational Christian Truth (as defined in Chapter 15 of my Roadmap) or fundamental WHY or Core Values level. But that is not the issue in American Orthodoxy. Minor linguistic differences aside, all American Orthodox Jurisdictions are aligned on the core foundational matters of the faith. And as loyal as I am to my Ecumenical Patriarch (to whom I swore an oath of service), I respectfully believe my loyalty always belongs first to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. I am sure Patriarch Bartholomew would agree. Thus, I respectfully and humbly submit that all Orthodox Christians must be committed to regaining OIC through AOU while respecting the historical origins of our ancestors and current presiding Bishops.

If a Servant Leader is the servant of those they lead, then it will require a reawakening of the calling of OIC and AOU in such a way that grammar, lowercase “t” traditions and historic countries of ethnic origin are never allowed to be impediments. Our youth love to play basketball with each other and do not care about commas or foreign countries. They are willing to enjoy the foods, dance, songs, and traditions of all other Orthodox Christian youth without prejudice from foreign wars or territorial disputes. If we are serious about preserving and ultimately growing the Orthodox Church in America, then OIC and AOU must be imperatives.

As mentioned previously, Orthodox Christians in the US have declined to 0.3% of the population in 2022, down from 0.5% in 1922. Thus, notwithstanding our efforts, **we have not only failed to make disciples of ALL nations, but we have actually lost disciples in OUR nation.** This is not a success, nor is it what I want to share with Christ in my II Corinthians 5:10 Moment when I stand before his awesome judgment seat. Do you?

B. Financial issues – The “\$ Gene.”

This merger impediment is easier to understand and diagnose. Merging entities want to be in a better financial situation together than they could otherwise be. This is what synergy is all about when the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. It can happen when one merging entity excels in one thing or area while the other merging partner has different or complementary strengths. However, financial resources and ongoing success are essential.

As a result, all leaders who are imbued with the E Gene also have a dominant “\$ Gene” focused on financial well-being. This includes personally being in a better financial position after the merger as well as the entity being stronger. In the case of AOU, it is more complicated since the foreign Patriarchates are understandably also financially dependent on their “rich American supporters.”

The Orthodox Patriarchs are currently in economically challenged or war-torn areas (Istanbul, Turkey; Moscow, Russia; Damascus, Syria; Jerusalem, Israel; Belgrade, Serbia; Sofia, Bulgaria; and Tbilisi, Georgia). With the possible exception of the Moscow Patriarch, who allegedly is funded by the Russian government, the United States faithful provide essential funding for their mother churches. Thus, while the Patriarchs wish there

to be unity, they cannot afford that result if the financial resources they depend on from America end up being compromised by AOU.

Thus, for example, the Order of St. Andrew, Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarch (which I am blessed to be a part of) not only provide regular funding for our Ecumenical Patriarch but also established and are funding the “Bartholomew Foundation” to secure the financial foundation of the Ecumenical Patriarch in perpetuity. While new \$100,000 pledges are being contributed regularly, the endowment currently has \$26.4 million pledged. In addition, over the last 24 years, the Archons have contributed \$52.28 million to fund the needs of the Ecumenical Patriarch. In this way, the financial security of at least one of the foundational Patriarchates is assured. I will visit this topic again when I propose my AOU AOC roadmap.

However, the local American National Orthodox Jurisdictions tell different stories. Some are financially solvent and able to fund greater ministries to help its parishes increasingly; however, most are only funded at a relatively subsistence level to keep the national office and Bishops funded. It is not a matter of capacity, as the U.S. Census reports consistently show that Americans who trace any ethnic identity to historically Orthodox countries are in the top quartile to top third on annual income.

However, as the earlier chapters in my Roadmap on financial stewardship show, the Orthodox faithful remain in the bottom quartile of contributing to their parishes in the form of their direct stewardship. Accordingly, the local parishes (that provide most of the funding of the national churches) are unable to share sufficient financial resources to ensure the most robust offering of services and ministries.

Indeed, in many instances, local Bishops feel there is often competition for financial donations from PIPs at the regional, national, and international levels. Of course, if the parishes solved their financial stewardship problems using the methodology identified in my Roadmap Chapters 10 and 11 (or some other successful stewardship strategy), this sense of financial scarcity would be replaced by the assurance of abundance that actually exists. Nevertheless, the current financial shortcomings and competition form a second major impediment to AOU.

Those Orthodox Jurisdictions or Dioceses doing well financially are less enthused about feeling like they will need to subsidize other Dioceses or even other Orthodox Jurisdictions. Again, replacing the false sense of scarcity with the truth of the abundance available would ameliorate these concerns.

However, proof of the reality of scarcity is the fact that none of the current Orthodox Jurisdictions have fully functioning best in class stewardship ministries helping their parishes with comprehensive best practices resources and teams to help parishes implement them. One part-time employee does not an effective stewardship department make. Even within my largest Orthodox Jurisdiction, for several decades, I have been trying to elevate stewardship to top of mind and ensure the necessary solutions and training are provided to the parishes, largely to no avail.

Indeed, the reason I created my Stewardship Calling ministry was to research, develop, and teach stewardship best practices throughout the Orthosphere in the

absence of other alternatives. Perhaps this accounts for the popularity of my Igniting The Flame stewardship retreats offered throughout the country since they are one of the only such offerings. Nevertheless, just like part-time clergy are not enough, a one-man band is a grossly insufficient offering. We must have a fully functioning, best-in-class, and full-time leadership and extensive teams researching and teaching stewardship throughout the American Orthosphere. The failure to address the financial needs of American Orthodox parishes, Dioceses, and National Jurisdictions remains a difficult challenge that must be overcome if AOU is ever to be successful.

C. The Big Kahuna! “Lack Of Commitment” And The “LOC Gene.”

Before being engaged in any merger/consolidation/outsourcing, I would ask the leaders of the organizations who were in charge of making it happen: “Whose full-time job is it to ensure the merger/consolidation takes place as effectively, efficiently, and promptly as possible?” If they either say no one person is in charge or name people who have other responsibilities or duties, I tell them the merger/consolidation will fail, and they should save their breath for cooling soup. This often gets the reaction I suspect some of you reading this have now.

Plain and simple, undertaking a merger/consolidation is extremely difficult, demanding, and time-consuming work. It requires handling thousands of issues and making hundreds of decisions each day. It is full-time work to get the combination accomplished, followed by more full-time work to ensure the consolidation is implemented successfully. It requires marshaling large and diverse teams of professionals from both within and outside the organization. It demands the full-time creativity and dedication of several key individuals in the organization with experienced leaders, and a lot of other requirements space does not allow me to outline herein.

I repeat my previously stated Five Truths of Failure in mergers/consolidation:

1. Those not committed to the WHY will ignore or fight it.
2. If something is everyone’s job, it is no one’s.
3. Busy people asked to work on something unrelated to their core job rarely do.
4. If no deadline exists, it will certainly be met.
5. What gets funded gets done.

THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT AMERICAN ORTHODOX UNITY WILL NOT OCCUR UNLESS THIS LACK OF COMMITMENT ISSUE IS ADDRESSED!

Προσεχώμεν! (“Let us be attentive” as used in the Orthodox Divine Liturgy to signal the importance of focusing on what follows)

In short, if it is everybody’s job, it is nobody’s job, and it will not be done. For over a decade, there has been no full-time dedicated Episcopal leadership driving

AOU and an AOC. The Director of Operations can only do so much. This is not a criticism of the few Bishops who have dedicated countless hours to the ACOBUSA on top of their regular duties), whether serving on the Executive Committee, the Secretariat, or the other functioning committees. These Bishops are devoting time away from their Diocese to serve this greater purpose and are to be sincerely admired and thanked. However, the fact that they have other significant jurisdictional duties is evidence of the root cause of the problem with AOU.

For over a decade, the challenge has remained the same. **No one Bishop (or small group of Bishops) has AOU and AOC as their full-time and sole duty. Therefore, AOU and AOC will not occur (and cannot happen) until this fundamental leadership issue is addressed.**

Remember my first pronouncement at the beginning of my Roadmap that every church problem is a leadership problem? This one is not a problem per se with who the current leaders are, but rather, **if ACOBUSA wants to achieve AOU and AOC, someone must have this leadership challenge as their only job.**

Indeed, while it is not for me to say, I can think of several current, retired, or underutilized Bishops who probably have the skills and time. If one or two Bishops with the right skills and full-time to devote (supported by the appropriate, lay professional assistance) were delegated the specific and sole responsibility for finalizing a unity plan and working to convince the ACOBUSA Bishops to implement it, progress might occur.

However, absent a dedicated and focused team working full time on Orthodox unity addressing the Canonical anomaly, then AOU and an AOC will not happen. I hate to be so direct, but someone who has objectively examined the current process and who knows how to get mergers and consolidations done has to “call the code” on a dead process that cannot resuscitate the patient. Again, facts are facts.

To be sure, as a previous survey of the ACOBUSA Bishops proved, not all current Bishops are in favor of unity/consolidation or an AOC. Some prefer separation, perhaps for some of the other reasons previously stated or possibly other personal ideas. Until the dedicated Bishop and support team leading the AOU movement meet with them and understand their fears or concerns, they will likely never agree and cooperate. That is unless their Patriarch has such a discussion with them. Bringing about this consensus is another task of the designated AOU leader.

