

EXTERNAL THREATS

36 - SECULARIZATION & CULTURAL/SOCIETAL SHIFTS - Cultural shifts

Cultural shifts away from traditional Greek values and practices; Growing secularization of society; The Devil is among us and we as a society are OK with accepting it. Bad news is always around.

And we as a culture focus on our differences more than our similarities. It has become OK to deride the other side of an issue; Pop culture emphasis on non-religious aspects of life, such as wealth, fame, drugs, etc; Our church is being used as a venue for sacraments.; Generational Drift; The general culture is increasing irreligious, Church is less relevant to youth.; Orthodox faith is under attack; Negative experience people have had with Christians and the pain they caused; Lack of interest amongst many in attending church; Apathy from APIPS; Loss of Greek culture/language as people find more acceptance and/or satisfaction with other groups (college, fraternities, work, social media, sports, sexual identity, etc.); Fewer young families and youth are identifying with organized religion in general Negativity towards Christianity in general Fear of christian worship; Our youth turning away from the church during high school, college, or early adult years due to societal pressures; Liberal colleges teaching values contradictorily to our faith and hate for Christianity; Church is a Theocracy inability or not willing to adapt to modern times & arrogant; Secular Competition: Christianity is misunderstood and misrepresented by many of the high-profile voices that claim to represent Christian views, resulting in an overarching mistrust of Christians in many sectors.; The worldwide assault on Christianity. A real, visible threat to our Faith, our churches and our communities.; Violence against Christians; Our nation has gotten away from God (think about how television used to have Billy Graham and others speaking about faith. It was shocking back in 1989 when Madonna's song Like a Prayer video was released. In today's mindset that's nothing!).

Discussion of God, faith and religion are considered verboten in casual conversation in that politics-and-religion are not to be discussed. The current news involving the murder of Charlie Kirk and his ministry are highlighting this lack of faith overall but also the good news of youth embracing their faith; Cultural diversification and influx of people from other faiths could reduce alignment with the traditional Greek Orthodox practices if not approached with vigilance; National trends of declining religious affiliation and decreasing Christian identification as secularism rises; National Religious Trends: Decline in religious affiliation across the U.S. impacts growth potential for all churches, including Orthodox parishes. Cultural secularization and liberal pressures. Increasing cultural emphasis on radical inclusivity or liberal theology can dilute or compromise scriptural and patristic teachings.; Christianity around the world is persecuted; Christianity is under attack worldwide; Christianity is the only religion that can openly be mocked and crucified without anybody needing to worry about being canceled; Anti-Christian violence; Anti-Christian violence.; The persecution of all Christian groups; Anti-Christian culture, primarily started with the abuse scandals from Catholics that spilled over to all Christian groups.; Destruction of the nuclear family; Sundays are not sacred in modern culture; Lack of religious values in the West and the promotion of degeneracy; Sunday has become another day in the week no longer a day of rest; Sundays not being respected as a day to go to church; Parents who conform to taking their children to events on Sundays.; Breakdown of the family/values.

20 - ECONOMIC & FINANCIAL - Economic policies have been and are being made that are

likely to cause a recession.; Economic instability; Capitalistic society causing people to work harder and volunteer less; Financial issues (as Pogas says "don't want that beautiful church to become a museum); Economy; The economy is unstable and can effect Saint Sophia Church finances negatively.; Economic uncertainty and debates about the tax exempt status of churches may be financial challenges; The economy because a lot of people cannot afford to give back as much as they want.; Economic recessions and high cost inflation are always a concern.; Job losses, and jobs that require younger folks to move out of the area.; Financial Instability; Economic instability will be a rationale for stewards to limit their commitment to the church.; Risk of tax law changes that could affect tax exemption status; Economic instability affecting donations Economic Pressures: Rising costs of living and inflation affect stewardship contributions and festival profitability.; Cost of living today that impacts stewardship; Rising costs: inflation impacting festival costs, utilities, building maintenance, etc.; Property and Casualty insurance market. If we have another loss, we will likely NOT find any carrier to provide insurance, which would cause us to default on mortgage and potentially have to self insurance millions of dollars. This is why effective risk management is critical.;

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Competing charity groups.; Economic climate (financial struggles that diminish stewardship and participation); Cost of living today that impacts stewardship and events; The uncertainty of the economy.

18 - TECHNOLOGY & MEDIA - Social media and geopolitical boundaries have increased polarization and isolation between groups, leading to greater bias and bigotry rather than understanding and truth.; Technology distraction: competing with digital entertainment/social media for young people's attention; Media and political climate that creates negative impressions of Christianity that could potentially threaten or restrict our religious freedoms; Hollywood; Social media; AI can be unknown or incorrect; Not all the information on the internet may be accurate; Internet and technology lead to internally centric and causing isolation and self-reliance; The national crisis, which is promoted by the news of certain mental illnesses (i.e. gender dysphoria) being accepted on a wide scale, and if you don't, you get hammered for it.; Technology; Social Media; Complacent Corruption" the idea that all institutions are corrupt, government, education, religion etc. People who assume that everything is corrupt lose faith in the institution and if they can drop out.; Not keeping up with evolving/new ways to communicate; Digital media overuse, including social media & gaming & streaming/binging can keep people from seeing the benefits of being part of a live, F2F community.; The advancement of AI technology; In order to survive in society, you must comply with new technologies whether right or wrong, even against your beliefs, such as putting a mark on your hand so you can be identified easily, buy + sell things by waving your hand-palm etc. Losing humanity; A society that increasingly shifts towards virtual engagement might be a threat if this area is underserved.

