

St. Stephen Orthodox Church

Vision & Strategic Planning - WHY Discovery Part 1

Dr. Bill Marianes



[StewardshipCalling.com](https://stewardshipcalling.com)

Stewardship Calling

What are you doing with all of the gifts God has given you?

WHY? STEWARDSHIP STRATEGIC PLANNING INTERNET RADIO & PODCASTS KEYNOTES & LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

PERSONAL

HOLY ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UGANDA

ST. SOPHIA JEFFERSONVILLE, PA STRATEGIC PLAN

ST. STEPHEN ORTHODOX CHURCH

CHRIST THE SAVIOR ACADEMY

SAMPLE S.M.A.R.T GOAL & ACTION PLANS

BOSTON METROPOLIS -

Strategic Planning

Scroll down to St. Stephen page

<https://stewardshipcalling.com/st-stephen-orthodox-church/>

St. Stephen Orthodox

By the grace of God, I am bl...
strategic planning. This is th

ing parish of St. Stephen Orthodox Church in Longwood, Florida, through

Draft your proposed St. Sophia Orthodox Church Why Statement and email it to:
billmarianes@gmail.com by:

Midnight - Thursday
January 22nd

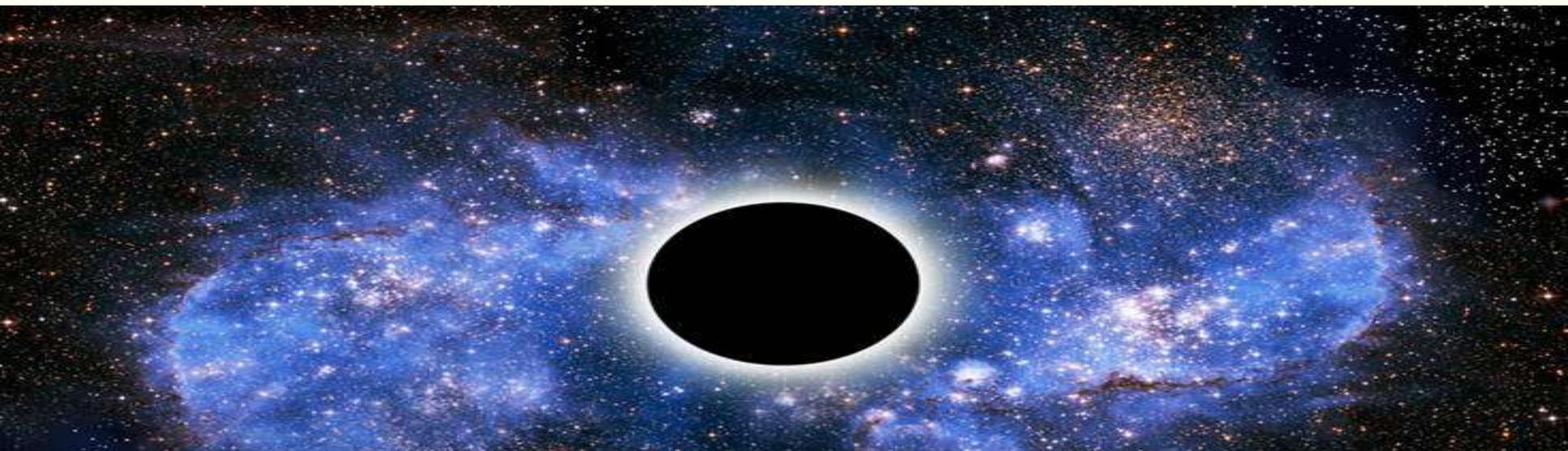
DO IT TONIGHT – while it is fresh.
Do **NOT miss omorrow's deadline!**

A stage with red curtains and a spotlight. The scene is set on a stage with heavy red curtains that have gold tassels and fringe. A single spotlight shines down from the ceiling, illuminating the center of the stage floor. The text "Let's set the stage" is written in a white, elegant cursive font in the center of the stage.

*Let's set
the stage*



We are living in exponential times...
... the speed of change is
unimaginable and accelerating



Years it took to reach 50 million users:

Telephone - 75 years



Radio - 38 years



TV - 13 years



Internet - 4 years



Instagram Threads - 24 hours



If 22 year-old Facebook were a country . . .



. . . it would be the largest country in the world

. . . MORE THAN TWICE the size of China and India, and 8.8 times bigger than the U.S.

~ Texting became useful about
25 years ago



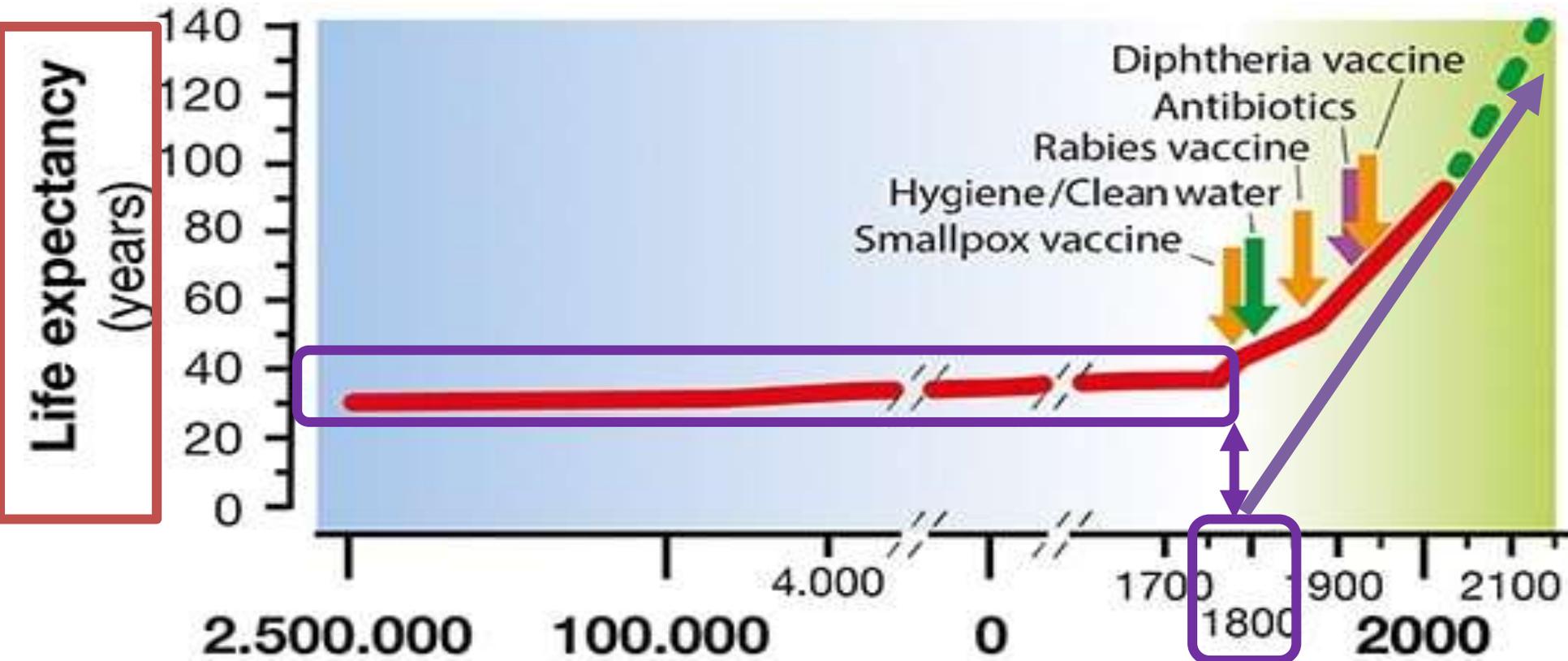
~ **97%** of American adults text

~ Text messages have a
98% open rate versus
only **20%** for email.