If I were advising the Patriarchs on how to achieve AOU and an AOC, I would tell them to designate one (or possibly two) Bishops (with the necessary leadership skills and gravitas) and lay professionals to commit to work full-time until AOU is achieved. I would also advise them to impose a reasonable but aggressive deadline for AOU and AOC.

Extremely occasional efforts of busy people and annual two-day meetings will never accomplish the goal. Until leadership is committed to an objective with a deadline, it cannot be achieved by humans. (However, the Holy Spirit can do anything!)

We will know the Patriarchs and/or ACOBUSA are serious about a truly unified face of Orthodoxy in America when they recruit and empower full-time dedicated

leadership to achieve this significant task and provide them with a deadline and resources. It is my humble hope that these AOC Roadmap chapters begin such a commitment.

Solving The Canonical Anomaly Reassignment of Bishops (without incumbents having to move).

As mentioned previously, one of the reasons the Patriarchs formed the ACOBUSA is because of the Canonical Anomaly, where there were multiple Bishops from different Orthodox Jurisdictions living in the same city. The previous proposal by the ACOBUSA's Canonical Regional Planning Committee to get Bishops who lived in the same city to move did not meet with great success. Some younger Bishops are fine moving, and some are not. So, when the logical solution does not work, creativity is called for in merger work. Thus, as part of my W.W.J.D Roadmap, I propose an extraordinarily simple solution to the Canonical Anomaly.

Currently, all Orthodox Bishops in America have parishes over which they are the shepherd in states and cities different from where they live. Indeed, new Orthodox Bishops are often given "sees" (Jurisdictions) in ancient places in church history until they might get a Jurisdiction in modernity. For example, the Metropolitan I served loyally as General Counsel for over 25 years and was first appointed Bishop of Troas before he became the first Bishop and later Metropolitan of Atlanta.

Troas was the ancient land of Troy on the Aegean Sea in the northwest corner of Asia Minor, which is now one of the most western parts of Turkey. I discovered this on one of my many visits to have an audience with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Constantinople (Istanbul) when I saw the drawing of Troas on the wall. During the entire time, Bishop Alexios was the Bishop of Troas, he lived in New York. When he was elevated to be Bishop of the then Diocese (now Metropolis) of Atlanta, he became the Bishop of Atlanta, where he lived. However, he had jurisdiction over the Greek Orthodox parishes in the eight Southeastern States.

That being the case, every current Orthodox Bishop can live where they are or want to live and just be placed in charge of parishes in whatever "Diocese" they would lead. (Again, for ease of reference, I will consistently refer to all American Orthosphere Bishops as "Bishops," which includes those who have the added rank of Metropolitan or Archbishop.)

Of course, when the AOC map is finally drawn, some Bishops may want to move their domicile and thus reduce geographic overlap. For others unwilling or unable to move, they can stay where they are and merely tend to the flock to which they have been assigned. In this way, there will never be two Bishops who have jurisdiction over the same city, and the real Canonical Anomaly can be addressed temporarily until new Bishops are elected and assigned to live in different cities. I can imagine some theologians identifying countless theoretical issues with the above AOC Roadmap solution for AOU, so I will leave it to them to argue their theoretical concerns while we get on with the business of bringing people closer to Christ and each other in unity.

The Challenges of Autonomy and Autocephaly.

So, what is this new AOC, and how does it relate to the ancient and historical Patriarchates? To answer this, I must first generally describe the two current forms of differentiation: Autonomy and Autocephaly.

Autonomy (literally, "self-ruled") is when the presiding Hierarchy within an Orthodox jurisdiction must be confirmed by one of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches. Otherwise, these autonomous churches are self-governing. Six current autonomous Orthodox churches include the Churches of Sinai, Finland, Japan, Ukraine, Estonia, and China (although, as usual, not every Patriarchate recognizes each of the above list of autonomous churches) (OrthodoxWiki, 2010).

Autocephaly (literally "self-headed") is when the presiding Hierarchy of a local Orthodox church does not report to any higher-ranking bishop or Patriarch. Autocephaly has been typically granted within the global Orthosphere by an Ecumenical Council or a Patriarch/Primate releasing a church under their jurisdiction in a different area from its material obligations to that higher authority while maintaining the full communion with the bishops of that area (OrthodoxWiki, 2022b).

The Roman Empire and history have acknowledged the original autocephalous Patriarchates of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch. Additional Autocephalous churches have been granted since then (e.g., Patriarchate of Moscow, Patriarchate of Serbia, Patriarchate of Romania, Patriarchate of Bulgaria, Patriarchate of Georgia, Church of Cyprus, Church of Greece, Church of Poland, Church of Albania, Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, Orthodox Church in America (autocephaly recognized by only by Moscow, Bulgaria, Georgia, Poland, and the Czech Lands and Slovakia), Orthodox Church of Ukraine (autocephaly recognized by Constantinople, Alexandria, Cyprus and Greece)(OrthodoxWiki, 2022b).

As you can see from the growing above list, throughout history, Ecumenical Councils have granted autocephaly, such as the Church of Cyprus (Third Ecumenical Council – 431AD), the Church of Jerusalem at the Quinisext Council (the council "in Trullo", in 692 AD) that established the Sixth Ecumenical Council Canons.

Additionally, autocephaly has been granted by a "mother" Church to a "daughter" Church such as (a) the Church of Antioch granting autocephaly to the Church of Georgia, (b) the Church of Russia granting autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) (although technically this grant of autocephaly is not formally recognized by many other autocephalous Churches), (c) the Church of Constantinople granting autocephaly to the Church of Ukraine (although this grant of autocephaly is not formally recognized by some of the other autocephalous Orthodox jurisdictions).

To make matters more complicated, some jurisdictions simply declared themselves autocephalous and were eventually recognized by others. This includes:

- (a) the Russian Orthodox Church, which declared itself autocephalous from Constantinople in 1448 and was eventually recognized by the four Patriarchs

existing at that time, proclaiming the Metropolitan of Moscow as the fifth in-rank Patriarch,

(b) the Church of Greece, which declared its autocephaly from the Church of Constantinople in 1833 following the Greek Revolution against the Ottomans (with the autocephaly not being recognized by the Church of Constantinople until 1850),

(c) the Church of Romania, which declared its autocephaly from the Church of Constantinople in 1865 which was not recognized until 1885,

(d) the Church of Albania, which declared its autocephaly from Constantinople in 1922 which was not recognized until 1937 (OrthodoxWiki, 2022b).

Other examples are even more nuanced (read that confusing) autocephaly stories such as:

(a) the Church of Bulgaria, which received autocephaly from the Church of Constantinople in 927, then was re-incorporated into the Church of Constantinople in the 11th century, then declared autocephaly again in 1186 (recognized in 1235), then lost autocephaly again, then was declared autocephalous by a decree of the Ottoman Sultan in 1872 which was disputed until Bulgarian autocephaly was recognized by Constantinople for the third time in 1945,

(b) the Church of Serbia received autocephaly from the Church of Constantinople in 1219, with the Ottoman Turks preventing the election of a Serbian Patriarch between 1463 and 1557, which led to the abolition of Serbian autocephaly 1766 until it again received autocephaly from the Church of Constantinople in 1879,

(c) the Church of Georgia with autocephaly, originally granted in the 5th century by the Church of Antioch, was abolished by the Russians in 1811, whereafter the Church of Georgia again declared autocephaly 1917 and was recognized by the Church of Russia in 1943 and by the Church of Constantinople in 1989 (OrthodoxWiki, 2022b).

Interestingly, not long after the ACOBUSA was created, a survey of the Orthodox Bishops was conducted, asking them what they saw as the resultant end of the ACOBUSA process. At that time, 52% advocated for full autocephaly, 15% thought an autonomous Church was the answer, 26% were undecided, and 7% did not believe in a united American Orthodox Church. Clearly, no consensus existed. Such a survey has not been repeated, and it would be beneficial to gauge the sentiment of the Bishops now that the ACOBUSA has existed and progressed for over a decade.

At this point, one might feel like this tortured history is why Yogi Berra developed the title to the previous section: "Anybody that ain't confused, don't know what's going on." Moreover, as I re-read this history, I am pained to again and again see what could be considered fractures of OIC within the Orthodox lineage. The big difference is that while autocephaly may be granted the churches stay nonetheless united in the fundamental theological principles. Some might dispute some of the above lineages and

reasons. Still, for purposes hereof, the relevant conclusion is that the granting of autocephaly is not always smooth, linear, permanent, or universally recognized within the global Orthosphere.

Nevertheless, ACOBUSA's goal was to create a universally recognized unified AOC in some form or fashion. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, of blessed memory, who led St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary, expressed a thoughtful recommendation to deal with the unhealthy ethnophyletism. He suggested we "for some time" maintain both the unique national cultures as we work toward the catholicity, canonical operation, and Unity Vision of "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic" church. It is almost 60 years since Fr. Schmemmann wrote his exceptional analysis of American Orthodox Unity. The question is whether the time has finally come in 2025 to achieve the Unity Vision of the Nicene Creed, the teachings of our Lord and Holy Scripture, and the mandates of the ACOBUSA's Charge, its Why, Mission, and Vision, as well as best operational efficiency practices.

