



STRATEGIC PLAN | SCENARIO STRESS-TESTING REPORT

Prepared For:

**Saints Raphael, Nicholas & Irene
Greek Orthodox Church**
Cumming, Georgia

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Helping people and parishes discover and live their stewardship callings so that they may have a good account before the awesome judgment seat of Christ

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Executive Summary

“To welcome all on a transformational journey to a life of purpose and salvation” is the *Why Statement* of Saints Raphael, Nicholas & Irene Greek Orthodox Church in Cumming, Georgia (“Sts. RNI”) developed through its 2023 strategic planning process (Sts. RNI Strategic Plan, n.d., p. 1). This comprehensive Sts. RNI’s strategic planning process identified substantial educational shortcomings in three stewardship areas (tithing, ministry engagement, and planned giving) and two significant shortcomings in religious education (youth and adults). The building to provide the expanded sanctuary and satisfy the education needs in those five areas represents the sixth dimension that is sorely lacking.

Strategic foresight allows organizations to consider future alternatives in a coordinated way to make better present decisions (OECD, 2020, p. 14). A specific tool to consider alternative futures is the exploration of professionally developed “scenarios” based on current trends to safely explore and test the consequences of future alternative states (OECD, 2020, p. 16). These possible futures allow one to examine and improve their current and future strategies. While these scenarios stretch out into a 20-year future horizon, to be meaningful, they should also be relevant to Sts. RNI’s uncertainties and Strategic Goals (Chermack, 2011, pp. 214-215). By specifically evaluating the key six Strategic Goals of Sts. RNI, in the context of four alternative future states, a form of stress-testing of outcomes allows for the examination of potential future results that might suggest specific present changes in strategy.

OECD (2020) compares scenarios where the concepts of education and schooling are stressed from a continuum of extended present approaches to a complete disruption into nontraditional education. Juxtaposed against the schooling styles is the variation from a continuity among school types and approaches to school models that are widely disruptive and alternative. These four states are called ***“Schooling Extended”*** (an expansion of traditional schooling approaches and modalities), ***“Schools As Learning Hubs”*** (which repurposes educational schooling in creative and potentially nonuniform ways), ***“Education Outsourcing”*** (where diverse organizations, platforms, and learning initiatives are explored), and ***“Learn As You Go”*** (which is the complete devolution of existing school institutions and learning approaches to a completely flexible learning approach) (OECD, 2020, pp. 43-54).

Because Sts. RNI’s Strategic Goals primarily focus on supporting particularized education, OECD (2020) is a valuable scenario plan against which to explore the future. When the Sts. RNI’s six Strategic Goals are assessed against this two-by-two matrix of alternative future scenarios (see Figure 2, p. 9), most Strategic Goals are expected to perform well or be acceptable in all but one scenario. This final scenario results in poor performance for all six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals.

Saints Raphael, Nicholas & Irene Greek Orthodox Church Organizational Strategies

“To welcome all on a transformational journey to a life of purpose and salvation” is the true north guiding WHY for Sts. RNI. The parish began in 1997 as a mission in the Forsyth County area of North Georgia, planted by faithful Orthodox Christians from the neighboring parishes of the Annunciation Cathedral in Atlanta, Georgia, and Holy Transfiguration in Marietta, Georgia. From its first Sunday service in 1999, borrowing space from Ivy League Montessori School in Cumming Georgia, to its current sixteen acres in the most rapidly growing county in Georgia, Sts. RNI has transitioned from a primarily Greek heritage parish to an “intentionally Orthodox” community comprised of 75% converts (Powell, 2023).

Having been previously served by a rotation of weekend-only clergy, their current Proistamenos is only the second full-time priest in its history. Fr. Barnabas Powell began his service to the Lord as a Pentecostal minister with a thriving congregation before embarking on his expedition to discover the historic Church of the Apostles. His journey to Orthodoxy and his subsequent graduation from Holy Cross Seminary uniquely prepared him for this evangelical ministry of taking a few Greek parishioners from other parishes and bringing the message of Christ and the Orthodox Christian church to a thriving congregation of approximately 135 steward families that has outgrown its current sanctuary building and parish life center.

As the only genuinely Orthodox church in North Georgia welcoming everyone on *a transformational journey to a life of purpose and salvation*, and with an amazingly dynamic clergyman with his own vibrant and growing international Orthodox media ministry (Faith Encouraged Ministries, n.d.), Sts. RNI created an exciting Strategic Plan to fulfill its future destiny (Sts. RNI Strategic Plan, n.d.).

The Sts. RNI strategic planning process began in early 2023 and extended throughout most of the year. It involved countless information-gathering sessions with the faithful of the parish and other stakeholders and culminated in a process through which over twenty-five faithful, dedicated countless hours and days to develop the Strategic Plan (Sts. RNI Strategic Plan, n.d.). Through this process, they identified a focused Mission Statement: ***Sts. RNI is a welcoming family who develops intentional Orthodox Christians through worship, education, outreach, and service.*** This led to developing S.M.A.R.T. Strategic Goals in three Strategic Areas of Focus: **1. Stewardship & Engagement, 2. Religious Education, and 3. Church Building.**

The six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals analyzed for this Scenario Stress-Testing Report (the “Report”) reflect the sub-strategic goals in these three Strategic Areas of Focus. Thus, for purposes of this Report: (a) the Stewardship sub-goals being separately analyzed include (#1) **Tithing**, (#2) **Ministry Engagement**, and (#3) **Planned Giving**; (b) the Education sub-goals separately analyzed include (#4) **Youth Religious Education**; and (#5) **Adult Religious Education**; and (c) the

significant (#6) goal focuses on a new **Church Building**. The strategic planning process determined all these strategic sub-goals are critical to the future of Sts. RNI. A brief synopsis of each of these six sub-goals is discussed next.