~ **95%** of text messages are
read in under 3 minutes.

Longevity Escape Velocity (LEV)

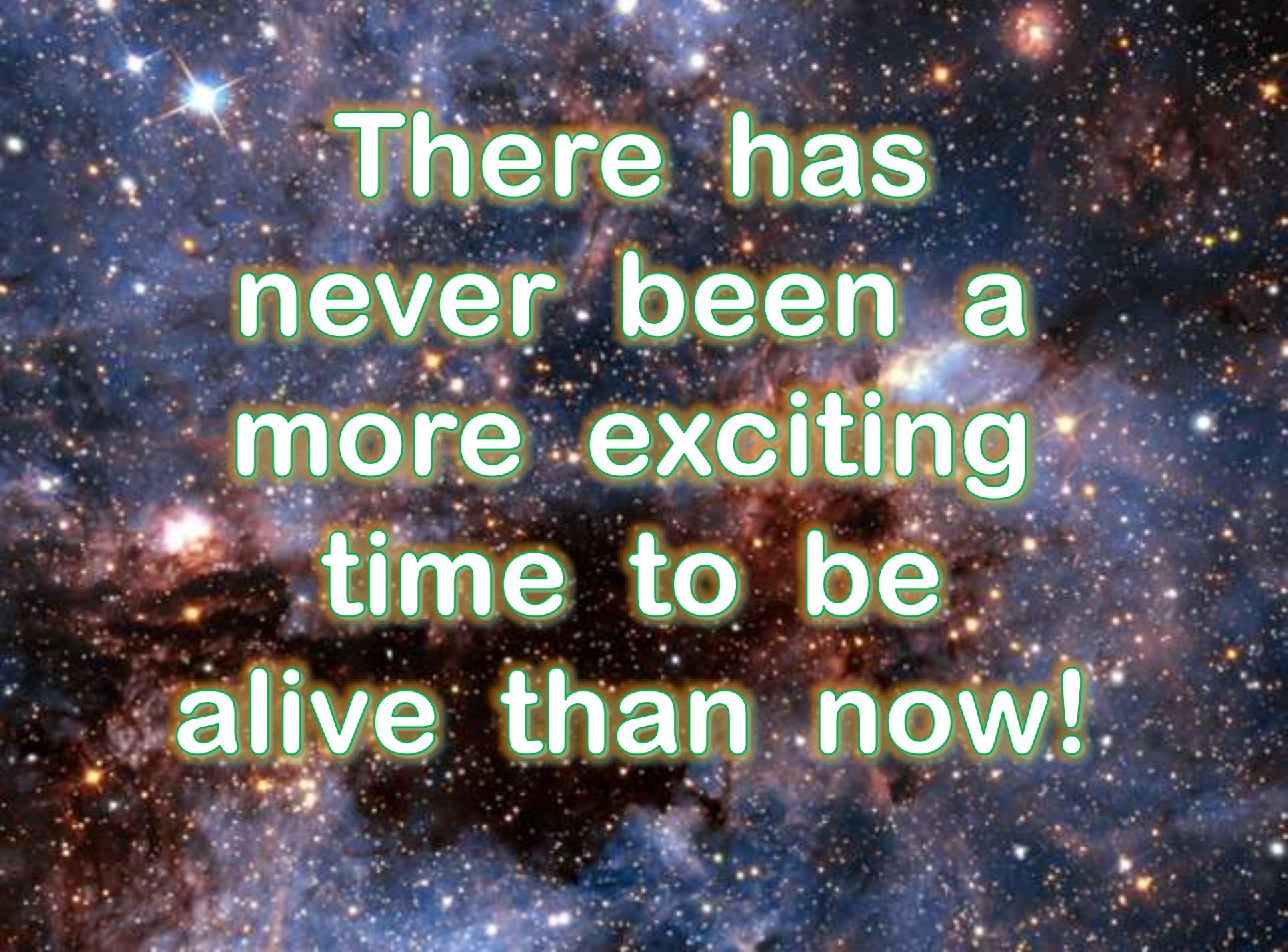
AI will extend your remaining life expectancy (not *life expectancy at birth*) longer than the time that is passing. (i.e., you have another year of life for each year you live.)



Your Main Objective



“Don’t die from something stupid” in
the next 5-10 years until we reach
Longevity Escape Velocity



There has
never been a
more exciting
time to be
alive than now!



MIND BLOWN



Jack Welch

Chairman & CEO - General Electric



“If the rate of change on the outside exceeds the rate of change on the inside, the end is near.”



“Change before you have to.”





Leaders of a church will either be risk takers, or church caretakers who will eventually become its undertaker.



AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION TIME!

What Is One Of The Single Biggest Challenge Facing Our Church?

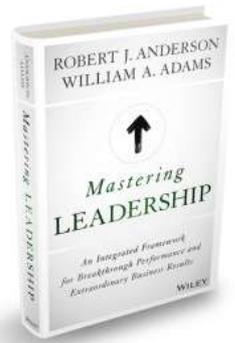
Entropy

$$\Delta S = S_f - S_i = \int \frac{dq_{rev}}{T}$$

$$\Delta S = \frac{q_{rev}}{T}$$

- ~ Everything in the universe moves from order to disorder, and Entropy measures that change
- ~ If you don't make positive changes, you will get negative changes

Mastering Leadership¹



The top 2 challenges identified in a survey of 1,500 CEOs was:

1. escalating complexity,
2. building the creative capacity in leadership to deal with it.

We Live In A VUCAD World

Volatility

Uncertainty

Complexity

Ambiguity

Disruption

“In the next 10 years, we will experience as many changes as humanity has seen during the past century.”



Ray Kurzweil
Futurist at Google, Co-
Founder of Singularity
University

45% of U.S. Adults would rather live in the past while only 14% would prefer living in the future

If they could choose, about 3 times as many Americans would want to live in past as in future

% who say that if they could choose, they would live ...