The above-tortured history of autocephaly and autonomy is what leads me to want to avoid either of those paths, which seem to be fraught with disputes and less likelihood of universal acceptance or consensus. I thus set out to discover a new AOC Roadmap. Indeed, in my many decades of mergers, acquisitions, and outsourcing transactions, when one form of combination proved problematic, we had to think creatively (and outside the box) to create another path forward.

[My AOC Unity Roadmap - The New Concept Of "Affiliated Independence."](#)

Up to this point, I have identified many challenges the Orthodox church is facing and the failures along the path to unity in America. However, a critic who offers no solution is not a leader anyone should follow. The advancement of either Autocephaly or Autonomy has proven difficult and potentially unacceptable to one or more parties for different reasons. The best M&A lawyers know that one failure opens up other new creative opportunities and alternatives to overcome a deadlock. With the utmost humility, allow me to offer my AOC Roadmap using a new concept I call "**Affiliated Independence.**"

All of us with historical ties, emotional feelings, or oaths of allegiance to the original or subsequent Patriarchates of Orthodoxy and homelands cannot easily turn our backs on our history and those Bishops who have shepherded us to this point. At the same time, America today is different in many material respects from every other country of Orthodox lineage. I could move to Russia, but I would never be a Russian. In contrast, a Russian can move to the United States and become an American. It is one of the unique realities of our young country made up of more recent immigrants.

The challenges our PIPs face are, in many cases, the same or similar. While the soundness of the unchanged theology and sacramental life throughout the centuries remains as life-affirming as it did when Christ and His Apostles began them, the needs

of contemporary Americans require some fresh thinking and perspectives on the “operational” side of the parish house.

Note I am NOT changing the essential and fundamental theology or sacramental character of the Orthodox Church. However, we live in a different time and places. The ancient church did not have the internet, social media, many competing religious and non-religious theories, heating, air conditioning, sound systems, electricity, pews, carpeting, choir lofts, organs and instruments, and countless other creature comforts an American Christian church requires.

None of these improvements or the other operational changes over time, including expansive ministries, online services, and websites, changed the fundamental truth taught in the Orthodox church. If we are to achieve the dream of our beloved Patriarchs to have matured to the position where we can have our own church in America that retains its historic ties, then like any great merger/consolidation, the best of both worlds must be fostered, and a new age for Orthodoxy must be revealed in a country starving for the truth that Christ brings.

So, what does my **Affiliated Independence** look like? It has the best elements of association, autonomy, and autocephaly and continues to honor the ancient traditions, relationships, and practices of all Orthodox churches. The new AOC based on the model of Affiliated Independence will be described in greater detail below but is based on the foundational understanding of:

1. a truly common Orthodox theology, practice, and witness built on the timeless and accepted theology,
2. self-selection of its Bishops and other leaders who operate in a conciliar and consensus style,
3. a respectful, supportive affiliation and communications with the historical Patriarchates while no longer being subject to every aspect of their decision-making,
4. a commitment to measurable excellence and best practices in all its operations, and committed to ensuring the highest levels of the **S³** acute parish needs of Servant leadership, Stewardship and engagement, and Spiritual formation and religious education,
5. a conscious celebration of the rich traditions and histories of all countries of origin of Orthodoxy with a special focus on also celebrating the reality of the new American Orthodoxy,
6. the mechanism and commitment for continuous improvement to adapt to the changing realities while remaining true to the timeless teachings of Christ.

Obviously, the nuances of Affiliated Independence will continue to be refined over time. Indeed, the hallmark of any great organizational model is experimentation with creative attempts to do things more efficiently and effectively. To be sure, as with every new human endeavor, good faith mistakes will be made, and lessons will be learned. Change, trial and error, and improvement are the only ways organisms grow and mature.

This includes churches, as history shows us so clearly. Since we will not tinker with the **Foundational Christian Truths** previously identified in Chapter 15 of my Roadmap or any fundamental and foundational unchanging Orthodox theology, the fear of trying new things that will not all succeed should be ameliorated.

I offer one additional major consideration before presenting a high-level example of what Affiliated Independence could look like. As theologians and laity who do not do major mergers, acquisitions, consolidations, or outsourcing transactions read the description below, it will be easy to become overwhelmed and imagine it to be impossible. With all due respect, it may seem that way because you have never been a part of a team accomplishing it. Those of us who have been blessed to work on far more complicated multi-billion-dollar global mergers/consolidations/outourcing transactions that might make this AOC seem simple are neither daunted nor concerned about impossibility.

Indeed, we have processes and systems we use routinely in such complex transactions to facilitate each step with excellence and as much ease as is legally possible. Thus, if while reading the AOC Roadmap elements below you become overwhelmed and believe it to be impossible, I urge you to apply the Biblical principles of “*fear not*” and “*all things are possible to him that believeth*” (Mark 9:23). Transactions more complicated than forming the AOC happen every day.

Nevertheless, to begin the dialogue, I submit **Affiliated Independence AOC Roadmap** could have the following elements:

Affiliation. The new AOC will maintain affiliation with all historic Orthodox Churches and Patriarchates. In this way, the AOC gets the best of all worlds by having continued relationships with all its historic predicates and elements of autonomy are incorporated.

Independence. The new AOC will be independently governed through its own selection of presiding Bishops and lay organizational leadership. In this way, elements of autocephaly will be incorporated. While it will determine its leadership, it will maintain its affiliation by informing all historic Patriarchates and Churches of its decisions. While they will have no veto power or control, the AOC can incorporate a mechanism by which advice can be sought from the Patriarchs with respect but which the AOC is free to consider or ignore.

Self-Governance. This element of the new AOC allows for its Synod of all AOC Bishops (“**AOC Synod**”) to collectively govern as if they were an Ecumenical Council when important matters are to be considered. The Synod will select its leadership and officers (that satisfy legal requirements) to include a Chairman, one or more Vice Chairmen (each with assigned responsibilities), a Treasurer, a Communications Secretary, and such other temporary or permanent senior leadership positions as the AOC Synod deems productive (“**AOC Synod Executive Officers**”). This could include separate Bishops who oversee major functions such as all seminaries, religious education, youth/young adults, evangelization, engagement and stewardship, servant leadership ecumenical activities, and selected significant national and/or international ministries of the AOC.

Organization. A new non-profit corporation will be formed in the State with the laws most favorable for churches. All current national Jurisdictions will be merged into the new AOC corporation unless, for legal or operational reasons, it is more productive to maintain a separate entity as a subsidiary or integrated auxiliary affiliate of the AOC. The ultimate determination of legal structure, form of merger/consolidation, and appropriate subsidiaries or affiliates will ultimately be determined by the properly trained professionals that form the **AOC Implementation Team** (described below). All current Orthodox parishes will automatically become parishes under the AOC.

AOC Implementation Team. Many decisions in such a merger and consolidation will need to be led by appropriately trained teams of lawyers, financial, accounting, tax, labor and employment, real estate, environmental, business, non-profit, strategic planning, consultants, and operational experts with the requisite skills and experience. Specific attention will need to be devoted to teams of professionals committed to AOU and AOC to address all real estate matters, some of which have been unaddressed for too long.

Working teams with professional expertise will be formed on a pan-Orthodox basis where the best and brightest minds are sought regardless of Jurisdictional background. This is not a Noah's Ark process where we need two from each species of Orthodox. We need the best and brightest faithful professionals willing to use their God-given skills regardless of any differentiating characteristics. This AOC Implementation Team will also include the consultants necessary to help the AOC develop all its strategic plan elements and implement the Strategic Goals. Professionals will come in and out of this AOC Implementation Team as their needs, skills, expertise, and time dictate.

Strategic Plan – While some parts of the American Orthosphere have strategic plans that I have been blessed to facilitate, the majority do not. Moreover, once the new AOC is established, it would be essential for a new AOC-centric strategic plan to be developed with representative diversity from throughout the AOC American Orthosphere.

Branding – While this sounds like a secular term used by businesses, every organization has an identifiable brand that includes its logo, designs, colors, and other elements. A cross-denominational group of experts from the AOC Implementation Team will design and create all such elements subject to the approval of the AOC Synod Executive Officers. All these branding elements (including consistent logos, designs, website, and related items) will be shared with and ultimately implemented by all AOC parishes.

Calendar. While this is not an issue for many Christian denominations, Orthodoxy has been divided between what is referred to as the "old" (Julian) and "new" (Revised Julian) calendars. The AOC Synod will agree to adopt one that will be uniform for all AOC parishes. Indeed, this will be the first of many likely decisions the new AOC Synod will need to address and resolve in keeping with the rich traditions of the earliest Ecumenical Councils.

Offices. In today's America, the notion of one central office where every function and team member are located may be less necessary than previously. The parishes are distributed throughout the country, and with current technology, talented professionals

are very comfortable working remotely and traveling to the parishes as necessary. While I travel all over the country, I can easily have five or more ZOOM sessions a day with parishes anywhere, including globally, that are very productive.