Sts. RNI Strategies

Through a comprehensive, community-wide strategic planning S.W.O.T. analysis with community open forums, the parishioners identified the most critical weaknesses of Sts. RNI impeding its progress at **welcoming all on a transformational journey to a life of purpose and salvation** to be **a welcoming family who develops intentional Orthodox Christians through worship, education, outreach, and service**. As a result, three primary Strategic Goals with multiple sub-goals were specifically crafted in detail with applicable success metrics and a comprehensive implementation action plan (Sts. RNI Strategic Plan, n.d., pp. 12-29). A synopsis of the six sub-goals from the three S.M.A.R.T. Strategic Goals follows.

1. **TITHING (Strategy 1)**: Sts. RNI will transition all parishioners to give a percentage of their income on their way to becoming at least tithers (10%) to cover through financial stewardship all operating expenses plus at least 10% of operating expenses to be given to parish-chosen external charities (without negatively impacting the capital campaign).
2. **MINISTRY ENGAGEMENT (Strategy 2)**: Sts. RNI will increase the adult and youth ministry engagement so that at least 90% of parishioners use their time and talents in ministry to become a full-participation parish.
3. **PLANNED GIVING (Strategy 3)**: Sts. RNI will implement a planned giving program and endowment in which at least 25% of parishioners participate.
4. **YOUTH EDUCATION (Strategy 4)**: Sts. RNI will have at least 90% of parish youth complete a revamped full academic year “Youth Religious Formation and Education School Program” each year and achieve measurable outcomes identified in step 2 of the Action Plan.
5. **ADULT EDUCATION (Strategy 5)**: Sts. RNI will have at least 50% of parish adults complete a new “Adult Religious Formation and Education Program” each year and achieve measurable outcomes identified in step 2 of the Action Plan, including a quarterly dinner “Parish Life Education Program” with dynamic presenters in which at least an average of 25% of parishioners participate in each quarterly program during complete implementation year 1, and at least an average of 40% of parishioners participate in each quarterly program during entire implementation year 2.

6. **NEW CHURCH BUILDING (Strategy 6):** Within 54 months, Sts. RNI will research, develop, and reach a consensus on implementing a best practices New Church Building Program after developing and considering:
- “**Plan A Stay and Build**” option revised construction plan, budget, capital campaign, and debt plan to fully finance and build on the current site a modified version of the currently approved plan; and
 - “**Plan B Move and Build or Buy**” option to develop a construction plan, budget, capital campaign, and debt plan to have a new church in a different location after selling the current property and either (i) buy and retrofit an existing building, or (ii) buy new land and build the designed church.

STS. RNI CAVEAT

As discussed in more detail in the Critical Contextual Caveat section below (p. 12), it is critical to appreciate the four constituencies in the U.S. Orthodox church generally and in Sts. RNI specifically. Based on 20+ years of research and work with over 600 Orthodox parishes and competing strategic plans covering over 26% of Orthodox Christians in America, Stewardship Calling created this model in Figure 1 to demonstrate the differences in educational experiences and needs of “cradle” Orthodox (those born into the faith) and “converts” (who join later in life, usually from another faith tradition).

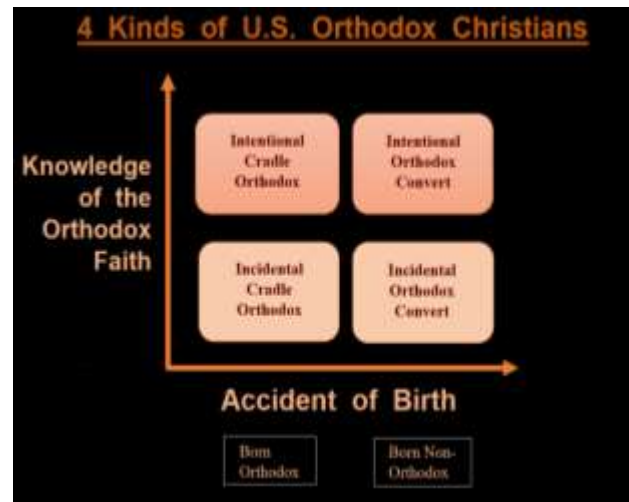


Figure 1. Four Kinds of Orthodox Christians. (Stewardship Calling, n.d.).

The cradle/convert dichotomy is further differentiated by the smaller percentage of converts (“incidental converts”) who merely become Orthodox for their Orthodox spouse so they can marry in the Orthodox church. They have no desire to learn about or become actively practicing members of the faith but will do the minimum to allow their marriage to be blessed in the church.

In contrast, the much larger percentage of cradle Orthodox born into the faith are characterized as “incidental cradle Orthodox” because they are baptized and confirmed as infants with no fundamental knowledge of the faith. Given the historical and demonstrated failure of the majority of Orthodox church youth Sunday school programs, compounded by the relative lack of depth of understanding of the faith by their parents (who never learned their faith as children), this monolithic group within the Orthodox church requires significant, structured and far more intense religious and stewardship education than their

intentional convert brothers and sisters who underwent such education in their catechetical classes.

To assist in evaluating and stress-testing the six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals against possible future scenarios, assessing them in the context of a developed scenario report is helpful. The following section describes the specific Scenario Report used for this analysis.

Back to the Future of Education: Four OECD Scenarios for Schooling

Scenario Report Background

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was established in 1961 as an intergovernmental entity of thirty-eight member countries focusing on economic progress and world trade (OECD, n.d.). The focus of OECD is to create a better world through improved lives resulting from better policies (OECD, n.d.). Its predecessor was the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation, formed as part of the Marshal Plan offered by the American government after World War II (OECD, n.d.). The current OECD has evolved to provide evidenced-based analysis and solutions on matters of global significance that work in close cooperation with the G7 and G20 nations.