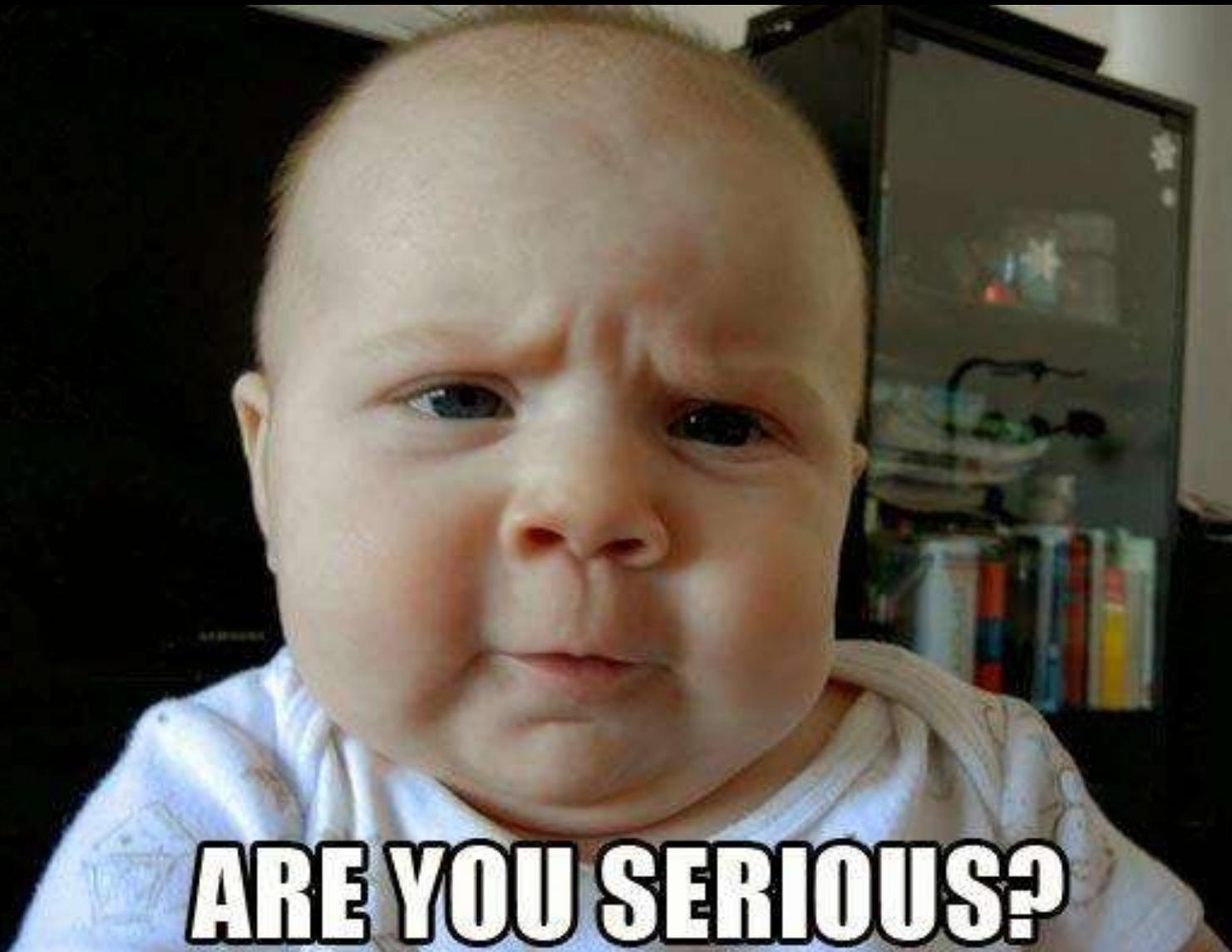
- 50 or more years in the past
- Less than 50 years in the past
- In the present
- Less than 50 years in the future
- 50 or more years in the future



Note: Share who didn't answer is not shown.

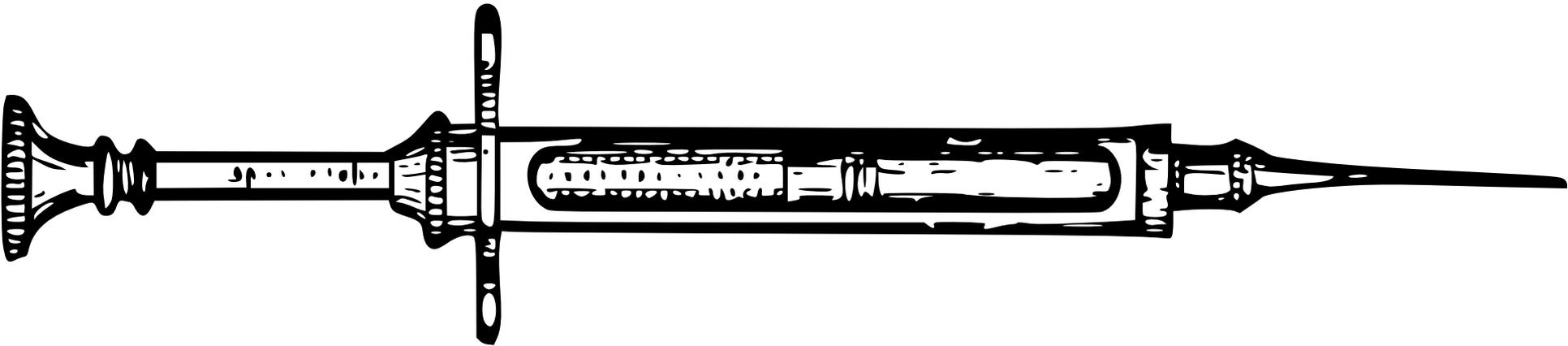
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 8-Aug. 3, 2025.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



ARE YOU SERIOUS?