Moreover, since the Chairmanship or other executive leaders of the AOC may change from time to time, a Bishop doesn't have to be in one central location. As with every national organization, the AOC should expect to have regional offices in multiple major cities throughout the country where the Bishop from that city will be located and where there will be additional meeting facilities. Many such locations already exist in the current Jurisdictions that can become the AOC Regional Offices.

Finances. As with the legal and real estate matters, the appropriately trained financial, banking, tax, and accounting expert **AOC Implementation Team** members will need to sort out over time and consolidate all financial accounts and matters. This area, like others, should provide great economies of scale. However, given the current inconsistent state of financial affairs in many branches of the American Orthosphere, the AOC Implementation Team experts will need to establish a consistent Chart of Accounts and a methodical and systematic approach to the consolidation. At the same time, it must maintain the operational effectiveness of the organizations being affected.

Location, Location Location. – The foregoing trinity is often repeated as the most important decision in a successful operation. The initial challenge is that while most Bishops do not reside in the same city, some cities do have multiple Orthodox Bishops, which creates the Canonical Anomaly that was one reason the ACOBUSA was formed. Many times, Bishops are willing to move to another city, and some of those overlapping Bishops could do that. For the older ones or those with other reasons, they would not be required to move and would be assigned a smaller geographic region as close to where they are as possible.

I am aware that at least one jurisdiction (OCA) requires Bishops to live within their Diocese. That rule can be abrogated in the Charter of the new AOC. If necessary, the large city housing multiple Bishops can be carved up with additional contiguous cities and states to form its own Diocese. In pursuit of OIC and a truly united AOC, a minor detail of where one resides should not be impossible to transcend. Christ and the Apostles never worried about this, and indeed, these first Bishops traveled constantly, often without spare tunics, staffs, bread, money, etc. (Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:3, 10:1).

At all times, the AOC must focus on the PIPs (Parishioners in Pews), APIPS (Absent PIPs), and FPIPs (Future PIPs) and what THEY need to get closer to Christ and each other. Candidly, a slavish adherence to an old practice (that is not part of Christ's theological foundational teachings) must make way when the circumstances of a new territory demand it.

New Territory Of Bishops. The current ACOBUSA reality is that most Bishops have geographic territories significantly larger than their ability to serve fully. In most such cases, the Bishop can't visit every parish and meet with his flock on a meaningful basis. Typically, the Bishops are invited for special occasions and then whisked through an aggressive schedule of activities, "rubber chicken lunches/dinners," and photo ops,

leaving them little to no time to meaningfully interact with their local clergy, the parish leadership, or PIPs. That is not how a shepherd tends his flock best.

If the current array of Bishops in the ACOBUSA are reallocated across the United States (with their consent), their territories can be significantly smaller. Thus, they can establish a much greater intimacy with their clergy and faithful. It will also be significantly less taxing on the Bishops and allow them more time to pray, write, teach, and do the other things for which they have been uniquely called. They must also find the time to care for themselves physically, mentally as well as spiritually.

It will be necessary for Bishops to have a very intimate and highly personal relationship with all their clergy, deacons, and monastics in their newly assigned smaller territory. The assignment by territory must consider the number of parishes and Orthodox Christians by territory so there is a reasonably consistent allocation of parishes and faithful to each Bishop. Moreover, Bishops must be encouraged to plan joint and cooperative activities with their neighboring Bishops. For example, one more centralized retreat center for youth summer camps and adult retreats can be jointly undertaken by the neighboring Diocese. Cooperation and not competition must be one of the Core Values and hallmarks of the new AOC.

The AOC Synod Executive Officers must be freed of extensive parish and clergy responsibilities, allowing them to focus more intently on the executive area of their primary responsibility. Moreover, as many functions as can be efficiently centralized should be accomplished so as to maintain universal best practices and extreme economies of scale.

If major global corporations can have one Human Resources operation serving the entire world, the AOC can also have highly efficient and centralized functions and operations for greatest efficiency and cost-saving (e.g., IT, record-keeping, financial accounting, banking, legal, real estate, communications, training, new program development, and other traditional functions of large organizations).

Focused Role of Bishops. One of the primary benefits of any merger or consolidation is the synergies created. Instead of having every administrative function recreated in every Orthodox Jurisdiction or Diocese (with widely varying competencies), the roles and responsibilities for all AOC functions can be assigned to specially hired and expert staff capable of executing the administrative responsibilities much more effectively and efficiently. The reality is that very few of the Bishops have had training or experience in the operations and administrative functions the current Diocese and Jurisdictions perform.

A unified AOC can hire subject matter experts for most operational functions and even ministries, thus freeing up the Bishops to do what God has called them to do, namely be shepherds of their flock and strong supporters of their clergy. All clergy need to have a deep and trusting relationship with their Bishop under whose omophorion (jurisdiction) they have authority to minister to the faithful. Bishops (and clergy) can return to their primary ecclesial and spiritual formation roles and delegate operational and administrative functions to the laity better trained to perform those functions.

How Will This Be Funded? The creation of the AOC is a massive undertaking, although it seems far less daunting than twelve mostly uneducated peasants being told to “*make disciples of all nations.*” Much greater and more difficult things have been undertaken, and with far fewer consequences hanging in the balance if it was not successful. Many of the current American Orthosphere Jurisdictions have financial foundations, resources and endless numbers of talented volunteers to help complete this work. As consolidation activities take place and properties are sold and efficiently combined, more capital will become available. And yes, clergy and other employee pension matters must be addressed and reconciled, as always happens in every merger. But the financial secret weapon key is what I describe next.

Venture Philanthropy. The American Orthosphere is blessed with a large number of Billionaires and Millionaires who can be approached to invest in the new concept form of venture philanthropy. Many of these blessed individuals became successful through venture capital, where wealthy people pool their money to buy, consolidate, build, and then sell companies, which earns them a healthy return on their investment.

A modified version of that model is where successful individuals contribute to a fund not for an earthly return but to fund transformational activities for Christ’s Church. The return they receive is seeing the transformational results from their investments and their greater confidence that they are using their gifts in pursuit of a good account before the awesome judgments seat of Christ.

Most major colleges and universities have mastered the technique of raising transformational dollars to be invested in endowments to accomplish targeted educational goals. The same is true of hospitals and other institutions. For faithful disciples of Jesus Christ who have been blessed financially, there is no better investment they can make. If you identify the American Orthosphere “Chuck Feeney’s” (see story in Chapter 10 of my Roadmap), there is no limit to the financial support available.

Patriarchal And Historic Church Foundations.

Another unique element of my Affiliated Independence model is that the AOC will replicate the enormous success of the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s “Bartholomew Foundation” (see previous discussion) that establishes a sizeable permanent endowment to ensure the Ecumenical Patriarch has sufficient financial capital to support its survival and success.

A similar endowment will be established for each historical See of Orthodoxy and Patriarchate to ensure their survival even though the AOC is independent. There are those American Orthosphere donors to which the continued protection and safety of their “mother church” is of paramount importance. In this way, the AOC, while independent, maintains an affiliation with its point of origin. This affiliation extends to inviting all foreign Patriarchs to America for all major celebrations, events, educational sessions, and other spectacular events to celebrate a unified Orthodox Church that has not existed since the first and second centuries AD.

“The key to abundance is meeting limited circumstances with unlimited thoughts” (Marianne Williamson)

You might feel overwhelmed by what you have read. Yet, as the title of this section suggests, there are many more significant and less important elements of my Affiliated Independence AOC approach to be conceived, presented, developed, refined, and implemented. I merely wanted to present an extremely high-level outline Roadmap of an entirely new concept that thus can be defined however those faithful to OIC and AOU can propose. I am happy to be a part of these conversations and share the many additional details I have sketched out, and I can also accept others taking these raw ideas around the track and improving on them without me. AOU is the key, not me!

Before considering this preliminary Affiliated Independence OIC AOC model further, I believe it is imperative to identify the motivation as the furtherance of the **Transformational Leadership (TL)** example of the Lord. Scholars of TL focus on being successful change agents by:

1. inspiring followers to pursue excellence,
2. a righteous new Vision,
3. for an exciting future,
4. aligned with fundamental Core Values and a central and inspiring Why,
5. in the face of constantly changing circumstances.

(Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Burns, 1978; Dixon, 2021; Northouse, 2022; Sosik & Jung, 2018).

It should be clear that the Unity Vision of a “House United” AOC is a better option than the status quo. It addresses the teachings of our Lord and Holy Scripture, implements the Chambésy Decision, ACOBUSA’s Charge, ACOBUSA Why, Mission, and Vision, and effectively and efficiently addresses the root cause challenges affecting parishes and Jurisdictions. Now, we can briefly explore more detailed elements of the AOC Path forward.

An Old Idea Whose Time Has Come.

The challenge of charting a path for American Orthosphere unity is not new. Orthodox theologian and scholar Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, of blessed memory, wrote a prescient and thoughtful analysis entitled *The Problems of Orthodoxy in America* (Schmemmann, 1964). Among the many critical conclusions, he noted that historically, Orthodoxy was the predominant faith, if not official or semi-official religion, in every other country where Orthodoxy was present.

