

# Overcoming Obstacles, Unlocking your Parish's Potential

*Presented by Father Evan Armatas at C.O.M.E. Conference – Portland, October 2016*

Intro

1. Not "why are we not growing?" but "what stands in our way?" (7:58-13:20) – 5:22 min.
2. **Preliminary Obstacle: Soil has not been tilled (14:47) – 4:20 min.**
3. **Fear (19:10) – 2:14 min** **Subtotal:**  
**11:56 min.**
  
4. **Priest is the primary caregiver (21:24) – 8:16 min.**
5. **Three parish paradigms: Chapel, Daddy and Empowered. Which one is the best? (29:40) – 4 min.** **Subtotal:**  
**12:16 min.**
  
6. **Leadership Progression: Character, Vision, Competency (33:43) – 3:37 min.**
7. **Lack of Strategic Planning (37:20) – 6:35 min.** **Subtotal:**  
**10:12 min.**
  
8. **Lots of meetings that do not align with Vision and Mission (43:55) – 5:53 min.**
9. **Practical Obstacles (49:48) – 5:52 min.** **Subtotal:**  
**11:45 min.**
  
10. Resources (55:40) – 1:20 min.
11. Q&A (57:00)

## Intro

1. You cannot eat a whole salami in one seating. Do not attempt to do all these at once.
2. The best meeting ever.
3. Obviously a major malfunction – Challenger disaster due to an O-ring.

## 1. Not "why are we not growing?" but "what stands in our way?"

1. **7:58** Parishes do not need an Outreach and Evangelism program. The whole life of the church is that. We need to remove what is in the way of outreach and evangelism. God restores His image in us. Let us uncover it.
2. **10:20** Facts:
  - a. God gives the growth: (Mark 4:26-28). God makes the seed grow. He wants Church to grow, qualitatively and quantitatively.

*He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. (Mar 4:26-28 NRS)*

- b. Church numbers are going down. Average size is 89.
3. What is the problem? We erected barriers. Remove barriers, not implement growth strategies! → Parish becomes healthy → parish grows.
    - a. Do not ask: Why we are not growing?
    - b. But ask: What keeps us from Growing?
  4. *Vuja de*: feeling that you looked at something many times but now see it in a new way. (up to 13:20)

## 2. Preliminary Obstacle: Soil has not been tilled (14:47)

1. Develop Positive view of GROWTH.
2. Develop positive view of CHANGE.
3. When we begin to talk about growth, change... → disturbance in the community. ~ Jet hitting the supersonic speed. → Throttle forward through the change! → **Prepare everybody (before) for the turbulence and discomfort of change.**

## 3. Fear (19:10)

1. Paralysis. Inward focus.
2. Uncontrolled, unexamined actions.
3. Misreading or misinterpret ques.
4. Because of fear leaders become silent, make excuses, avoid problems, blame or gossip, get angry and cheat.

#### 4. Priest as primary caregiver (21:24)

1. Limitations:
  - a. Numerical. 125 (max. 200) per priest.
  - b. Burnout of primary caregiver. Gets to a threshold and then they do odd things.
  - c. Priest is not repeatable (book: "Good to Great" – must have more than one person as p.c.)
  - d. Eliminates meaningful engagement. Life of parish controlled by just a few.
2. Franchise/ leverage new leaders in community:
  - a. Leaders develop leaders.
  - b. Leadership class in community.
  - c. Inoculate with Mission, Vision and Goals and then release them.
3. All the oars in the water: all oars in the water at the same time → new level of health, Outreach and Evangelism (28:04)
4. Two scenarios:
  - a. Helicopter A: on task. Urgent, not important.
  - b. Helicopter B: on vision/ strategy. Important