The complement of nations includes a variety of representatives of North and South America, Europe, and Asia but noticeably excludes communist countries, India, and African continent countries (<https://www.oecd.org/about/>). Accordingly, not all scenarios or observations are as narrowly applicable to a United States-based entity like Sts. RNI. Also, most scenario discussions focus on government schools/agencies rather than the educational operations of a Christian church. Accordingly, this OECD scenario is not a perfect fit for this Sts. RNI stress-test.

It is well established within the Orthodox Church through the over twenty years of work Stewardship Calling (n.d.) has done with over 600 Orthodox parishes and the strategic plans Stewardship Calling ministry has developed for the over 26% of Orthodox Christians in America that tithing, ministry engagement, and planned giving have either not been taught effectively or at all. Similarly, this same body of extensive research identified a significant lack of formalized and effective adult religious education. While most Greek Orthodox parishes have some form of youth religious education, primarily delivered through their Sunday schools, the Stewardship Calling (n.d.) research has identified that there are no objective effectiveness metrics or outcomes established or evaluated, leading to massive uncertainty about the success of these Sunday school programs.

The most extensive longitudinal research conducted on youth and their religion is the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) (Smith, 2024). This ongoing study confirmed the lackluster faith education of most Christian youth in the United States (Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith, 2024; Windsor, 2007). The same NSYR research demonstrated how critically important the parents' religious education level is as it affects how well they instill that knowledge in their children.

Thus, the OECD Scenario Report that focused on the alternative futures of schools (institutions of learning) and schooling (the modalities of delivering educational content) out to 2040 is generally appropriate to use as a reference against the five combined Stewardship and Religious Education Strategic Goals of Sts. RNI, all of which focus on better education. And since the Sts. RNI Strategic Plan focuses on the new building to provide the location and backbone for much of the education the parish will offer, while not perfectly aligned with the OECD scenarios, it is a functional analog.

In assessing the six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals against the four OECD (2020) scenarios, it is essential to note a critical potential difference or similarity (depending on perspective). OECD naturally focused on public education, which governmental institutions typically provide. In contrast, no governmental education is part of the Sts. RNI education Strategic Goals. However, replacing the governmental entities in OECD (2020) with the official doctrine and teachings of the Orthodox Church is analogous. In that way, since all Orthodox religious education must be either sponsored or blessed by the Hierarchs and clergy within the Orthodox Church, one can argue that it is merely a variant context of who provides the education when compared with government officials who were the principal focus of the OECD schools and schooling scenarios.

Axes of Uncertainty

In scenario planning, one looks at potential future conditions of both high and low extremes and certainty to investigate current strategies' unexamined and unexplored impacts or futures (Chermack, 2020). Since future prediction is impossible, the objective is to stress-test current strategies against possible relevant future outcomes across a matrix of uncertainties (Chermack, 2011, 2020).

For this analysis, the axes of uncertainty explored by OECD (2020) focused on the continuity and disruption of traditional schools and methods of providing education or schooling. OECD (2020) divided the four quadrants into the categories titled "Massive Schooling," "Virtual Schooling," "Re-schooling," and "De-schooling" (p. 58). For purposes of this Report, we will refer to these four quadrants by the more descriptive alternative names used in OECD (2020): "**Schooling Extended**," "**Education Outsourced**," "**Schools As Learning Hubs**," and "**Learn As You Go**" (p. 41). (See Figure 2, page 9.)

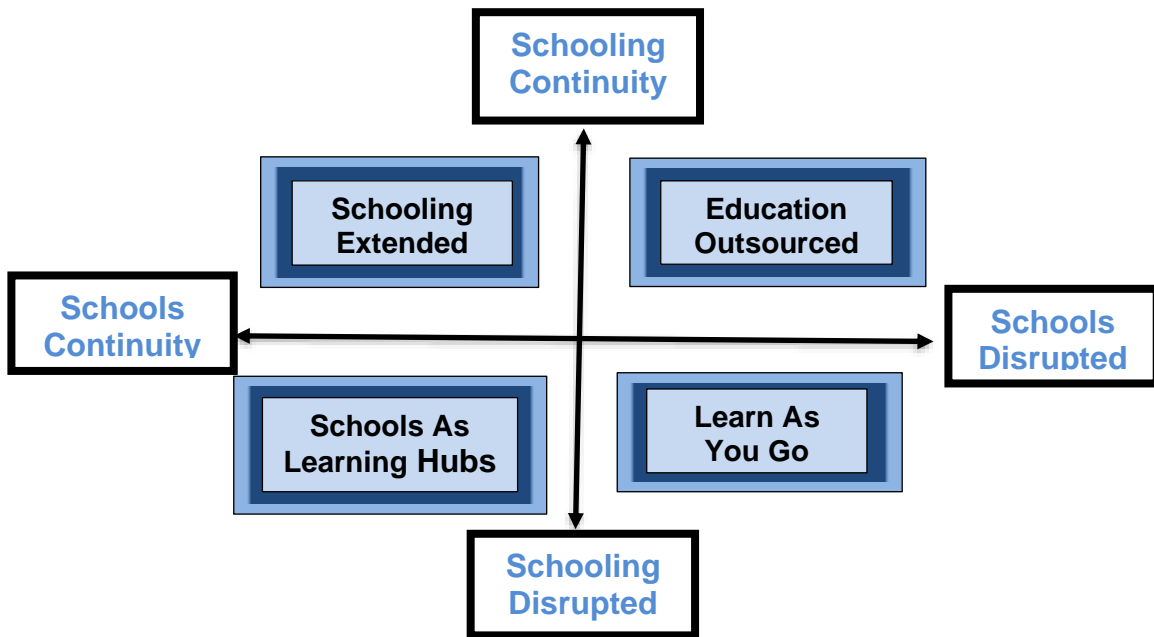


Figure 2. Four OECD Scenarios for Schooling. (OECD, 2020, pp. 41-54).