Thus, there was an essential integration of national culture with the local Orthodox Church. When the immigrants from predominantly Orthodox countries emigrated to the United States, they brought their own integrated national culture and church practices. However, Orthodoxy in America represents an exceedingly small minority of the

population in a country with a distinctly secular orientation and where a unique and diverse “melting pot” culture predominates.

Why Do Consolidations, Combinations, Or Mergers Not Succeed?

As I propose a major consolidation, it is worth briefly exploring why particular consolidations/combinations/mergers fail. While those in the field have many war stories and theories, I submit that the top 8 reasons for failure include:

1. No real reason and sense of urgency to combine,
2. Absence of a formal deadline,
3. The timing is not optimal,
4. Lack of commitment by the required stakeholders,
5. “Friendly Fire” usually in the form of internal people trying to protect their turf, positions, identity, authority, agendas, financial situations, etc.,
6. External forces fear the impact of the consolidation,
7. Lack of the requisite resources and experienced and dedicated leaders and teams charged with accomplishing the consolidation,
8. It is demanding work.

People of faith also know that any work must be blessed by the Lord and assisted by the Holy Spirit. I will briefly assess the above items in relation to the ACOBUSA’s Charge.

Challenges 1, 2, & 3: The data of the decline in Orthodoxy presented throughout my Roadmap should be motivation enough to pursue this Unity Vision work diligently. However, the Chambésy Decision never set an actual deadline to achieve the ACOBUSA’s Charge, and thus, there is no internal or external ACOBUSA accountability. Unless the ACOBUSA Bishops and supporting teams adopt a sense of urgency and a deadline to reverse the negative church trends in pursuit of a “*good account before the awesome judgment seat of Christ,*” we will not achieve the ACOBUSA’s Charge or AOU in our lifetimes. Put simply, **deadlines drive decisions and direction!**

Challenges 4 & 5: These two items are the most difficult to assess and discuss and may be the “elephant in the room.” Since the parishioners have little visibility into the ACOBUSA, they are not pushing for anything from it. All parishes need trained clergy, effective ministries, programs, processes, and support to address their many parish S³ and other challenges; however, they never think of the ACOBUSA or their national Jurisdiction as the solution to those challenges. Indeed, and regrettably, they likely never think of the ACOBUSA at all.

While the Orthodox Church is far from a typical non-profit or a business, it might help to examine a very successful paradigm and proven strategy. If you are the kind of smaller thinker who gets triggered when business analogies are used in church discussions, by all means, skip this next section. I am not trying to be offensive but acknowledging that some people have greater difficulty applying analogies and

paradigms in different environments and may not understand that all successful “business” principles always have a Biblical foundation.

How To Take Something Great And Scale It Nationwide – A National Solutions Organizational Model.

A **National Solutions Organizational Model (“NSOM”)** adopts and adapts great concepts and causes them to multiply on a large scale efficiently and effectively. An NSOM is a type of organization that has a national orientation focused on developing the best practices, programs, products, and services and then optimizes and distributes them regionally and locally to organizations closest to the beneficiary of the product or service for training and delivery to that end user.

By inventing best practices once and delivering them often through a distributed process, a national organization can most efficiently provide best-in-class results at scale. This model has been tested and proven repeatedly throughout time and in varied environments. Examples in the non-profit and business world include a “franchise” like model (e.g., American Cancer Society, United Way, Northpoint Church, Chick-fil-A, etc.) It is helpful to look at how this proven NSOM motivates human behavior, efficiently solves large-scale challenges, and how the NSOM applies to the infinitely more worthy work of the church.

A unified AOC NSOM could efficiently develop the best **S³** (**S**ervant leadership, **S**tewardship and engagement, **S**piritual formation, and religious education) and other ministries, resources, processes, systems, programs, tools, training, products, and best practices solutions to effectively meet the needs of the parishes and PIPs/parishioners (“stakeholders”). National delivery can be easier or more complex depending on how it is designed and distributed. However, having Dioceses regionally available and geographically closer to the parishes and parishioners can allow for any appropriate regional variations to be iterated.

After some inevitable consolidation of unviable parishes unable to survive on their own (or those too close to each other to make sense to maintain independently), Orthodox parishes can be all optimized to better serve the needs of the faithful with proven and effective ministry solutions and approaches. This NSOM model is one of the most effective for achieving goals and exceeding people’s needs nationally with local delivery. This approach can help us bring people closer to Christ and each other with appropriate adaptation.

Selected NSMO Headwinds For The AOC

Decades of research into human nature identify how difficult it is for some leaders to give up any perceived autonomy, authority, or financial resources. And yet those same decades of research prove that the “Servant Leaders” who subordinate titles, positions, and economic and personal concerns to achieving a righteous vision are the most effective ones, achieve outstanding results, and change the world. Indeed, these humble servant leaders emulate the behaviors of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. True Servant

Leaders enhance their influence the more they focus on developing people's God-given gifts to work together to achieve a righteous and inspiring vision.

I repeat the exemplary leadership teaching from St. John Chrysostom:

The most basic task of the Church leader is 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. Only a person who can discern the gifts of others and can humbly re-joice at the flowering of those gifts is fit to lead the Church (Chrysostom, 1964, p. 44; Kostakis, 2018).

St. John directly identified those who he believed were "fit" to lead the church. It is just such Servant Leaders not focused on autonomy, personal authority, or financial resources that can create a "House United" AOC.

Finally, ethnophyletism is still alive and well in some parishioners and parishes. Any vision for a "House United" AOC must allow people to continue to have outlets to celebrate and share their ethnic heritage. While this problem was very prevalent 60 years ago when Fr. Schmemmann envisioned unity (Schmemmann, 1964), it is less of an issue today.

Many Orthodox parishes have effectively integrated parishioners of different ethnicities into their parishes by celebrating all their ethnic diversity. This includes reciting the Lord's Prayer in multiple languages and celebrating each other's national days, foods, and dances to build better pan-Orthodox fellowship without detracting from the centrality and universality of our shared Orthodox liturgical worship and sacraments. Thus, continued sensitivity to historic ethnic pride and traditions held by some is easily possible and not incompatible with a "House United" AOC.

Challenge 6: There are no apparent external adversaries other than the secular antagonists to all religions in America and the constant forces of the evil one seeking to divide Christ's church. It is possible that a mother country Patriarch may not bless a Jurisdiction under their Omophorion to participate in a "House United" AOC. However, the objections of one (or even a few) can no longer impede the needed progress of the majority, who will substantially benefit from the Unity Vision of "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church."

If a prompt solution is not found to remove the obstacles created by a particular foreign mother church, then that Jurisdiction will choose to be left out of the "House United" AOC until the Holy Spirit deems their engagement appropriate. The needs of the vast majority can no longer be held hostage by the objections of a few or a distant foreign mother church leader, as has been the case at times for the ACOBUSA.

Challenges 7 & 8: Never before in the recorded history of the Orthodox churches in America has there been such an abundance of talent, leadership, accomplishment, and financial resources. Putting together exceptional, diverse teams of the laity from all Jurisdictions to tackle each critical aspect of a unification implementation and strategy is now much easier by God's grace.

One positive consequence of the last decade has been the time to recruit ACOBUSA committees of talented and diverse laity in many functional and operational areas necessary for successful consolidation. The ACOBUSA's Secretariat and Committees have already identified and formed good working relationships among many professionals with expertise in joint ventures, consolidations, mergers, finance, operations, technology, law, youth, ministries, stewardship, leadership, training, capital campaigns, real estate, human resources, risk management, and other required disciplines necessary to achieve the Unity Vision of a "House United" AOC. This last reality makes me confident that this is the time to complete the ACOBUSA's Charge.

In addition, the establishment of IPAs (InterOrthodox Parish Associations) in various parts of the country is extremely helpful in progressing the AOC vision. As faithful from throughout the American Orthosphere pray, worship, socialize, and work on philanthropic projects together, the artificial divides of ethnic origins will diminish. The advancement of a unified American Orthodox ethos and purpose will allow us to help bring people closer to Christ and each other. The fact that the Lilly Endowment saw so much value in this idea it provided a \$1.25 million grant for the IPA project underscores how transformational and valuable this program can be.

[We Must All Be In This Together - The Wisdom Of Two Respected Theologians with Strategic Foresight, Historic Hindsight And Present Insight.](#)

I will never forget the time I first met Orthodox Metropolitan Kallistos Ware of Diokleia, of blessed memory, on his visit to Atlanta for a profound theological talk. His relaxed manner and distinctive British accent made him a joy to listen to and learn from. Just a few months before his passing, I was blessed to work with him to secure rights to some of his writings for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese to use for an APP of all the church services for the parishioners. He graciously offered his unconditional consent for the Archdiocese to use his works for the enlightenment of the faithful.

Metropolitan Kallistos was mildly amused that this American church lawyer was calling him for a rights consent when he always wrote for others to use what God had given him and not for him to protect. Without knowing it, he reaffirmed my previously formed intent to ensure my Roadmap was available for free for all of Christ's parishes who could benefit from it.

Paradoxically, this also runs afoul of my many decades of protecting the intellectual property rights of my media and celebrity clients. But that esteemed man of God, like this humble and unworthy servant, was richly blessed and saw the need to share what he had with others. He is sorely missed, and the world is darker because of the absence of his light.

