

## A Business Model for Parishes

How do you build up a successful parish? “Do what you do so well they want to come back and bring their friends.” These words of Walt Disney were words that built an Empire or a World. The focus is in the business parlance, customer service. Pastors are the coordinators and managers and the parishioners are both the customers and the staff. Parishioners have to provide excellent customer service to each other to build up the Church.

There are three “Magics” in the Disney model.

### I. *The Magic of Setting in the Service Experience*

Every detail of a person’s encounter with the parish sends a message. Are phone calls answered politely and quickly? Does the parish website say a ten year-old could do better? Does the church shine with cleanliness or does dust fall from the chandelier? These simple details tell a visitor how much we care. If we don’t care, why should they join us or even attend a service? When Volodymyr the Great sent representatives to Constantinople to learn about the Byzantine Church, they came back saying that they did not know if they were in heaven or on earth. Is that the same experience one feels upon entering your church? How do you rate a restaurant? Most people feel if the restrooms are clean that the kitchen is clean. Are your restrooms clean so that people don’t have to rush home to take care of nature’s needs? Do people have to struggle to find out when the services are? Most hotels offer a board and your parish should be listed. Many travelers look to Masstimes.org or the diocesan website. These people may be relocating to the area and you want to make a good first impression. Make

sure that if it lists your website, that the link works. Once I clicked on parish and the website name was for sale. Did that mean that the parish did not have a website any more, or was there no more parish? I just looked for another church in the city I was visiting.

### II. *The Magic of Casts*

Is the pastor (and are the parishioners) happy to see people coming into the Church? Is it like coming into a gathering of family and friends or the gathering at a funeral? In Siam, the law states that everyone when on the public streets has to smile so that tourists think it is a happy place. When newcomers and long timers come into the Church is there warmth. When people leave are they in a rush? Do they leave before the priest closes the Royal Doors or slip out after receiving the Eucharist? They should want to stay and greet the priest at the back of the church as they are leaving. What about a “coffee ‘n’ cake” session after Liturgy? A handshake and a smile can brighten a day, whether it comes from the priest or one of the parishioners. When the person comes in and they sit in one of the regular’s seat, what happens? There are stories of people being told that “you’re sitting in my seat” and the new people walked out the door. We cannot assume anything about anyone walking in. A regular can be having a bad day and needs just a sign that someone cares. A new-comer walks in looking for a spiritual home. Once a black family walked into a Ukrainian parish and a parishioner with the best of intentions told them about the Protestant church down the street. This family looked at the parishioner strangely. Their

daughter, who in perfect Ukrainian, told the parishioner that they had just moved here from Ukraine, broke the silence. They were descendants of Ethiopian students who went to Ukraine to study, married and had a family and now their son, his wife and daughter got a visa to come to the United States for work. We cannot underestimate the importance of the service. If the service was being offered in the presence of the President of Ukraine, there would be beauty and passion in the singing and the preaching would move the hearts of all. Should not our service for our God be even better? The priest, the cantor, the choir and all the faithful make the service heavenly. Together, we make it heaven on earth.

### III. *The Magic of Action*

At Disney the staff is trained to look for combustion points. These are the points where something goes wrong. Every pastor knows that if it is a hot August day and the air conditioning is not working, that is a combustion point. Preparation in advance for what can and will go wrong is always necessary. Thank God if nothing goes wrong but when it does everything should run smoothly. (Keep large fans available and check an hour before the service that everything is working right).

Attention to every detail.

None of this costs money, but it does cost commitment. The Church, not Disney’s Land or World, should be the happiest place on earth. The Church is heaven on earth; so coming to Church we leave the problems of the world outside and enter into the heavenly banquet surrounded by love. For when we abide in love we abide in God and God should be abiding in your church.

*Fr Jonathan Morse*