Horizontal Axis

The horizontal axis explores various school entity forms, from the most traditional current form of organized academic and educational buildings, systems, and structures on the left to potentially non-existent or non-dependent on buildings or brick-and-mortar infrastructure.

Vertical Axis

The vertical access looks more at the kind of education provided from those with more traditional teacher-driven programs through those with greater cross-institutional collaboration to the independent approach of self-initiated learning.

Scenario Signposts / Conditions

OECD provided in Figure 3 below helpful infographic diagrams of each of the four assessed scenarios outlining their goals, structures, and educational providers (OECD, 2020, pp. 44, 47, 50, 53). These “signposts” assist in understanding the possible detailed circumstances in each of the four future state scenarios. OECD (2020) examined the goals and functions, organizations and structures, and teaching workforce for each of the four future states as modeled in Figure 3, as well as aspects of governance, geopolitics, and challenges for public authorities (p. 41).

Scenario Narratives

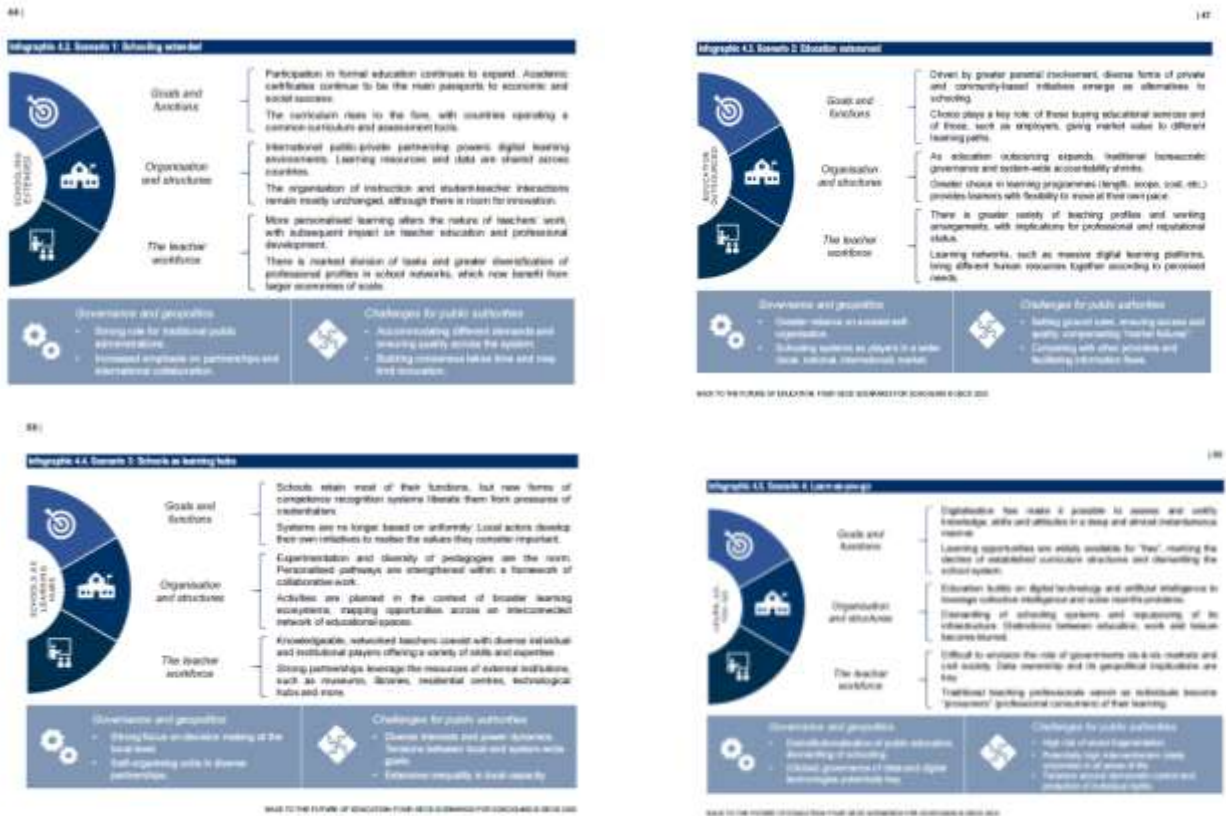


Figure 3. Signposts for Four OECD Future Educational Scenarios. (OECD, 2020, pp. 44, 47, 50, 53).

A slightly expanded narrative follows that describes each of these four OECD (2020) scenarios.

1. Schooling Extended (OECD, 2020, pp. 43-45).

This scenario resembles the current schooling format with a continued focus on expanding the delivery of a centralized approved curriculum in traditional teacher/learner environments and using familiar approaches. Some innovation occurs with a greater emphasis on a more effective and uniform curriculum; however, a diverse and well-trained formal teacher in a traditional teaching establishment is a hallmark of this scenario. Even as collaboration and technical advances occur, there is a greater focus on teacher diversification and growth due to a more personalized instruction opportunity. Indeed, participation in learning occurs at an earlier age and verified completion of the education cycle is an objective.

2. Education Outsourced (OECD, 2020, pp. 46-48).

In contrast to institutional schools and schooling, in the Education Outsourced scenario, educational functions are undertaken by diverse, dispersed, and largely privatized organizations that are highly flexible and technologically independent. This school accommodates diversified and specialized learning platforms, services, and modalities and completely replaces traditional school environmental aspects of locations and physical plants. This abandonment of any rigidity of education even abrogates time limitations on education. Innovation is encouraged, as is outside and more comprehensive collaboration and increased engagement of parents in choosing, coordinating, and even delivering schooling. This push for parents to be educators places even greater emphasis and pressure on parental education. Wider student outcome varieties result from wider variation in teaching and schooling options.