Metropolitan Kallistos delivered a talk about the Orthodox Divine Liturgy (Ware, 2011, 2012) where he shared the definition of λειτουργία (Liturgeon or liturgy), which translates as δουλειά του λαού or "work of the people." He humorously declared it to be "dubious etymology but good theology." These critical words essential to an Orthodox

practice of the faith mean “a shared corporate action done by many people in common action and something we can only do together.” This beloved Metropolitan said that in the Orthodox Divine Liturgy, there must be no passive spectators but only active participators (Ware, 2011, 2012).

Metropolitan Kallistos explained that to be a person is to be in a relationship. (“I need you in order to be myself”). He explained that in the Divine Liturgy, we express our human nature in relation to another. This reinforces that a priest cannot do the Divine Liturgy alone and can only do it in cooperation with another. Metropolitan Kallistos pointed out that in the Divine Liturgy, we rarely say “I” and mostly say “we” as in the prayers “We offer you this spiritual worship without the shedding of blood” “send down your Holy Spirit upon us” (Ware 2011, 2012).

He noted further that in the English text of the Lord’s Prayer, we use the words “us” 5 times, “our” 3 times, and “we” once, but we never say me, mine, or I. The anomaly rests in the modern Nicene Creed since, in the original version from the Ecumenical Council, it began, “We believe.” However, as happens when humans are involved, Metropolitan Kallistos noted that when it was transferred for use in the Sacrament of Baptism, it made sense for the person being baptized to make a personal affirmation of faith (Ware 2011, 2012).

When Baptism was later reintegrated with the Divine Liturgy, the Baptismal form of the Nicene Creed was retained with the first person. However, the correct liturgical expression is “we,” not “me.” In this brief exegesis, we again see how man changed rituals and why. Once again, men made changes for convenience. But for this to be a source of separation from Christ in each other seems an anathema to me.

Metropolitan Kallistos also noted that we also pray, “Let us love one another with one mind so that we may confess.” He concluded his remarks by saying there is no true confession of faith in God the Trinity and no true celebration of the Divine Liturgy without mutual love. This well-regarded Orthodox theologian provided us with a wealth of understanding about how things change over time for human reasons, which should not divide Christ’s church or family.

In the 4th Century AD, St. John Chrysostom discussed how everything in the Eucharistic celebration is shared in common. The priest does not offer thanksgiving alone, but the whole people give thanks to them. This underscores the corporate dimension of the liturgy that the priest cannot celebrate alone, and this critical religious service must be celebrated in union. The priest even asks for the consent of the people.

Metropolitan Kallistos previously discussed the repeated use of the word “Amen” (even in the Eucharistic prayer where the priest says, “This is my body...” and the people should proclaim “amen.”) It is the Amen that sanctifies the prayers and actions that is the expression of the laity to make the prayer or action or divine offer their own. (Can I get an Amen?) Metropolitan Kallistos teaches us that the “Amen” expresses the corporate shared aspect of the Divine Liturgy and is a natural expression of faith and an embracing of the message as the truth.

Thus, “Amen,” Metropolitan Kallistos advises, is a personal commitment that means “I make the action and words my own.” In this way, as well as so many others, the Divine Liturgy can actually become the δουλειά του λαού (work of the people). As a footnote, I note that to amplify further the work of the “people” concept in the Divine Liturgy, Metropolitan Kallistos strongly advocated for congregational singing. I know this may anger some of the choir ministry participants but ask yourself if your concern is the pride in your performance vs the engagement of the people.

The point of this journey down the rabbit hole with distinguished Orthodox Theologians of the 21st and 4th Centuries is to underscore the critical importance of not just bringing people closer to Christ, which is a central goal. But the journey we are on is also to bring people closer to each other so we can share in “δουλειά του λαού or “work of the people. Both liturgically but also in ministry. This is why, in my Roadmap, I so often repeat the ACOBUSA WHY Statement I was so blessed to help develop. We are called to bring people closer to Christ and each other. A unified American Orthodox Church is a giant and transformational step on that journey.

Can This Be Done Now?

With the utmost humility and gratitude to God for His many blessings bestowed on this sinful and unworthy servant, for over 40 years as a lawyer and over 30 years in service to His church, I believe I understand some of the significant challenges and opportunities of integration and optimization when combining disparate entities and teams. I also appreciate the critical need for comprehensive visioning and strategic planning for a consolidated entity. It is essential to carefully plan and execute with excellence the integration of similar functional areas, processes, teams, cultures, assets, systems, technologies, properties, and finances.

This is no easy task, which is why some estimates suggest that between 70%-90% of mergers fail. However, the many decades of meeting Christ’s disciples throughout the United States, both clergy and laity, give me the confidence to conclude that the Unity Vision of a “House United” AOC is now imminently possible if we follow a thoughtful Roadmap and address the three significant challenges reiterated in the final section of this Chapter.

One Possible AOC Roadmap To Create A “House United” American Orthodox Church.

Any complicated consolidation, joint venture, merger, or unification project requires a systematic approach with dedicated specialists and best project management practices. Outlining all such elements is far too involved for my Roadmap. However, once the ACOBUSA prioritizes this, a high-level summary includes the following 5-step process.

Step 1. Form The AOC Implementation Team - A diversified AOC Implementation Team of experienced lay professionals with joint ventures, mergers, project management, relevant substantive skills, and strategic planning experience must be recruited and agree

to work as hard as necessary on creating the AOC. In addition, a Bishop (or two) must agree to work full-time to support the AOC Implementation Team concerning theological and other issues requiring Episcopal assistance. This AOC Implementation Team will include the current ACOBUSA Director of Operations and staff.

Step 2. Complete Due Diligence Assessment Of Critical Issues And Creation Of The AOC Roadmap - The AOC Implementation Team will complete a full due diligence analysis of all required actions, in sequence, that must be completed. They will also use project management tools to scope out all work streams and dependencies fully, assign them to the appropriate individuals and teams, and establish the timeline for each step. They will also present a comprehensive “**AOC Roadmap**” that outlines the necessary steps and timeline. This AOC Roadmap will address how the AOC is optimally organized synodically and in such a way as to resolve the Canonical anomalies, including by allocating all the Bishops to their own manageable Diocese geographies (regardless of where they may have a residence).

An expanded organizational model will inevitably need to include more Dioceses in the aggregate than currently exist in any current American Orthodox Jurisdiction. This restructuring allows all Bishops to cover smaller geographies and thus be more visible and accessible to their faithful. Therefore, the Canonical anomalies can be resolved (without having any Bishop move) in such a way as to make their jobs less personally taxing and allow them to be more effective and personally engaged shepherds with their faithful. In addition, during this phase, we will identify the funding needed to achieve the AOC Roadmap and possible donors who are excited to complete this long-held vision of a united AOC.

Step 3. Obtain Necessary Approvals - The AOC Implementation Team and supporting Bishop(s) will present the AOC Roadmap to the ACOBUSA and any other required individuals/entities to obtain all necessary approvals. This will be the time for all the Bishops to, by consensus, raise their voices to the heavens as one to proclaim a Unity Vision to fulfill their calling and create “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Orthodox church” in America. Once the necessary approvals are obtained domestically, any required Patriarchal approval processes can begin since it is critical to have a local consensus before obtaining international approvals.

I am not minimizing the separate and essential Patriarchal approvals or how long they will take; however, I merely do not want to distract from the summary five steps to engage in that protracted dialogue. Suffice it to say, those Patriarchs whose approval will be necessary should be informed fully and constantly at every step of the process so that ideas can be socialized and well-accepted before it is presented for approval. The more one is informed and engaged, the easier consent is to obtain. Finally, the separate and essential venture philanthropy donors can be solicited and will be asked to contribute the funds to complete the AOC Roadmap work streams.

Step 4. Execution of the AOC Roadmap - The AOC Roadmap will follow the outlined steps. The progress will be publicly shared with all stakeholders. Indeed, the AOC Roadmap must include a focused professional communications strategy and plan. If ever there was time to provide hope and a vision for a brighter future, this is that time. And the AOC Roadmap is such a vision. During this phase, it is likely that some planned steps

may prove impossible to complete or finish on the schedule established. In such cases, an appropriate workaround or contingency plan will be established to deal with matters requiring more time.

Step 5. Completion and Celebration - Upon completion of the AOC Roadmap, before the new conciliar synodical governance and synergistic operations begin, a national AOC celebration should occur to thank God for His patience as we finally worked together to achieve His Unity Vision for His Church.

Many more detailed sub-steps in this process are beyond the scope of this Roadmap. At the same time, even more synergies and shared improvements for our parishes and parishioners will occur along the way as the Holy Spirit guides and blesses this holy work.

AOU AOC CONCLUSION.

By now, dear reader, it should be clear that I am strongly advocating you join me in getting serious about Εἰς μίαν, ἁγίαν, καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν” One, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, and the AOC Roadmap.

Summary of the Three Biggest ACOBUSA Challenges to Achieve American Orthodox Unity and an American Orthodox Church.