The Anecdote for a VUCAD World

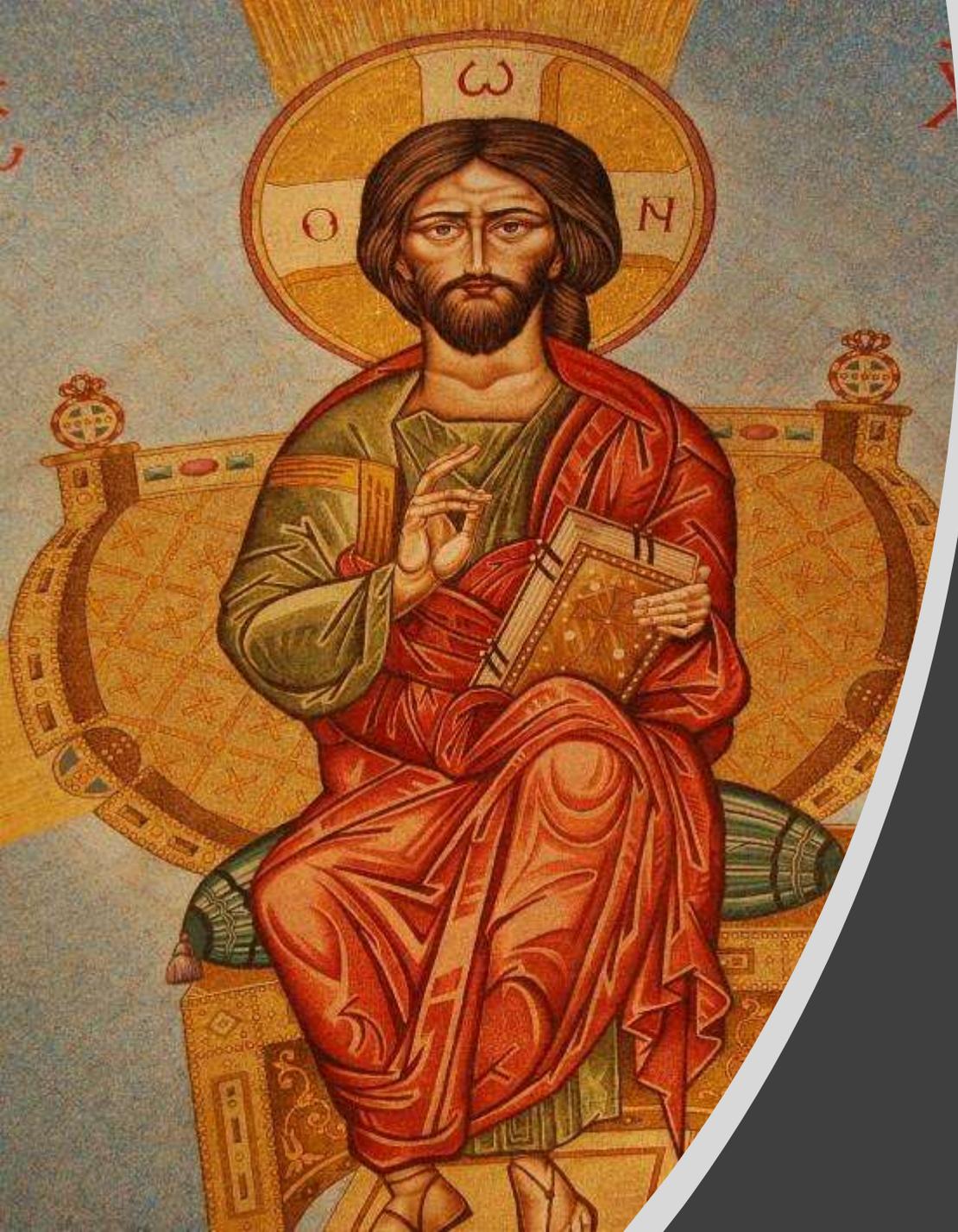


Μετάνοια

Metanoia



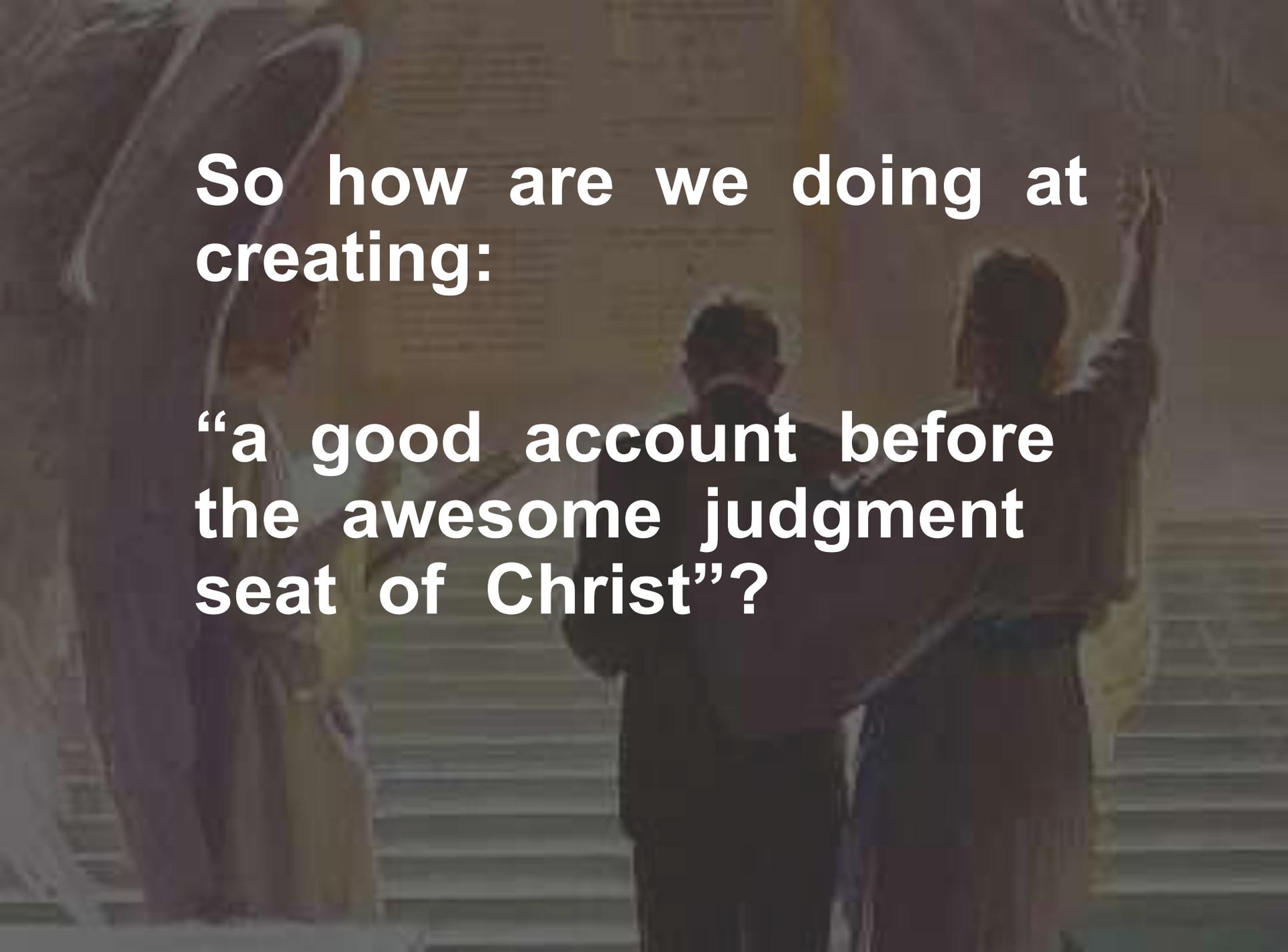
Are you prepared to
transformationally change?



One personal WHY

“...and for good account before the awesome judgment seat of Christ.”