#### 5. Three parish paradigms: Chapel, Daddy and Empowered. Which one is the best? (29:40)

1. Paradigms:
  - a. Chapel: few key people control the life of the parish.
  - b. Daddy: charismatic, incredibly capable leader. "What did father say?"...
    - i. Combination of Chapel-Daddy
  - c. EMPOWERED: the healthiest!
    - i. Parishioners must know Mission, Vision, Goals
    - ii. Their work must be honored
    - iii. Let people be responsible
    - iv. Scalable
    - v. Healthy, brings new life

#### 6. Leadership Progression: Character, Vision, Competency (33:43)

1. Must have a great priest as a leader. Must understand what leadership is about:
  - a. Character:
    - i. Knowing the difference between right and wrong.
    - ii. A true leader with character acts for what is right regardless for the risk for himself. This does not happen if operating in fear!
    - iii. Teach everybody else to do the same.
  - b. Vision: one sentence dream. "An Orthodox community in which people find transformation in Jesus Christ."
  - c. Competency. We do not ask at Parish Assemblies who wants to run for PC? We select them.

- d. Trust: by building up the three characteristics.

## 7. Lack of Strategic Planning (37:20)

1. Clarify IDENTITY. Get people's oars in the water at the same time. Decision making must be clarified.
2. VISION and MISSION: Why and How.
  - a. St. Spyridon:
    - i. Vision: "An Orthodox community where people find transformation in Jesus Christ."
    - ii. Mission: Worship, Service, Community, Education.
3. SWOT: STRENGTH, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, and THREATS: Categorize them. Understand honestly who we are.
4. Organizational Chart with Roles and Responsibilities of the parish
5. Long Range Strategic Goals that move us firmly towards Vision
  - a. Example from St. Spyridon: "Enhance each person's relationship with Jesus Christ and one another through our focused ministries (Worship, Service, Community, Education) that enrich the internal and external community."
  - b. Develop 3 like this.
  - c. Move to SMART Goals. Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, and Time bound. Example: "develop Ministry plan by March next year. → Who, by when
6. Implement plan

## 8. Lots of meetings that do not align with Vision and Mission (43:55)

1. Activity does not equal accomplishment.
2. Leaders lack three things:
  - a. Reflective thinking!
  - b. Leverage
    - i. Develop Cadence chart. Lead the leaders. Do not micromanage.
    - ii. Identify your span of control into no more than 7 areas. Priest: Preach, Teach, Pray.
    - iii. Classify the degree of oversight
    - iv. Set time to meet with key personnel
  - c. Accountability: the dashboard. We do not want O-ring disasters. People like it.

## 9. Practical Obstacles (49:48)

1. Facility:
  - a. Seating 80% rule
  - b. Parking 2.3 per space
  - c. Bathrooms, women first! → cleanliness of church
2. Pew Study – research shows that spirituality in US is going up. They miss church because it does not fit their schedule: Service times set for convenience. Streaming services.

3. Us:
  - a. Name of the church – Greek, Romanian,...
  - b. Music and Worship

### **Resources (55:40)**

1. Saint Nektarios Education Fund – 5 parishes
2. Podcasts
3. Pascha Passport
4. Lesson Plans, Catechism (Holy Trinity Denver)
5. AFR

### **Directions:**

1. Understand the premise and buy into it.
2. Get help: outside Agent of Change.
3. Investigate: collaborative, open, and honest.
  - a. Review, record, listen, inform.
4. Prioritize and act within a Strategic Plan.
5. Repeat.

# Questions for group discussion

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Overcoming Obstacles to Unlocking your Parish's Potential – *Father Evan Armatas*

## 1. Ask the proper question

1. How is your French? What did Father mean by *Vuja De*?
2. Fr. Evan stated that healthy parishes do not need an Outreach and Evangelism program per se.
  - a. Why is that?
  - b. What is his recommendation to make it happen?
3. It was mentioned that God gives the growth, He makes the seed grow. God wants the Church to grow, qualitatively and quantitatively. Father quoted from the Gospel of Mark:

*He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. (Mar 4:26-28 NRS)*

- a. If so, what is the problem, according to Father Evan, that causes parishes not to grow?
  - b. Father also mentioned implementing *Growth Strategies*? How did he refer to Growth Strategies? Why?
4. Father Evan's model calls for changing the way we see things. For instance, not to ask: *Why we are not growing?* But rather ask: *What keeps us from Growing?*
  - a. Name a few obstacles that keep our community from growing.
  - b. Would this also apply to every one of us as persons? If God provides, then what is in our way to grow into being Christ-like (deified)?

