

# THREATS

**40 - SECULAR SOCIETY** - Hostility of secular society directed against Christianity; Socialism – the antithesis of Christianity; Community developing apathy due to current events; Widespread rejection of faith and church; Post-Christian people’s belief that they have heard the Gospel and it is not Good News; Secularization of our society and culture; Societal influences potentially creeping into the Church such as: relativism, nihilism, anger, politics, pornography, tribalism, extremism, apathy; Other Sunday morning “priorities”; Secularism ; Secularism; The rapid pace of change in American culture; sports on Sunday; Stability of the police force is important, to protect our community and parish; Increasingly secular attitude of society; Increasingly hostile culture to Christianity; Cultural challenges; Increased stress on religious organizations to yield to cultural norms incompatible with Orthodox teaching and tradition; Increase of non-church activities in families’ lives threaten church attendance/participation; Individualism often expressed in terms of rights and freedoms; An understanding of success that values conspicuous consumption and status; Exploitation of, instead of, the nurturing of God’s Creation and His people; Societal norms at odds with the Orthodox faith; Global Tendency of more about church preservation than community transformation; Cultural tide is shifting away from traditional Christianity; Social fragmentation and lack of civic engagement; Pennsylvania is an aging state with a low birth rate; American individualism is not compatible with Orthodoxy; Decrease in those who associate themselves with organized religion – the “nones”; LGBTQ communities; Anti-religious rhetoric; Social unrest, Christians are becoming the minority; The cultural and sexual diversification of society that is currently celebrated lead in the opposite direction of our faith; Anti-religious, non-traditional cultural tones; Anti-religious bias - the larger population increasingly associates “the church” with hypocrisy, blind faith, oppression, and cruelty; Societal influences; Society has moved to less emphasis of traditional religious practices; CURRENT STATE OF SOCIETY; Perception of Christians as dealing out judgment not mercy, church as courtroom, not hospital; Popular culture is “Post-Christian,” antagonistic; LGBT's plan (through the "Equality Act", etc.) to force churches to bow to their agenda or face lawsuits; The decline in Christianity makes it difficult to minister to certain groups of people.

**31 - MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ORTHODOXY** - Misinformation and misconceptions about Orthodoxy; Concerns about Orthodoxy being too ethnic; Idea that Orthodoxy is stuck in the past; Rejection of Orthodoxy due to lack of understanding; as more Protestants become aware of Orthodoxy, some will have a \*perceived\* idea of understanding and pass this (mis)information along; Losing college aged youth due to moving out of area for jobs; Association of “Orthodox” with ethnic culture, feeling that Orthodoxy is foreign; Perceptions that the Orthodox Church tolerates supremacist ideologies, and attraction of adherents of these viewpoints to Orthodox Church membership; Widespread view that faith is fantasy, incompatible with science; Widespread view that “church” is about rules and taboos, moralism, judgment; Widespread belief that death is the natural end of human life, resurrection is meaningless, undesirable; Perception that the Orthodox Church is sexist, insensitive to women, male-dominated, lacking in roles for women; American unfamiliarity with the Orthodox Church and Orthodox worship; Society’s intolerance of the OCA’s views on LGBT marriage, abortion, etc.; Ethnic perception; Lack of knowledge of Orthodoxy; Misinformation; Orthodoxy is sometimes viewed as cultural and not open to people of other backgrounds; some folks think we are Jewish; Perception that “Orthodoxy” is cultural based; The term “Orthodox Christian” can cause people to feel like it’s a group they don’t “belong” in; Misconceptions about what Orthodoxy really is; Misunderstanding of what Orthodoxy is; Lack of knowledge of Orthodoxy by the general public; Perception and stereotypes of Orthodoxy; Perception of Orthodoxy as ethnic or alien/foreign; Orthodoxy has limited roles for women; Orthodoxy is unusual, with many ethnic traditions; not easily understood or accepted by a typical person; Orthodoxy can be perceived as a cult, elitist, intellectual type of religion; Many people are being turned away from Christianity and finding other religions or atheism because they only see hypocrisy in the Christian churches. They hear the teachings of Christ, such as “Love your Neighbor”, but watch as Christians ignore, attack, or abandon women pregnant out of wedlock, the poor, the homeless, the abused, people who identify as gay, and people of different ethnicities to name a few. This is a major threat to our mission of showing all people the love of our loving and all caring God. We must not only find a way to break down the barriers and convince these people to discover Orthodoxy, but we must be constantly vigilant to prevent this threat from taking root within our parish community; Roman Catholic Dogma creeping into the Church.