3. Schools As Learning Hubs (OECD, 2020, pp. 49-51).

In this scenario, schools can remain in some of their current and traditional models but with far greater collaboration with other organizations and institutions outside the four walls of the academic institution. This collaboration can extend to the community and other organizations and include adapting to include both social and civic innovations. This scenario replaces uniformity and consistency in teaching objectives, values, and approaches with a wider variety of schooling professionals who may each produce their own learning initiatives. This scenario introduces non-professional teachers who may be community leaders, experienced professionals, and parents. Collaboration with and among these varied learning hubs and networks is critical.





4. Learn As You Go (OECD, 2020, pp. 52-44).

Free your mind of all traditional norms of school buildings or traditional schooling constructs and imagine a scenario where learning occurs wherever, whenever, and through whomever. Since learning can happen at any time and place, this scenario loses notions of formal learning processes. Indeed, at its extreme, a blurring and merger occurs between the distinctions of learning and living. This leads to the concept of no teachers, formalities to learning, or elements of what constitutes “proper” education. Without any certification of completion, there is no consistency between what learners know. Given the blurring of notions of “work/education/life balance,” lifestyle changes must occur, including regarding childcare. This scenario also incorporates an accelerated adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) solutions that other scenarios may use but which figure prominently in a laissez-faire Learn As You Go model.

The following helpful OECD (2020) Figure 4 infographic describes the four scenarios and differentiates the goals, structures, teachers, geopolitics, and challenges.

| 41

Infographic 4.1. Overview: Four OECD Scenarios for the Future of Schooling

OECD Scenarios for the Future of Schooling	Goals and functions	Organisation and structures	The teaching workforce	Governance and geopolitics	Challenges for public authorities
Scenario 1  Schooling extended	Schools are key actors in socialisation, qualification, care and orientating.	Educational monopolies retain all traditional functions of schooling systems.	Teachers in monopolies, with potential new economies of scale and division of tasks.	Strong role for traditional administration and emphasis on international collaboration.	Accommodating diversity and ensuring quality across a common system. Potential trade-off between consensus and innovation.
Scenario 2  Education outsourced	Fragmentation of demand with self-reliant "clients" looking for flexible services.	Diversification of structures: multiple organisational forms available to individuals.	Diversity of roles and status operating within and outside of schools.	Schooling systems as players in a wider (local, national, global) education market.	Supporting access and quality, fixing "market failures". Competing with other providers and ensuring information flows.
Scenario 3  Schools as learning hubs	Flexible schooling arrangements permit greater personalisation and community involvement.	Schools as hubs function to organise multiple configurations of local-global resources.	Professional teachers as nodes of wider networks of flexible expertise.	Strong focus on local decisions. Self-organising units in diverse partnerships.	Diverse interests and power dynamics; potential conflict between local and systemic goals. Large variation in local capacity.
Scenario 4  Learn-as-you-go	Traditional goals and functions of schooling are overwritten by technology.	Demanding of schooling as a social institution.	Open market of "prosumers" with a central role for communities of practice (local, national, global).	(Global) governance of data and digital technologies becomes key.	Potential for high interventionism (state, corporate) impacts democratic control and individual rights. Risk of high social fragmentation.

BACK TO THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION: FOUR OECD SCENARIOS FOR SCHOOLING © OECD 2020

Figure 4. Four OECD scenarios for the future of schooling. (OECD, 2020, p. 41)

A Critical Contextual Caveat

Five of the six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals fall into the education categories in two topic areas: stewardship/generosity and religious education. The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese was formed 102 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 and helping its faithful assimilate into their new homeland.

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).

For over one hundred years, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America 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., “stewardship and ministry engagement”). At the same time, the Archdiocese attempted to teach how to practice the disciplined Orthodox faith 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.).

By all objective measures, the American Greek Orthodox Church has not succeeded at providing its cradle Orthodox faithful effective stewardship or religious education (Stewardship Calling, n.d.). Interestingly, over the last 15 years, most growth in the Orthodox Church in the United States occurred through converts to Orthodoxy from other faith traditions, many of whom already understood, practiced, and engaged in effective Christian stewardship and ministry engagement. (Stewardship Calling, n.d.). These converts completed newly created catechetical educational programs to properly teach them the Orthodox faith’s fullness. Thus, the converts do not struggle as much as the cradle Orthodox do with the essential teaching elements in five of the six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals.

The following section examines the six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals in the above four OECD scenarios to hypothesize the projected result on a traditional green, yellow, and red scale. The objective is to assess how well each strategy performs in each scenario. Given the historical educational failures of the American Greek Orthodox churches, it is fascinating to contemplate whether materially innovative approaches and strategies could make a difference in the education of cradle Orthodox. However, the prevailing sentiment, reinforced by successful examples of parishes undertaking significantly enhanced stewardship and religious education, is that left to their own devices, the faithful will not acquire this religious education absent intentional Orthodox best-in-class teaching and programs that have become available in only the last decade or two. Moreover, given the Orthodox church’s rigidly hierarchical leadership structure and nature, the Hierarchs would never approve significantly external and variable approaches.

For these reasons, scenarios that focus less on more comprehensive education offered by the Orthodox church are far less likely to be successful. A profoundly hierarchical church structure and leadership methodology reinforce this assumption (or prejudice). Thus, as the analysis below will show, while many educational scenarios might have vastly different predictive futures with the advent of less traditional and rigid approaches, the presumption (or confirmation bias reinforced by successful examples) is that the greater the distance from the church as the source of best-in-class education, the worse the anticipated results, particularly with cradle Orthodox. Hence, there is an evaluated “sea of red” in the predictive analysis of how the six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals might fare in several of the four OECD scenarios, particularly in the Learn As You Go scenario.

Strategy | Scenario Matrix Analysis

The following color-coded assessment using the typical red-yellow-green rubric evaluates how each of the six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals will likely perform in the four future OECD (2020) scenarios.