II Corinthians 5:10
Orthodox Divine Liturgy



**So how are we doing at
creating:**

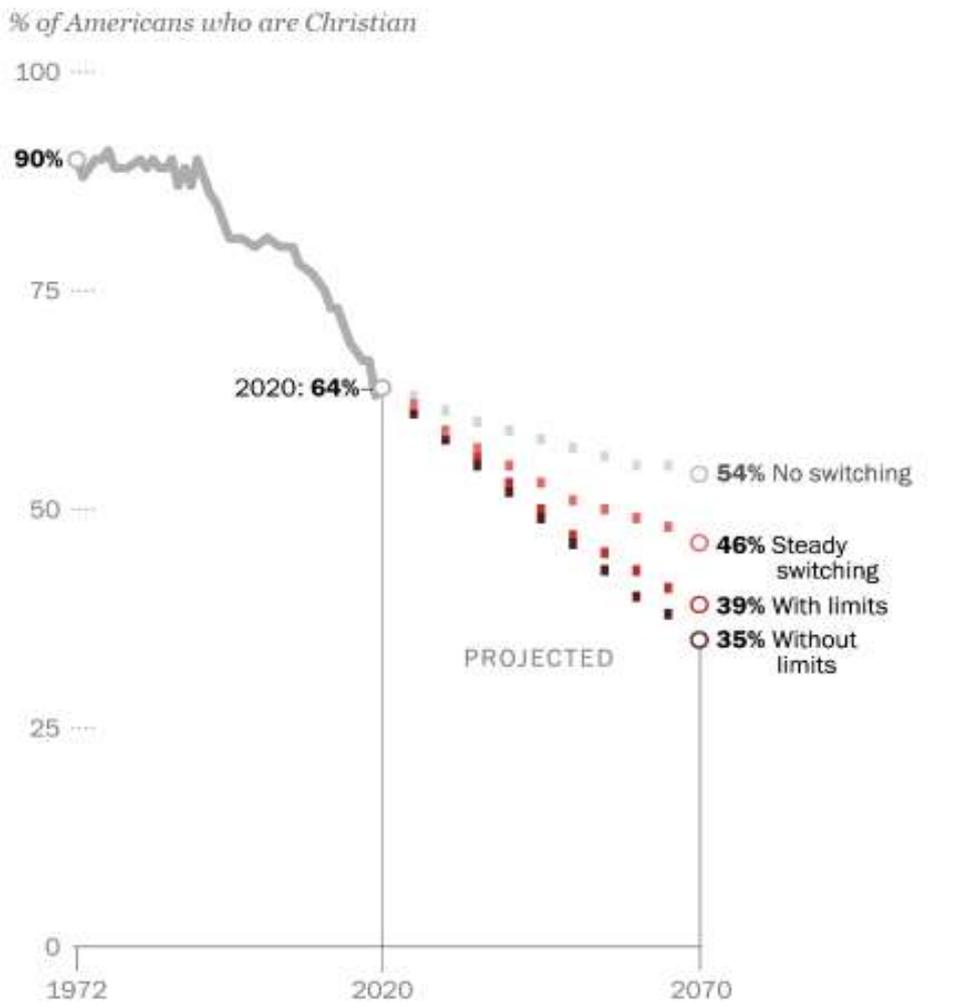
**“a good account before
the awesome judgment
seat of Christ”?**

**IN GOD
WE TRUST
ALL OTHERS
MUST BRING
DATA**

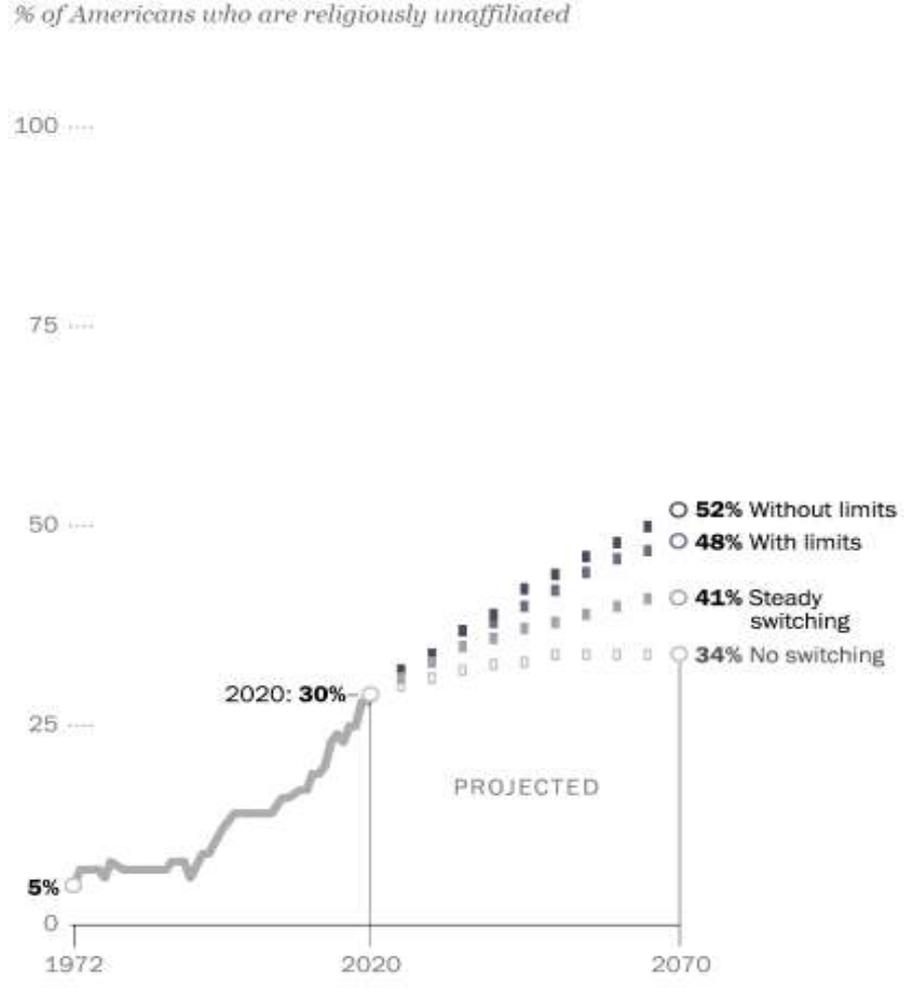
Setting
the Stage
With The
Facts

By 2065, **52%** of the US population will be “NONES” (no religious affiliation) with **35%** identifying as Christians