Perhaps the current tactical biggest challenges to overcome to accomplish the ACOBUSA's Charge and the Unity Vision of a “House United” AOC are:

1. The ACOBUSA has not demonstrated that this work is a priority and does not have a timeline or deadline.
2. No ACOBUSA Bishop(s) is/are assigned to devote all the time necessary on a full-time basis to this task and process.
3. No lay experienced transaction team and project manager(s) are in place and fully committed to doing what is necessary.

First, the Chambésy Decision did not set a completion timeline or deadline for the ACOBUSA's Charge. Similarly, neither have the ACOBUSA Bishops discussed any such deadline or timetable or made this work a priority. Without a timeline and the sense of urgency of a deadline, busy people will not properly prioritize this work.

Second, every Bishop is fully deployed trying to manage their Diocese/Metropolis or other full-time operational responsibility, often without sufficient support staff and necessary resources. Thus, as soon as they leave the annual 2- or 3-day ACOBUSA meeting, all Bishops immediately return their focus exclusively to their primary Diocesan/Jurisdictional duties. They have no time or resources to focus on achieving the ACOBUSA's Charge. Proof of this is how many of the ACOBUSA committees achieve very little due to the inability (or, in some cases, unwillingness) of Bishops to devote the necessary time and effort.

On top of this, every American Orthosphere Jurisdiction is left to reinvent the same wheel and establish countless redundant services, programs, and functions, all without sufficient resources or employees to do the work. A unified AOC can develop the best practices once through an NSOM and implement them in every Diocese and parish, thus making the work of the Bishop more focused and effective.

Third, a Bishop alone cannot complete this monumental and historical task, just as Christ modeled the need to recruit Apostles and disciples. A unified AOC will require many disciples consisting of an experienced team with a deep bench of expertise in various fields, all organized by effective project management. Every consolidation, joint venture, merger, or unification project requires a diverse group of committed individuals with the time, energy, enthusiasm, and focus to achieve the vision and objective. This AOC Unity Vision is no different. Fortunately, such individuals exist within the diversity of the American Orthosphere Jurisdictions.

The Bottom Line.

Please let me summarize succinctly and clearly. No “House United” AOC will be possible, and we will not achieve the ACOBUSA’s Charge and its Why, Mission, and Vision without:

- (a) a timetable and deadline,
- (b) the ACOBUSA and at least one or two qualified Bishop leaders establishing the Unity Vision as their full-time top priority, and
- (c) a dedicated, diversified, professional transaction team to plan and execute all the necessary activities using classic project management.

Until the ACOBUSA makes American Orthodox Unity (AOU) a top priority by recruiting a committed professional team devoted to achieving a systematic and methodical plan on an agreed-upon timeline, the Unity Vision of “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic American Orthodox Church” will remain nothing more than a dream. I love good dreams. I prefer effective actions that lead to great results.

This AOC Roadmap chapter asks a simple yet critical question: “Does Christ want His AOC to be a “House Divided” or a “House United” in keeping with the Nicene Creed Unity Vision?” If you are not persuaded that this “House United” AOC Vision is the optimal answer, then I thank you for your time reading this far. I urge you to publish an alternative plan to achieve the Unity Vision of “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Orthodox church” and accomplish the ACOBUSA’s Charge from the Chambésy Decision.

Our Orthodox Study Bible shares many historical stories of people dividing Christ’s church. However, since Christ established His church, there are precious few examples of those who successfully brought it together. Let me say that again. Dividing is always easier than uniting. But today, we can do something very different in this extraordinary land of opportunity into which we have been planted. Something Holy. Something unifying. Something that can help us with a “*good account before the*

awesome judgment seat of Christ.” Something that can bring people closer to Christ and each other. Or we can do none of that.

I pray that you agree that it is worth fighting for His will as we praise His name and seek His forgiveness and life eternal in “μία, ἁγία, καθολικὴ καὶ ἀποστολικὴ Ὀρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία” – “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Orthodox church.” All glory to God!

[Bonus Time PostScript If My AOC Roadmap Is Delayed – A Roadmap For the New Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Charter.](#)

What the above discussion convicts me to do is to advocate for OIC and unity. However, it may not be the Holy Spirit’s will to allow that work to begin, as I have outlined in my Roadmap. Thus, I believe I would be remiss if I did not start closer to home and try and answer the same question for my own **Greek Orthodox Archdiocese** (“GOA”) Jurisdiction.

The Ecumenical Patriarch canceled and then suspended the Charter he granted to the GOA. The GOA, through its Archbishop announced it would pursue a reorganization and new Charter to reflect more current realities and then postponed work on its reorganization plan at the request of the Ecumenical Patriarch. Thus, we remain with the old charter still temporarily in force with the assurance it will be replaced at some time sooner rather than later. But how and by what?

I spent so much time studying and crafting a Roadmap for the far more difficult and complicated new unified AOC (American Orthodox Church) that I discovered that the same **National Solutions Organizational Model (NSOM)** model would likely work extremely well for the GOA in the interim. Thus, in the spirit of my Roadmap and after working for three decades with GOA parishes, I humbly offer the following **GOA Roadmap** for consideration with the knowledge that this, too, will likely evoke strong emotions from my brothers and sisters and require adaptation or alternatives.

History First.

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese was formed 103 years ago in the United States. For its first fifty to seventy-five years, it focused primarily on delivering the liturgical and sacramental timeless faith as best it could and, most importantly, helping its faithful Greek immigrants assimilate into their new homeland and learn how to be Americans.

This second assimilation objective was challenging given America’s multicultural nature, which maintained an intentional practical and legal separation between the church, government, and the “public square.” Most “cradle Greek Orthodox” parishioners for the first five to seven decades were first or second-generation Greek immigrants. In Greece, over 98% of its citizens are members of the Greek Orthodox Church, which is essentially the state religion and is enshrined in the country’s constitution, where the government pays for the churches and the clergy salaries (Evason, 2019). This

presented a daunting Servant Leadership challenge for the GOA (the first leg of my **S³** stool).

For over one hundred years, the GOA has attempted to provide a third area of education about the necessity of financially supporting the local churches since there was no governmental assistance or resources (i.e., the Stewardship and Engagement second leg of my **S³** stool). At the same time, the GOA attempted to teach how to practice the disciplined Orthodox faith (i.e., Spiritual formation and religious education, which **is** the third leg of my **S³** stool). This objective of spiritual formation had to occur in a foreign land and culture that not only did not understand Orthodoxy but had its own many different religious beliefs and traditions (e.g., sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, etc.) (Barrett, n.d.).

After having worked with over 1,000 American Orthosphere parishes, completing my Financial Stewardship Analysis for over 275 parishes, and strategic plans that cover over 26% of American Orthosphere Christians, by all objective measures, I respectfully conclude that the GOA has not succeeded (a nicer way of saying “failed”) at providing its parishes and cradle Orthodox faithful **S³** effective Servant leadership, Stewardship and engagement, or Spiritual formation and religious education training and programs. The proof of that embarrassing and inescapable conclusion is the actual data showing the immense challenges being faced by GOA parishes, which continue to have all the **S³** problems notwithstanding over 100 years of good faith efforts.

Interestingly, over the last 15 years, most growth in the American Orthodox Churches has occurred through converts to Orthodoxy from other faith traditions, many of whom already understood, practiced, and engaged in effective Christian stewardship and ministry engagement. These converts completed newly created catechetical educational programs to teach them the Orthodox faith’s fullness properly. However, such SFARE programs for converts were neither consistent nor always demonstrably good or effective. In fact, there were no objective guidelines for success being pursued and thus no metrics to assess effectiveness.

I mean no disrespect to the countless individuals (me included) who, in good faith, pursued programs in one or more of the **S³** most critical areas. But honesty, not illusions, is essential in leadership. As the old saying goes, “Facts don’t care about your opinions or feelings.” And the facts are that none of us who have toiled in the American Orthosphere vineyard would be happy defending the overall poor and declining results (with a few exceptions) the GOA and American Orthosphere are experiencing if this were the moment we stood before the “awesome judgment seat of Christ.” I know this for a fact after having presented the empirical data and asked enough Bishops, clergy, and lay leaders if this was the story they wanted to tell in the II Corinthians 5:10 Moment and watched them tear up.

A.D.P. Trinity Model To Make American Greek Orthodox Church



Disciples.

Since 33 AD, Jesus Christ has trusted us to be stewards of His Holy Orthodox Christian Church. There are currently approximately 230 Million Orthodox adherents globally. The GOA has over 500,000 parishioners distributed among approximately 550 parishes divided into nine regional Metropolises and one national **Archdiocese** (“**A**”). However, the current **A** offices have, after many decades, not been able to provide comprehensive, proven, best-in-class practical solutions and teams to address the three S³ challenges parishes face. Accordingly, every GOA parish I have worked with complains about the funds (affectionately called the “allocation”) they send to the Archdiocese for which they expressed concern they were not getting helpful solutions in return.

(I cannot help myself and must add that the entire GOA “allocation” system is completely untethered to and inconsistent with, a proper Orthodox understanding of stewardship and generosity and giving of “first fruits.” Thus, this system of paying for the **A** has earned the privately used, more accurate descriptive title of “tax system.” I acknowledge those involved in the process are triggered by and hate the word tax, as do I. But again, that is how the system has been inappropriately designed, implemented, and is perceived. I repeatedly cite W. Edwards Deming and paraphrase his conclusion that when the majority of people perceive something the same way, your telling them they are wrong is unproductive and causes you to lose credibility. There is a huge difference between compliance due to fear and joyful giving. The “allocation/tax” system must be replaced by proper Orthodox stewardship, or the **A** will continue to lose credibility and be perceived adversarially. But again, I digress.)