SCENARIOS		Schooling Extended	Education Outsourced	Schools as Learning Hubs	Learn As You Go	
STRATEGIES	1	Tithing				
	2	Ministry Engagement				
	3	Planned Giving				
	4	Youth Religious Education				
	5	Adult Religious Education				
	6	New Church Building				

Rubric:

- Strategy performs well under this scenario.
- Strategy performs marginally under this scenario.
- Strategy performs poorly under this scenario.

Figure 5. Strategic Plan | OECD Scenario Matrix Analysis for Saints Raphael, Nicholas & Irene Greek Orthodox Church. (Marianes, 2024).

Strategy | Scenario Matrix Overview

This section offers a brief synopsis of how each of the six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals is expected to perform in the four OECD (2020) scenarios.

Strategy 1: Tithing

Given the Critical Contextual Caveat previously discussed, the three disciplines of excellent stewardship and generosity (e.g., tithing, ministry engagement, and planned giving) have not been enculturated through effective education programs that have only recently been delivered in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese to

address a unique Orthodox theological and experiential perspective on tithing and its historical absence among cradle Orthodox education. Thus, the Sts. RNI Strategic Goals featuring enhanced extended church-based education strategies and collaborative learning extensions from traditional approaches are expected to succeed well in the School Extended and Learning Hub scenarios because of the hands-on and systematic educational approach. An Outsourced scenario might allow the Strategic Goals to achieve some basic principles and tactics of tithing; however, given the Orthodox theological understanding and foundations, anything without grounding in consistent theology would fare poorly. This is the risk created depending on to whom the education is outsourced. The previous open learn-as-you-go models have been an abject failure over the last century (before recent formal programs). Thus, the Tithing Strategic Goal will likely perform equally ineffectively in the Learn As You Go scenario. Because of the weak foundation from prior generations, Orthodox Christians (especially the incidental cradles) appear to require a disciplined and systematic education on tithing. This explains why the Tithing Strategic Goal will not perform well in any flexible learn-on-your-own scenario.

Strategy 2: Ministry Engagement

Again, the Critical Contextual Caveat explains the difficulty in engaging cradle Orthodox in ministries. Newer Councils of Ministries programs, where implemented, are seeing positive results in ministry engagement. However, the key objective of this education is to have parishioners previously not enculturated in effective education programs learn how to engage and manage effective ministries. The Strategic Goal for Ministry Engagement education is expected to perform well in the School Extended and Learning Hub scenario models by providing hands-on and organized instruction on why and how ministry engagement must change. It might work well if such education is outsourced to an educator familiar with the unique elements and nuances of the Orthodox church ministry work. However, many ministry engagement models that work in other jurisdictions or faith traditions lack the Orthodox foundations to be effective at Sts. RNI. Finally, as in all cases for the Sts. RNI Strategic Goals, the Ministry Engagement Strategic Goal will likely perform poorly in an open-ended Learn As You Go scenario because of the need for formalized education, training, and processes among the Sts. RNI Orthodox faithful.

Strategy 3: Planned Giving

Mentioning “planned giving” is speaking a completely foreign language to Greek Orthodox parishioners. (Obviously, we cannot use the “its Greek to me” expression.) Indeed, while 68% of Americans do not have a will or an estate plan to offer a planned gift, many who have a will do not make planned gifts to their churches (Lustbader, n.d.). Thus, the absence of any effective or viable education in Orthodox churches makes virtually any form of instruction better than the status quo. Indeed, while the School Extended and Learning Hubs would be future smart

and aligned well, the Planned Giving Strategic Goal would likely perform well also under an Outsourced educational scenario since no Orthodox theological construct needs to be taught or untaught. Indeed, the only scenario in which the Planned Giving Strategic Goals would predictably have poor results is when education is left to the individual without formalized processes, systems, appeals, and training, as in the Learn As You Go scenario.

Strategy 4: Youth Religious Education

Religious education is critical given the high 64% departure and attrition rates of Greek Orthodox and other Christian youth after they leave their familial homes (Barna Group, 2019; Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019). The insignificant youth religious education currently delivered is well-intentioned but not academically and theologically rigorous and lacks effectiveness metrics or analytics (Stewardship Calling, n.d.). Thus, the need for Sts. RNI Strategic Goal #4 to focus on youth religious education, with the primary success coming from firsthand training from even more diverse teachers with the proper theological training. Therefore, the Youth Religious Education Strategic Goal would likely excel in a School Extended scenario. However, the Outsourcing and Learning Hubs scenarios may allow specific positive results in the Youth Education Strategic Goal the more they include a well-grounded, theologically sound catechetical program. Still, in some aspects of these two scenarios, as outsourcing and learning hubs get farther removed from proper Orthodox catechesis, the Religious Education Strategic Goal results would be neutral to poor because they do not connect to the rich Orthodox theology. The Youth Religious Education Goals would perform the worst in the independent Learn As You Go scenario and eliminate the nominal benefit realized by the existing Sunday school programs. The research clearly shows the need for more regimented (even if experiential) religious education for youth (Barna Group, 2019; Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019).

Strategy 5: Adult Religious Education

The scenario assessment of the Sts. RNI adult education strategic goal #5 is likely identical to the youth goal for the same reasons. It is well documented that the majority of cradle Orthodox have not adequately learned their faith and need formal and more rigorous education in their adulthood. Furthermore, Smith and Denton (2005) and Smith (2024) have empirically documented the symbiosis and connectedness of adult religious education and youth education. A parish youth education program cannot fully succeed without successful foundational adult religious education support. Additionally, the content and methodology must be theologically consistent and calibrated to age appropriateness and learning style modalities. Thus, the Adult Religious Education Strategic Goal would likely experience the same positive results as the Youth Religious Education Strategic Goal under the Schooling Extended formal education scenario, mixed results under the Outsourcing and Learning Hubs scenarios, and failure under the open-ended Learn As You Go scenario. That is not to say the strategies in the School Extended model are identical between youth and adults. What it might take an

active adult to engage fully differs from youth in some circumstances. However, a sound Orthodox curriculum from well-trained educators should produce better results in religious education.