U.S. Christians projected to fall below 50% of population



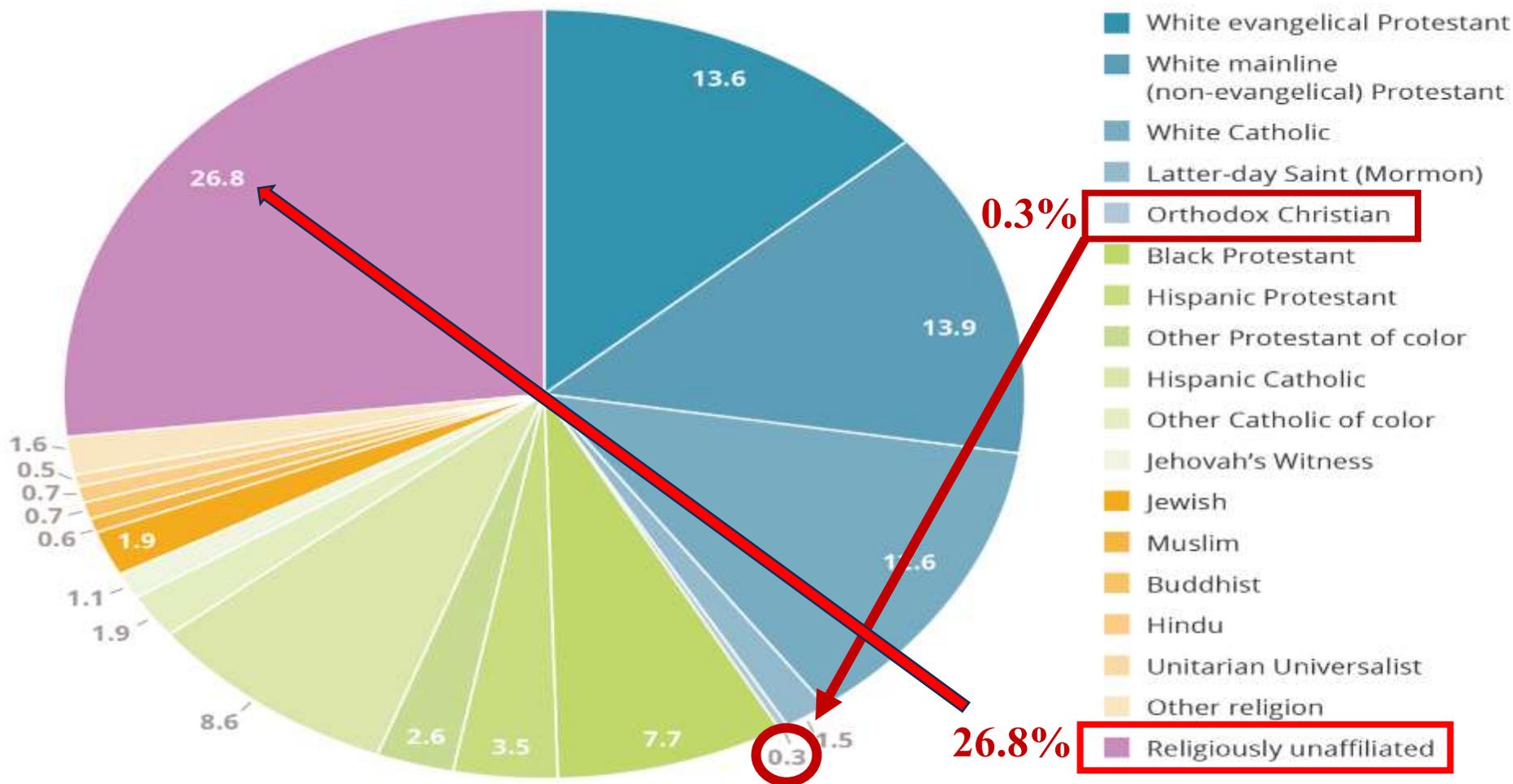
U.S. 'nones' will approach majority by 2070 if recent sv



Orthodoxy – A Rounding Error In The American Christian Landscape

FIGURE 1. The American Religious Landscape in 2022

Percent who identify as:



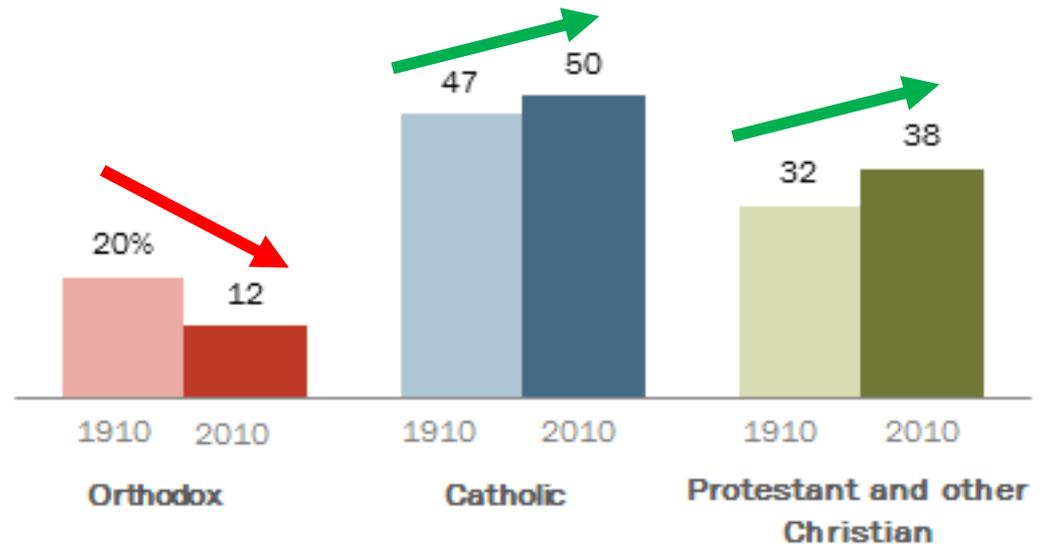
Source: PRRI 2022 American Values Atlas.

0.5% 100 years ago

**Globally,
Orthodoxy
is
Declining
While
Others
Are
Growing**

**Among Christians globally, Orthodox share falling,
Catholic, Protestant shares increasing**

% of world Christians who are ...



Note: "Protestants and other Christians" includes Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists and other small Christian groups.

Source: 1910 data from World Religion Database. 2010 data from Pew Research Center analysis of censuses and surveys, originally published in 2011 report "Global Christianity." "Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century"