# THREATS

**23 - UNCONTROLLABLE CRISES (e.g., COVID-19)** - The continual threat of COVID-19; CV19 pandemic continuing through 2021 causing a major disruption to our church and the community; These past few months have shown us what we can do to help; COVID and the aftermath yet to come, especially economic depression; Global pandemics can threaten the survival of the church; Threat of illness from Covid 19; Corona virus; COVID quarantine making maintaining relationships difficult; Coronavirus pandemic (presents challenges; Covid19 pandemic; Pandemic affecting all aspects of people's lives; COVID and its potential after effects – tanking economy, limited social interactions, “new normal” rhetoric; COVID 19 people cannot come to church and may stop coming and giving; Lack of early prepared plan for pandemics at all governmental and authoritative levels; Covid; COVID-19 (possible economic effect); Viruses and fear of them (i.e. the recent effect of COVID-19); Coronavirus; COVID 19; Coronavirus poses a significant threat to “community”; Potential long term financial impact of COVID and the ability to fund outreach/local community support; Further pandemics or health threats which prohibit church attendance or services; Less in-person attendance because of mandates could lead to spiritual weakness and/or apathy; Less in-person attendance leading to less in-person fellowship. Even in-person, the stigmatism of virus bringing on laws and/or personal preferences (of some) of no physical contact.

**22 - ECONOMY - ECONOMIC STRAIN** - National economic effect on financial support of church; Possible financial issues if there is a deep and prolonged recession; Economy – especially right now; losing jobs is something we cannot change; People leaving the area for a job; Economic health of community can be a risk for our church; Overall economy can threaten the financial stability of the church and maintenance of the property; Decline in income due to unemployment; Economic strain / uncertainty may affect financial giving, attendance; High unemployment rate ; Economic challenges, especially related to the pandemic; Increased unemployment; Economy is volatile and many people's livelihoods are uncertain; Overspending with folks losing their jobs; Low or slow growth of the Harrisburg area economy; Economic repercussions due to the corona virus; Economic instability; Economic hardships may have an effect; Economy is an obvious one that affects church participation and tithing both as an opportunity and threat; Bad economy; Parishioners who are out of work may not be able to give/tithe to Church; Economy.

**18 - POLITICAL ISSUES** - Political – certain political parties do not support Christians; Political climate; Politics; Government oppression – use of the courts to suppress 1st Amendment; Degradation of the community around the church; Political changes could result in changes to tax exemption; POLITICS Party stereotypes, ideals, etc.; Corrupt government; Bad laws; Political unrest causing a threat to our church community; Growing US political polarization and temptation to brand specific political views as “Orthodox”; Growing trends towards socialism in our government and the impact on our liberties, especially freedom of speech and freedom of religion; divisive politics in the community and nation do not take seed in our church; political issues, political polarization; Tense political climate; High level of polarization within the country (political, black/white, etc.) – demonization of ‘the other’; Polarized political world – each election creates more tension between parishioners; Christianity unfortunately has become politicized throughout the United States and our community. The eroding of Christian teachings and values within non-Orthodox churches has led to a wide spread deception that paints Christ in whatever image the individual wants.

**14 - DECLINING MORALS / VALUES** - Decline in moral values; Moral values of our members (especially the younger generations) are effected by social media and popular culture; Disintegration of marriage and family relationships in favor of “anything is okay” morals and values; Societal decay and anti-Christian attitudes in America; Current thinking among many people on abortion is a threat; Unmarried couples raising families is an issue to discuss; Spiritual Sloth - the idea that the human soul

# THREATS

either does not exist, or does not need care; Active shooter threat Violence and vandalism against the church; Reduced church/religious participation and values nationally; LACK OF FAITH; Societal norms have changed and resulted in increased atheism – Nones; opposition from the evil one; Societal desires for gluttony, sexual pleasures, pleasures in general, (hedonism.....my former old priest used to say that).; People are marrying later and having fewer children.

**13 - YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS ISSUES** - Competing with sports on Sundays; Loss of younger parishioners as they complete their educations and enter adulthood in a highly mobile society; Students moving to other areas for work; Changed attitudes and beliefs, with a viewpoint that traditional Christian non-acceptance of LGBTQ+ sexual activity is hateful; School sports are a threat to church, church school and youth activities; Sense of civic duty and patriotism have greatly diminished for younger generations; General disinterest of the youth in religion, i.e. fastest growing segment is the non-religious (growth problem); Across Christian denominations, young people are returning to church as adults less and less; Entertainment industry and social media can make a Christian life seem undesirable to youth who have a steady diet of social media; Few young generation to Orthodoxy (Engaging an ever-changing western culture with a never-changing Gospel Truth); Sunday youth sports; Youth sports – more and more they disregard Sunday mornings and afternoons and schedule practices, games and tournaments; Demographic uncertainty: do we have enough younger members to step up in the coming years?