Strategy 6: New Church Building

We primarily have Orthodox churches for the liturgical and sacramental services and engagement. They are also the only place the Holy Eucharist (Body and Blood of Christ) is offered. The liturgical services are essential educational sessions, not merely rituals to be attended. Indeed, virtually everything spoken, sung, or chanted in the long Orthodox Divine Liturgies and other services derives directly from the Holy Gospel. The church building also hosts formal education classes (either live or initiated via technology). Sts. RNI needs a new church building: (a) due to its explosive growth so that it can finally accommodate the increasing numbers of parishioners for the Divine Liturgy and deliver the Orthodox Sacraments, (b) to provide the housing of resources for teaching (both verbal and experiential), (c) to be the point of initiation of any distance learning options, and (d) to serve as the repository of academic and other teaching materials that must be maintained in physical form. The Outsourced education future or laissez-faire Learn As You Go scenarios would not require the facilities or building being planned and implemented by Sts. RNI Strategic Goal #6, thus causing this Strategic Goal to perform poorly in those scenarios.

While the preceding stress-test brief narratives assess the probable performance of each of the six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals in each of the four OECD (2020) educational scenarios considered, it is also helpful to take a step back and summarize more holistically the relative strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and elements of threat (SWOT) that could result from the Strategic Goals across the four OECD (2020) scenarios.

SWOT Analysis

Introduction

At the outset, it is critical to understand that the Scenario SWOT Analysis (SSA) below differs significantly from Sts. RNI's Strategic Plan SWOT Analysis (SPSA). The SPSA conducted during the strategic planning process focused on Sts. RNI's internal strengths and weaknesses and external factors that might provide opportunities or threats to the parish.

In contrast, this SSA is a more holistic assessment of the overall performance of the six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals juxtaposed against the four future scenarios. It attempts to aggregate the individual evaluations of the twenty-four possible outcomes (six Strategic Goals stress-tested against four scenarios) to provide a more bird's eye macro view of the Strategic Goals and their likely futures.

While this SSA may identify specific strengths from one or more of the twenty-four outcomes, it is helpful to evaluate Sts. RNI's Strategic Goals and the parish's future readiness to deal with the consequences of these scenarios as outlined in Figure 5, p.14 (Strategic Plan | OECD Scenario Matrix Analysis for Saints Raphael, Nicholas & Irene Greek Orthodox Church).

SWOT Analysis Summary

The following bullet point summary of key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the six Strategic Goals, as a whole, provides a high-level future smart stress-test summary of the Sts. RNI six Strategic Goals.



Figure 6A. SWOT Analysis Summary. (Marianes, 2024).

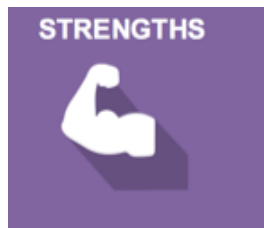
Weaknesses	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less formal educational scenarios can lead to less theologically prepared parishioners. • Failing Stewardship Strategic Goals (#1, #2, #3) will create a substantially under-resourced church. • Failure to optimize Religious Education Goals results in less engaged faithful. • The absence of religious education makes convert evangelism difficult. • Inadequate facilities reduce the quantity and quality of all educational options. • Failing to educate this generation of youth effectively dooms the future church. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of adult faith education compounds the religious illiteracy felony among their children. • Lack of faith education of youth accelerates the demise of the parish. • External trends toward AI and outsourced educational options make theologically sound Orthodox education training more difficult. • An under-resourced parish makes all activities less successful and growth more difficult. • Trends toward education decentralization or greater governmental interference with education could threaten Orthodox theological practices and understandings.

Figure 6B. SWOT Analysis Summary. (Marianes, 2024).

The following brief narrative describes the above stress-test summary of the six Sts. RNI strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to provide greater context.

SWOT Analysis Explanation

Again, this SSA (Scenario SWOT Analysis) differs from the SPSA (Strategic Plan SWOT Analysis) conducted by Sts. RNI, as discussed above.



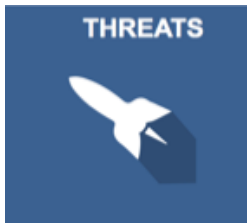
The critical commonality of the Sts. RNI Strategic Goals is their primary emphasis on education, which is a hallmark of a healthy and growing church. Three of the four OECD (2020) education scenarios provide primarily or partially positive potential futures for the Sts. RNI Strategic Goals. Churches must focus on both the religious education of their faithful and their education on how to contribute their time, talent, and treasures, which are represented by five of the six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals. Thus, this stress-testing suggests that more significant financial and human capital resources and returns through generosity and engagement are possible in more formal educational scenarios. The new/expanded church building is necessary for religious services even if it does not serve other educational purposes. However, a more flexibly designed educational space would be a helpful modification to the current plan. Education is a core tenant of Orthodox theology and Christ’s teachings, and this scenario analysis suggests that substantial investments in all forms of education and facilities should be positive for Sts. RNI in most instances.



The Sts. RNI Strategic Goals show increased vulnerability and less success the farther the future veers from more traditional educational approaches with individuals highly trained in the theological, stewardship, and engagement understanding from an Orthodox perspective. More modern and less hierarchical churches might find greater success as the future of education moves toward greater flexibility. However, the laissez-faire future open-ended education scenario would expose a significant weakness for the Sts. RNI Strategic Goals the further education departed from the formalistic and traditional Orthodox education that is a core belief. Furthermore, less effective stewardship education (Strategic Goals #1, #2, #3) could create a substantially under-resourced church from financial and human capital perspectives. More importantly, less effective religious education accelerates the weakening of the bond between the church and its faithful and the departure of youth not fully educated on their faith, tradition, and beliefs. Lessening stewardship or religious education can lead to less impactful or prevalent evangelization. This consequence would, in turn, put stress on declining churches. If the greatest freedom Learn As You Go scenario occurred, the new and larger church building targeted in Strategic Goal #6 could become unnecessary or too expensive to maintain, thus placing even further strain on a parish. The bottom line is that failing to effectively educate current and future generations on their faith and core beliefs dooms the future church to irrelevancy in the American landscape.