A Roadmap For The GOA - The A.D.P. Trinity Model.

To address the need for a revised Charter from the Ecumenical Patriarch for the GOA and to address its empirically validated most critical big three S³ challenges, I humbly and respectfully propose it begin a reorganization process over three years using my “**A.D.P. Trinity Model.**”

The **A** currently has no articulated and generally accepted Why, Mission or Vision Statements, Core Values, or Strategic Plan. Thus, during an initial “**Strategic Development Period,**” the **A** and new regional **Dioceses** (“**D**”) (proposed below) should reach a consensus on a Strategic Plan. I believe the Strategic Planning process should be done using the method defined in great detail in Chapter 7 of my Roadmap (or some other effective process) to include a diverse and broad representative cross-section of the GOA Bishops, clergy, and laity from throughout the country in order to reach the broadest consensus. Past efforts have concentrated on a relatively small number of “insiders” designing such processes and elements. Candidly, groupthink and the desire to please the Bishop limited the creativity and consideration of other possibilities and top priorities.

While I strongly advocate for a broad-based and highly participative comprehensive SP process that represents the diverse needs of the GOA, with the utmost humility based on my experience, I can offer the following starting points if no proper SP process is pursued:

Proposed New WHY Statement (the fundamental purpose an organization exists)

Follow Christ to Light the Way to God.

Proposed MISSION Statement (what an organization does)

Make Disciples of Christ through Education and Engagement.

Proposed CORE VALUES (fundamental organizational beliefs that drive decisions)

Christ-centered loving, learning, and leading.

Proposed VISION Statement (where the organization will be at a set time in the future)

Within three years, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese will research, design, test, and implement best practices solutions that materially and measurably improve parish and parishioner Servant leadership, Stewardship & generosity, and Spiritual formation and religious education as outlined in specific S³ Strategic S.M.A.R.T. Goals and Action Plans.

Current State And Need For Change

I have previously provided extensive data showing the significant challenges being faced by GOA parishes that I will not fully repeat here. However, it is unequivocally clear that with 47% of cradle Orthodox adults having left the church, the GOA reporting the worst regular attendance in church services of only 21%, and 99% of the GOA parishes being totally dependent on Greek festivals and fundraisers to fund their barely subsistence and not Vision-based budgets, the GOA is in serious need of best in class programs in the three areas (**S³**) the data shows are most critical: **Servant Leadership (S1)**, **Stewardship & Engagement (“S2”)**, and **Spiritual Formation and Religious Education (“S3”)**.

Future State.

The GOA must reverse all negative trends and, within 25 years, can more than triple in size with at least a 20% increase in **Parishes (“P”)**, all providing transformational **S1**, **S2**, and **S3** solutions. These preliminary metrics need to be further validated, refined, and calibrated. However, I believe this seemingly audacious goal can be substantially exceeded if the above AOC Orthodox Unity Plan succeeds.

Proposed New American Greek Orthodox Church A.D.P. Trinity Model.

Under the new “**A.D.P. Trinity Model**,” a reorganized national **Archdiocese (“A”)** will hire the right full-time and qualified leaders to identify best practices to address the empirically identified proven solutions of the root causes of the negative trends in **S1**, **S2** and **S3** areas. The U.S. would be demographically divided into approximately 15

(based on current projections, subject to change) GOA **Dioceses** (“**D**”) regionally distributed based on the demographics of the **P**s in their geography. The **D**s would be primarily responsible for becoming training and support organizations to help the local **P**s implement the **A**-developed best practices **S1**, **S2**, and **S3** solutions for the benefit of the Parishioners In Pews (“**PIPs**”), Absent Parishioners In Pews (“**APIPs**”), and Future Parishioners In Pews (“**FPIPs**”).

While the church is not a business, this **A.D.P Trinity Model** mirrors the highly successful “invent once, share often” **National Solutions Organizational Model** (“**NSOM**”) previously described in this Chapter 16. The National organization (i.e., **A**) should research and develop the best service/products/solutions and pass them on to their regional organizations (i.e., **D**) to be delivered and refined with the local parish (i.e., **P**). Implementation experiences, successes/failures, innovations, unique alternatives, and new experiential best practices are shared by **P**s upward through **D**s to the national **A** so they may be further refined and redistributed back to **D**s for sharing with all **P**s.

A 3-Phase Roadmap For The Next Quarter Century Of Greek Orthodoxy In America.

Phase 1 (years 1-3): Most **P**s are significantly under-resourced to research, develop, and implement **S1**, **S2** and **S3** best practices. Moreover, there is no organizational vehicle or process to share at scale what **S1**, **S2**, and **S3** solutions work or are ineffective. For example, (a) **S1** best practices servant leadership programs can be developed with distributed training regionally, (b) **S2** solutions will include comprehensive welcoming, small group “one-anothering,” in-reach, outreach, evangelism, tithing, and ministry engagement processes and (c) **S3** solutions will include detailed, comprehensive year-round in-person and online adult and youth religious, Biblical, and spiritual Orthodox formation and education, including Catechumens (Orthodox converts) and seekers.

Experience suggests the **A** will need the three-year Strategic Development Period to:

- (a) validate the proposed Why/Mission/Vision Statements and Core Values and complete researching and designing the most effective **S1**, **S2**, and **S3** solutions (including all curriculum and implementation procedures manuals),
- (b) recruit the **S1**, **S2** and **S3** ministry leaders,
- (c) divide the country into the geographic 15 **D**s, and
- (d) recruit and train the necessary **D** trainers and **S1**, **S2**, and **S3** implementation specialists.

Phase 2 (years 3-4): The **D**s newly recruited regional **S1**, **S2**, and **S3** trainers and implementation specialists will deliver the new best practices solutions to all **P**s in their geographic region. Given parish leadership and volunteer turnover, and the latest best practices development, this training will be repeated annually or more frequently as needed.

Phase 3 (years 4-25): Each **P** will complete a strategic planning process (or update their previous plans) to accept and embrace the **A** Why, Mission, Vision Statements, and Core Values or identify their nuanced alternative versions. In addition, each **P** will implement their **P**-specific **S³** S.M.A.R.T. GOALS (updated each 3-5 years) using a version of this template:

STRATEGIC S³ S.M.A.R.T. GOALS (specific strategic goals to achieve the Vision - S.M.A.R.T. Goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant/Realistically written, and Time-bound with interim and ultimate deadlines to create accountability)

Implement best practices to improve:

Servant Leadership by (metrics = X) through (process = Y) within (deadline = Z),

Stewardship & Engagement by (metrics = X) through (process = Y) within (deadline = Z).

Spiritual Formation and Religious Education by (metrics = X) through (process = Y) within (deadline = Z)

All Strategic S.M.A.R.T. Goal Action Plans will include:

1. definitions/metrics of what constitutes **S1**, **S2** and **S3** success (insert in **X** above),
2. benchmarking of their current status in relation to researched **S1**, **S2**, and **S3** best practices,
3. comprehensive implementation plans to achieve best practices (insert in **Y** above),
4. deadlines for each action (insert in **Z** above), and 5. qualitative/quantitative measurement of achievement of best practices.

Within the 25-year **A.D.P. Trinity Model** implementation period, the **A**, **D**, and **P** Strategic Plans and **S1**, **S2**, and **S3** success metrics (**X**) and processes (**Y**) will be continuously re-evaluated and updated (every 3-5 years) to achieve the future goal of a minimum tripling the size of the GOA with at least a 20% increase in the number of **P**s (or whatever higher achievable metrics are possible)

Pitfalls And Eternal Consequences Of Failure

Decades of lethargy, less focused and trained leadership, lack of creative and effective solutions, fear of the unknown, unwillingness to research workable alternatives, under-resourced groups, fine people who are not the most effective leaders, and change resistance remain some of the many headwinds for the **A.D.P. Trinity Model**. These challenges are prevalent in the American Orthosphere faith tradition that: (a) immigrated to the U.S. from Orthodox-dominant countries with State-supported religion, (b) remains

virtually unchanged for almost 2,000 years, and (c) is managed in a conciliar fashion by a synod of all Bishops who make major decisions by consensus.

If it is God's will, the **A.D.P. Trinity Model** can succeed and be fully funded and implemented without further taxing the resource-constrained parishes through the use of the Orthodox Venture Philanthropy donors (previously discussed), more efficient reallocating of existing Leadership 100 and Faith Endowment awards, and proper Orthodox parish tithes/offerings.

I fear that presiding over the further decline of Orthodoxy in America into oblivion has the most severe of eternal consequences. The Orthodox Divine Liturgy and Holy Scripture make clear that we will each individually seek "*a good account before the awesome judgment seat of Christ*" based on what we did as stewards of God's gifts. Christ entrusted His church to us. Who among us is prepared to stand before the Lord to confess we were responsible for losing disciples in our own nation rather than "*making disciples of all nations?*"