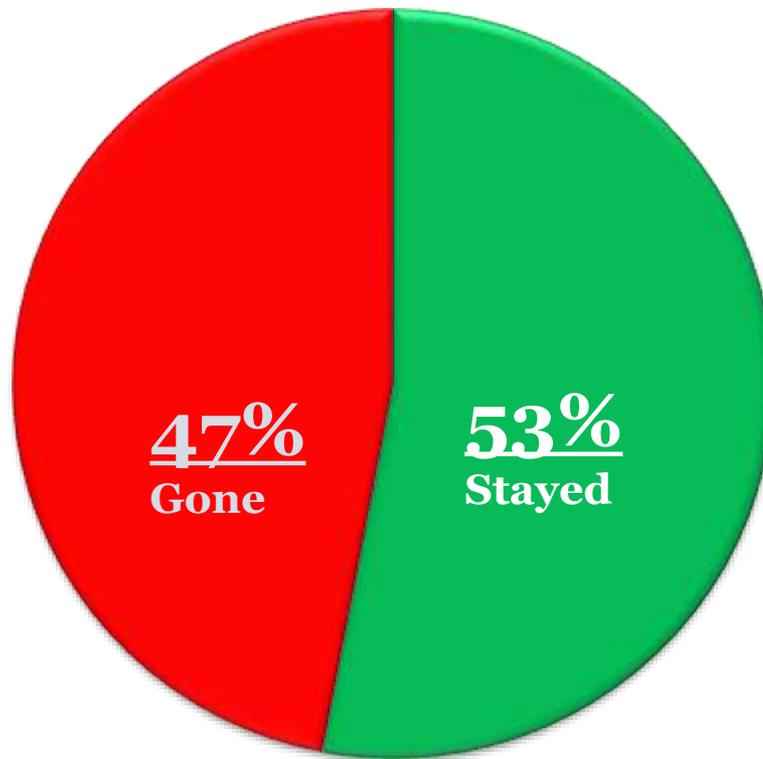
PEW RESEARCH CENTER



Reality

Shattered

47% of cradle Orthodox adults have left the Church

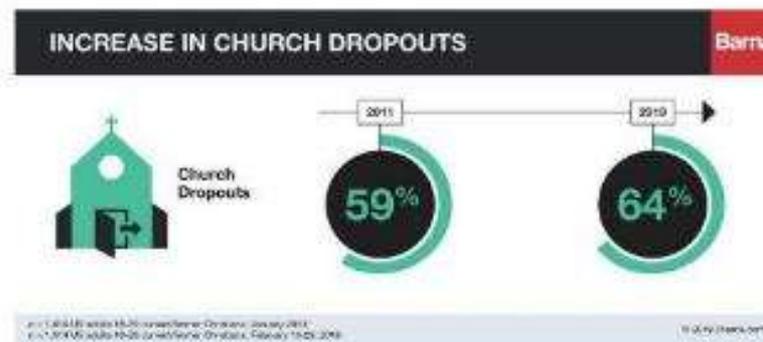


■ YES ■ NO

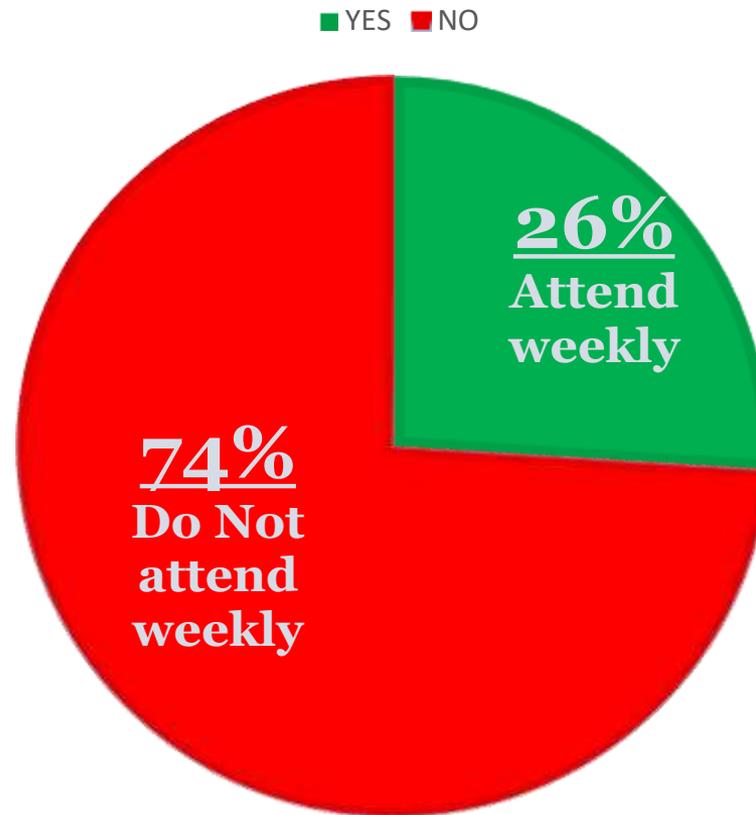
64% of youth drop out of church in their 20s

When Barna president David Kinnaman published his 2011 book *You Lost Me*, we heard from many people (especially church leaders) who were shocked to learn that 59 percent of young adults with a Christian background had dropped out of church at some point during their 20s—many for just a time, but some for good.

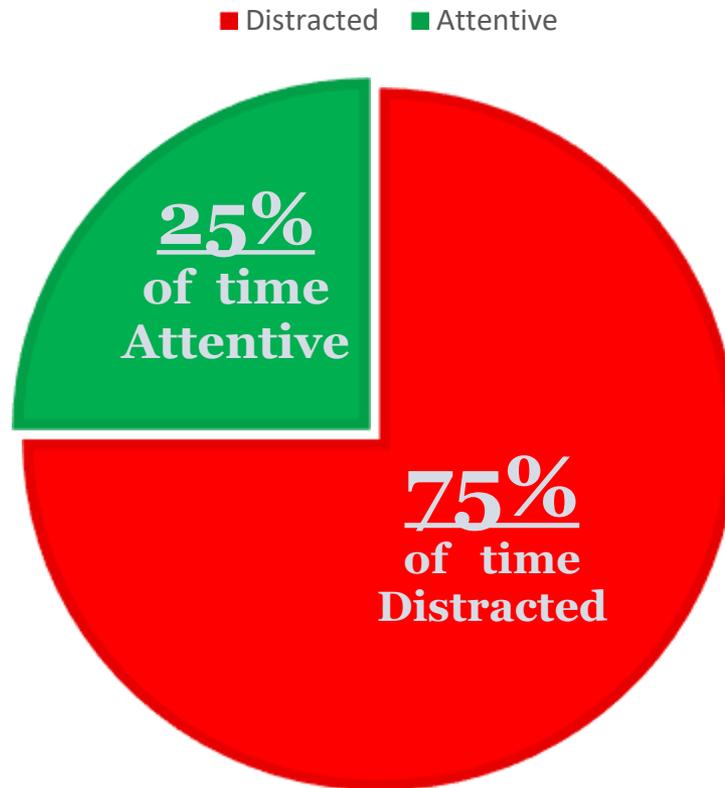
Eight years later, research for Kinnaman's new book *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* reveals that the church dropout problem is still a problem. In fact, the percentage of young-adult dropouts has increased from 59 to 64 percent. Nearly two-thirds of U.S. 18–29-year-olds who grew up in church tell Barna they have withdrawn from church involvement as an adult after having been active as a child or teen.



**26% of Orthodox Christians adherents
regularly attend church services.**



Parishioners' minds wander \approx 75% of the time during church services.



PRE-COVID Giving Facts¹

U.S. Orthodox Christians are in:

~ top 1/4 in annual income

~ bottom 1/4 in church stewardship

¹ Pew Forum income data compared against Financial Stewardship Analysis of over 275 U.S. Orthodox Parishes conducted by Stewardship Calling ministry

Your Median Pledge Per 2023
Steward Family =

\$740

Your Expense Budget Per
2023 Steward Family =

\$2,270



How Close Are We To Being A Tithing Parish?