Enhancing the religious and stewardship engagement of the faithful of Sts. RNI provides countless positive outcomes and opportunities. The ability to improve educational alternatives can produce greater parish health and effectiveness. Partnering with other like-oriented Orthodox groups in hubs can expand the educational reach of Sts. RNI teams. Naturally, greater depth and success of religious education connects faithful parishioners closer to the teachings of Christ with more significant opportunities to evangelize to other potential converts. A new building is also essential for increased liturgical worship space but can also include more flexibly designed educational spaces to accommodate a variety of future scenarios. Overall, substantially greater effective and expanded spiritual and stewardship formal and education called for in five of the six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals provide significant opportunities for volunteers to be productively used to bring people closer to Christ and help Sts. RNI fulfill its WHY: ***To welcome all on a transformational journey to a life of purpose and salvation.***



Threats abound for Christian churches generally in the United States. They remain potentially more significant for those faith traditions that are in distinct minorities where departures due to lack of proper faith formation leads to complacency or loss of engagement. The lack of effective religious and engagement education for adults exacerbates the religious illiteracy among the next generation of Orthodox faithful. This shortcoming in proper faith formation leads to the demise of a parish, making its buildings museums rather than living houses of worship. The Sts. RNI six Strategic Goals are targeted to address these threats and perform reasonably well in most future states. However, for exceedingly ancient, hierarchical, and ritualistic churches, an education “free for all” laissez-faire Learn As You Go environment leads to further negative results. Thus, as greater use of technologies, alternative outsourced educational sources, and even AI expand, pressures will be placed on theologically sound traditional Orthodox theological education. Furthermore, parishes without sufficient financial and human resources will fail to educate their current and future faithful and evangelized believers and inadequately serve others in their communities. Thus, the absence of effective stewardship and engagement education leading to under-resourced parishes and ministries puts added pressure on Sts. RNI to accelerate the educational objectives in their Strategic Plan. Finally, trends toward education or operational decentralization, autonomy, or more significant governmental interference with or control of Orthodox theological education could threaten Sts. RNI’s religious education, practices, and parish health and wellbeing.

Conclusion

Overall, the juxtaposition of the six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals into the future of the OECD (2020) four education scenarios show primarily positive results with a few neutral future possibilities. However, this scenario stress-test shows an apparent problem with all six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals if the laissez-faire Learn As You Go educational future scenario becomes a reality. This is true because of the current Sts. RNI cradle Orthodox faithful’s relatively poor educational levels in the first five Strategic Goals. Furthermore, this future-ready stress-test of the Sts. RNI Strategic Plan six Goals identified the one strategy (#3 Planned Giving) that performed well regardless of the other two Stewardship Goals (#1 Tithing and #2 Ministry Engagement) in either of the School Extended or Learning Hub scenarios, and perhaps also in the Outsourced model (depending on to whom and how the education is outsourced relative to the needs of the faithful).

The Youth and Adult Religious Education Strategic Goals (#4 and #5) and the new church building (#6) significantly depend on the more traditional School Extended scenario. While one must still build the new and bigger church for the previously identified principal objectives of liturgical services and sacramental practices for a growing congregation, the relatively poorer performance of the New Building Strategic Goal #6 in all these educational scenarios is likely outweighed by the

other paramount religious reasons for the building. Thus, this stress-test does not dramatically change the need for the Strategic Goal #6 new church building, although it might suggest design changes.

Call To Action

“I believe there are too many practitioners in the church who are not believers. In such a fearful world, we need a fearless church.” (Lewis, 1983, p.158)

Jesus Christ commanded his disciples to “go forth and make disciples of all nations” (New King James Version, 1982, Matthew 28:19) and “to be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (New King James Version, 1982, Acts 1:8). While one cannot say if the “ends of the earth” is in Cumming, Georgia where Sts. RNI finds its “Jerusalem,” to do what the Lord commands requires the E² powerhouse of Education and Engagement.

The six Sts. RNI Strategic Goals are focused on providing the education and resources necessary to have fully engaged disciples of Jesus Christ who are capable and ready to make more disciples. Thus, the relatively positive performance of all Strategic Goals in three scenarios confirms the directionally correct focus of the Sts. RNI Strategic Plan.

The poor performance in the fourth laissez-faire Learn As You Go scenario suggests that the efforts on Strategic Goals 1-5 should be accelerated and amplified in the potential School Extended scenario mindset as soon as possible so that even if the fourth scenario prevails, the advancement in religious and stewardship education will be more firmly rooted at Sts. RNI. In other words, a dedicated and prompt rollout of Strategic Goals numbers 1 through 5 is advisable.

The new Sts. RNI church building is essential to provide the growing number of parishioners, both cradle and converts, with the liturgical and sacramental engagement that can only happen in an Orthodox church sanctuary. Given the possible identified OECD (2020) future educational scenarios, Sts. RNI would be wise to use this future smart stress-test to re-examine all the design elements of the new Sts. RNI building and ensure maximum flexibility in the design and use cases for each non-sanctuary room. This would be especially beneficial if more outsourced, non-physically present, or other less facility-dependent education scenarios became the norm in the future.

Author Corrie Ten Bloom encouraged, “Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God” (Boom, 2013). So, too, Sts. RNI must enthusiastically pursue its Strategic Plan to enhance religious and stewardship education with facilities designed to bring people closer to Christ and each other so that they may fulfill their WHY “***To welcome all on a transformational journey to a life of purpose and salvation.***”

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