**10 - OTHER CHRISTIAN GROUPS** - Co-opting of “Christian” by groups that loudly preach a version of the Way contrary to the Orthodox Way; Atheism and potential persecution of the Church or intolerance of the Church’s right to exist (existence problem); Rise of non-denominational churches among millennials; Competition from other churches; An increase in the “nones,” or those who are religiously unaffiliated, in the last decade; Increased interest in non-denominational churches and “spiritual but not religious” sentiments; Other forms of Christianity are larger and better known than Orthodoxy; Demands by groups to support their causes or beliefs and donate money or other resources to those causes (through intimidation or threats); Abuse scandals have discredited many churches and institutions; Other people with thoughts and practices that are not Orthodox, who will come and try to change the faith and services.

**9 - TECHNOLOGY** - Technology that threatens our privacy, which in turn leads to threatening to our free will and freedoms; Social Media; Social media; Competing with TV, internet for parishioners attention; Social media and its effect on community cohesiveness; Evolving technology; Not knowing what websites are reputable to listen to about Orthodox topics; Technology/screens replacing human contact and interaction, amplified during pandemic; Social technologies, TV, YouTube

**8 - ORTHODOX LACK OF UNITY** - All Orthodox churches need to work toward arriving at a critical mass, a large enough presence in our society that our voice is heard; Lack of unity among various Orthodox communities/churches; Uncertainty re: schism between Russian church and the Constantinople Patriarchate; Lack of Orthodox administrative unity and praxis; Orthodox Christians as a religious minority in the United States; Schisms within Orthodox Church and between other denominations; no accountability to any hierarchy, little concern for dogma, greater emphasis on local ministry that includes paying salaries to “ministers” and not national/diocesan structures.

**7 - VIOLENCE** - Domestic terrorism; Violence - church shootings; Disasters; Radical or violent activists of security threats, such as fire, vandalism, sabotage, attacks; Threat of active shooters; Violence; Threat of violence from outside source.

## **ONE OFFS**

- The need for sound non racist respectful policing
- Few resources for Orthodox Christians (laypersons and clergy) in areas of mental health, marriage counseling, etc. could lead Orthodox Christians to feel isolated or to seek out resources that are potentially spiritually harmful
- Stewardship evolving into guilt giving instead of Christian Stewardship
- Retention of interfaith Marriage couples

# THREATS

- There is no mention of "Only those Orthodox....." in the Diocese of the south or West. This is handled on a personal level as it should be
- Movement of clergy to a different location
- Clergy that speak loudly and forcefully but don't represent the Church at large in tone and ethos
- "Church" generally perceived in modern society as "local"
- Recognize that feeling welcome and feeling excluded are often done in small ways

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## **THE FOLLOWING ARE NOT EXTERNAL TO OUR PARISH AND THUS DO NOT QUALIFY AS THREATS FOR PURPOSES OF A SWOT ANALYSIS**

- Financial and spiritual growth in membership to sustain the church and the administration of the parish;
- Parish participation to help resolve social and civic problems within the church, the Diocese and our local communities
- Parking lots constraints
- Getting young people to attend church and be active while not turning our backs to the older folks who are coming and supporting the church
- Church is located on area of street that is not visible until you are right there. Also, street is not busy or traveled by many
- Decline in membership
- Increasing parish costs and financial stress on parishioners
- Changes in land use and zoning. Adjacent properties becoming industrial or commercial, perhaps bringing unwanted traffic; It is not inconceivable that we could become victims of our own success and through accession of new members, outgrow the capacity of our current sanctuary, even if pews were to be removed. While "these are the kinds of problems you don't mind having", I don't think our current sanctuary is capable of expansion beyond its current footprint. It might be worthwhile to explore what our options are, if any, if the congregation were ever to exceed building capacity. Certainly, spinning off another parish, as was done in the early 2000's, is one option (for which you might need to establish a population threshold at which the planning for spin-off would begin). Are there other options which might be considered?
- Township ordinances
- Transportation lacking on Sundays; While our Slavic Food Fest is a wonderful celebration of our parish's heritage, for unacquainted visitors it also reinforces the perception that the Orthodox church is mainly an ethnic church. It would be preferable for CTS to be known more for the strength of our Christian discipleship than of the quality of our perogies
- From the "Dark side"