14 - POLITICS & POLARIZATION - There is increasing polarization in our society along with broken, lost and empty lost souls. This causes a sickness that sometimes comes out as hatred and harm to churches and church parishioners.; American politics; The toxicity and corruption of American politics threatens the faith of our parishioners daily and, when brought into the church, it can create division.; Complacent corruption that pervades everything and culture; Government regulations and laws that could threaten tax exempt status; Our nation losing sight of why and how it was founded and that impact on all churches; Politics; Political climate; Political environment;; the current political & social scene in the US promote normalization of: A me-first mindset; Being under surveillance and not being allowed to worship; Prejudice; The fractiousness of American political life can easily feed divisiveness in Church.; Montgomery County has shifted politically to a stance not traditionally aligned with our faith and culture.

14 - COMPETITION FROM OTHER RELIGIONS & COMPETING SPORTS/ACTIVITIES - Competition with other churches and religious communities; Competition for surrounding churches or sister parishes; Competing activities and obligations within communities, schools and other groups. For example, travel sports teams for kids, school functions are more and more afterschool and weekends as well.; Sunday sports conflicting with youth participation; Sports and Activities on Sundays; Sunday sports; All sects of Christianity are attacking each other and saying they're wrong in online forums (with lots of ignorant arguments); Competing demands on families (sports, school, work schedules) resulting in declining church attendance among younger generation.; The popularity and dominance of other Christian denominations in the U.S. (e.g., Catholicism, Protestantism); Losing people to non-denominational mega-churches who provide more but demand less.; Families face competing pressures from sports, school, and weekend activities, limiting parish participation.; How does an ancient religion compete (perhaps compete is not the right word?) with new age churches that seem to be popping up everywhere, many preaching prosperity theology.; Outside interests of youth families more attractive; Not enough time especially for families. Church becomes less of a priority when you are married, have a job and/or have kids.

4 - SAFETY - Safety Concerns: Increasing threats to faith institutions require proactive security planning.; Increased trend of mental illness (potential threats to safety by self-radicalized

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individuals).; Other pandemics that would make the churches shut down again.; Mass shootings causing fear and concerns about attending church and/or staying afterwards.

3 - ORTODOXY TRADITIONALISM & OBSCURITY - Orthodoxy is not well known in the area; Yiyia theology; As the world continues to evolve and Orthodox traditions remain the same ...this may seem unappealing to some, leaving some people's view of the church as rigid, strict or unwelcoming. There are rules in society no matter how big or small and likewise God gave us his rules found in the Bible. Some people tend to bend those rules to their personal liking, but for me it's those who stand strong and adhere to the traditions of the church and the teachings of God that prevail. The ever evolving new age way of society's thinking to me is the biggest threat that we face as a church.

2 - YOUTH ISSUES - Young people leaving for college, reducing active participation in parish youth and young adult ministries; Continued loss of young people; The high drop out rate of our youth after High School.

2 - ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES - Environmental policies have been and are being made that make it harder to be good stewards of God's creation.; Climate change.

ONEOFFES

- ~ Cultural Greeks who know very little about the Faith;
- ~ How do we remain relevant without watering down our Orthodox faith to make it easier to practice?;
- ~ Legal challenges (refusing sacraments based on certain beliefs of the Orthodox Church);
- ~ Life coaches;
- ~ Materialism Fear & hatred of the other Situational ethics Disregard for subject matter experts Lies

INTERNAL TO OUR PARISH AND NOT TO BE CONSIDERED EXTERNAL

- ~ Delayed YAL Development: Lack of formal YAL structure risks losing young adults in their 20s.;
- ~ We are the only Greek Orthodox Church in the area: the GOYA, specifically, is outside the loop regarding other Greek Orthodox Churches (being invited to churches events, dancing at the parade);
- ~ The existence of larger and Grecker churches;
- ~ Aging population;
- ~ Because we are so diverse- I believe we are looked at as, not a fully Greek Church by our sister parishes in our metropolitan leads to competition from other, larger, churches in our metropolitan (Losing members due to this);
- ~ Due to diminishing clergy, potential insecurity among parishioners in losing spiritual guidance or spiritual
- ~ Geographic Mobility: Young adults leaving for college or jobs often disengage from parish life permanently.; father because clergy will be re-assigned regularly due to Archdiocese needs.;
- ~ Small GOYA Membership: A small youth group risks further attrition if not supported and expanded.;
- ~ Length of Sunday services see above;
- ~ Over reliance on a few pledge units that give a substantial portion of the operating costs of the church;
- ~ Reliance on community for festival if low attendance / poor weather, we will take a financial hit.;
- ~ We are highly visible, which makes us an easy target for evil individuals or groups. Need to continue to build on safety measures for our people and property.;
- ~ Overdependence on people outside the church to fund our church through festivals and fundraisers as primary revenue sources.
- ~ Sister parishes in the Philadelphia region consider us a remote location;
- ~ Economic capacity of church is failing. Do not rely on single high end donor to sustain operations.;
- ~ Attrition of elder community, not able to keep the traditions documented and sustainable.;
- ~ Our Church is minimized by sister parishes because of our size.;
- ~ Competition: Our Sister Greek Orthodox Churches have larger amounts of involved families with children. They are pulling our young families away because of established programs with a greater amount of participants. Children like participating in events with groups of other children their age not just 1 or 2 kids their age.;;
- ~ An aging community without newer young members and families.;
- ~ Small threat would be the Focus door is left open to those who are attending the Focus event but do not have access to the building without a member of the parish.