## 2. Preliminary Obstacle: Soil has not been tilled (14:47)

1. Father Evan defined the first obstacle as our view of GROWTH and of CHANGE.
  - a. Do we, as a community have a POSITIVE view of growth and change?
  - b. How about you individually? What keeps you grounded when it comes to growth and change for:
    - i. Our community
    - ii. Yourself (spiritual growth). How do you address this personal weakness?
2. Father Evan gave the example with the supersonic jet. What message did he try to give through that example?
3. How about the great change that we will all go through when we die? Would this model apply to it too? Why so? Or why not?

## 3. Fear

1. Have you ever acted in fear?

2. Has the leadership of our community ever (over the years) acted or reacted in fear? What symptoms were visible?

#### 4. Priest as primary caregiver

1. What does it mean for the priest to be the primary caregiver? Is your priest the primary caregiver? Give examples.
2. Father Evan talked about *four limitations* when having the priest as the primary caregiver:
  - i. Numerical. 125 (max. 200) per priest.
  - ii. Burnout of primary caregiver.
  - iii. Priest is not repeatable.
  - iv. Eliminates meaningful engagement.
    - a. How would you, personally, be affected by these limitations?
3. Father mentioned that in his community two important things happen to address the obstacle of the priest as the primary caregiver.
  - i. Leadership class in community through the year.
  - ii. Inoculation of leaders with Mission, Vision and Goals and then release them.
    - a. What is the purpose for doing so?
    - b. Would you benefit from attending such activities in our community?
4. Remember the two examples that Father gave? One with the oars in the water and the other one with the helicopters at an emergency site? What did they mean?
5. What is the Vision of our parish?

#### 3. Three parish paradigms: Chapel, Daddy and Empowered. Which one is the best?

1. Father Evan presented two unhealthy paradigms:
  - i. Chapel: few key people control the life of the parish. “We expect to have this and that”
  - ii. Daddy: under a charismatic, incredibly capable leader. “What did father say?”...

Are we in any way following one of these two models or a combination of them? Give examples.

2. Father Evan presented the healthy paradigm as well:
  - i. EMPOWERED: the healthiest!
    - Parishioners must know Mission, Vision, Goals
    - Their work must be honored

- Let people be responsible
  - Scalable
  - Healthy, brings new life
- a. In practical terms, what can we do as a community to shift to the healthy EMPOWERED model?
  - b. How about you, personally--what can you do?

## 6. Leadership Progression: Character, Vision, Competency

1. Father Evan mentioned three characteristics for a good leader that build up TRUST: *Character*, *Vision* and *Competency*.
  - a. How did Father define *Character*? Name its three defining attributes.
  - b. Do you have Character according to this definition? How can you overcome the obstacle related to it?
  - c. Why should we not simply accept volunteers to serve as leaders (PC, ministries)? What should we do instead?

## 7. Lack of Strategic Planning

1. Why do we need to have a Plan in place if we did everything else? Is it important?
2. Why did we do everything else mentioned earlier if we can have a Strategic Plan in place?
2. How does Father Evan's model compare to what we do in our parish? Where are we with our planning?
3. Are you part of this effort in our parish? Why or why not?

## Summary of OBSTACLES for us to remove

1. Preliminary Obstacle: Soil has not been tilled
2. Fear
3. Priest is the primary caregiver
4. Three parish paradigms: Chapel, Daddy and Empowered.
5. Leadership Progression: Character, Vision, Competency
6. Lack of Strategic Planning
7. Lots of meetings that do not align with Vision and Mission
8. Practical Obstacles