0.8% = est. St Stephen parishioner
giving



Donor Concentration



Top 3

33% of stewardship



Top 10

56% of stewardship



Top 20

75% of stewardship

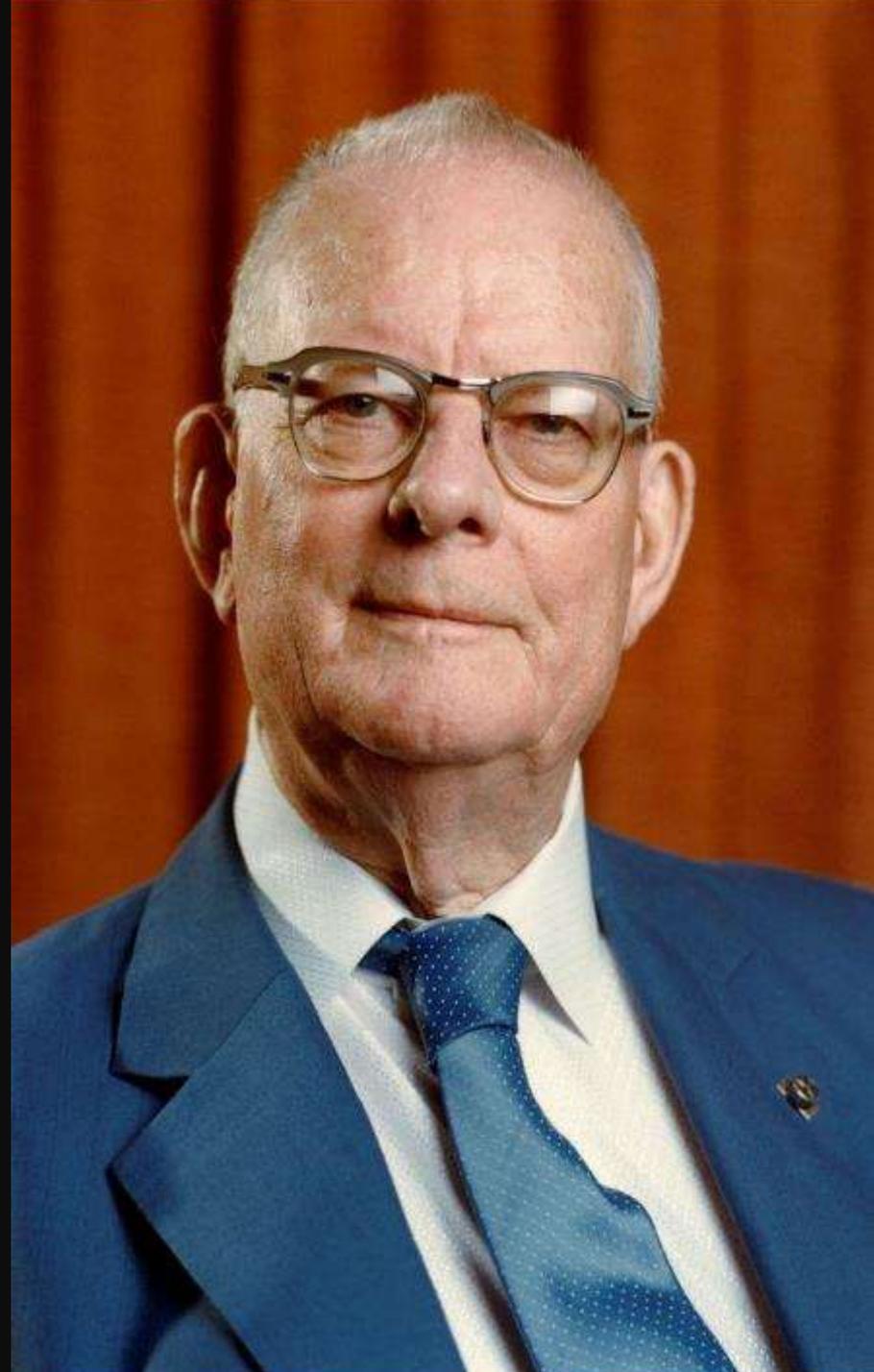
Who Owns The Problem?

“Any time the majority of people behave a particular way the majority of the time, the people are not the problem. The problem is inherent in the system.

As a leader, you own responsibility for the system.

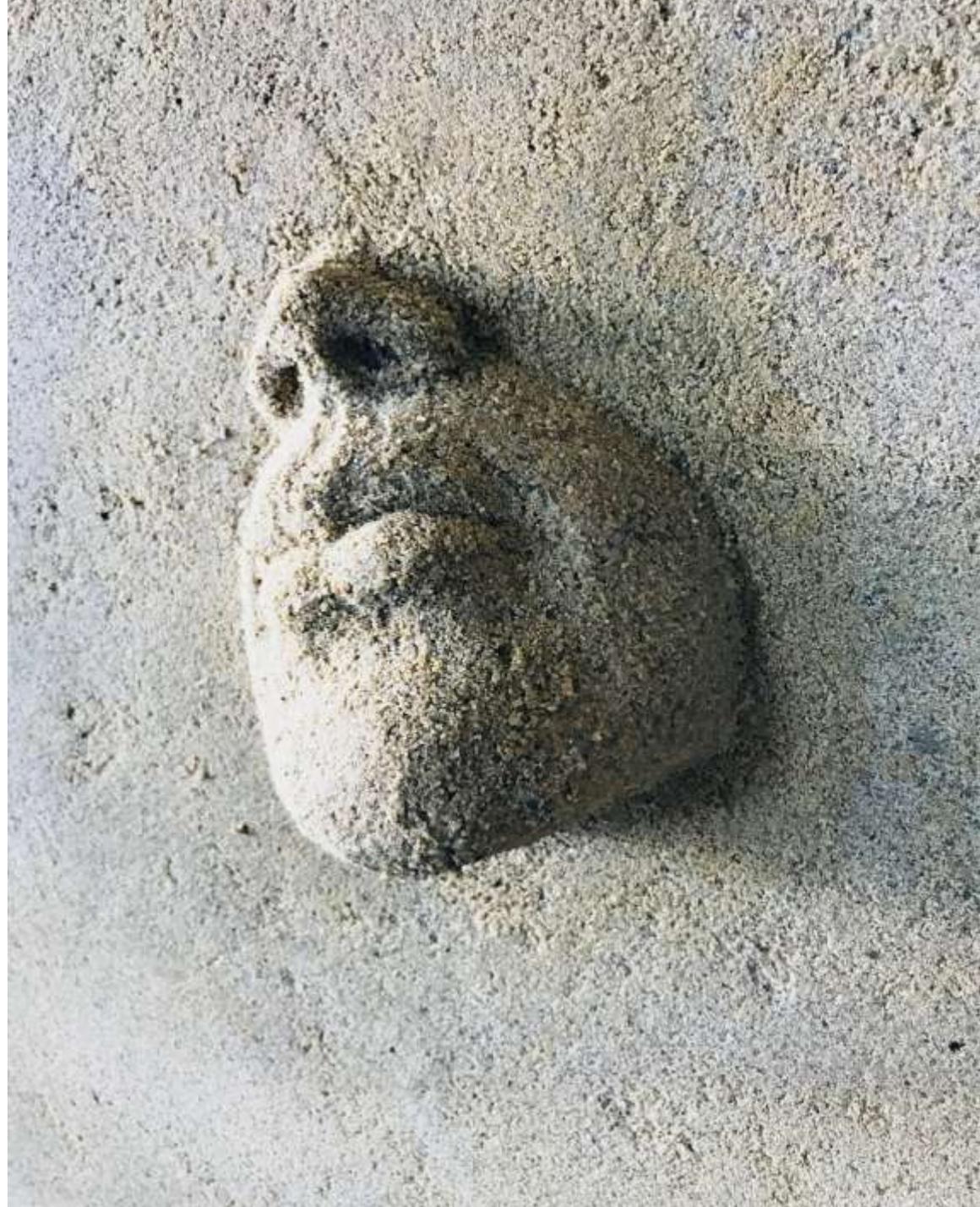
...if you find yourself blaming the people, you should look again.”

**W. Edwards Deming
(father of the Quality Movement)**



**And now for
something
completely
different...**

**...things may
be changing,
which means
we must
change also**



Young Adults Lead a Resurgence in Church Attendance

(<https://www.barna.com/research/young-adults-lead-resurgence-in-church-attendance/>) (Sep 2, 2025)

STATE OF THE CHURCH



Number of Weekends U.S. Churchgoers Attend Church Per Month, 2025

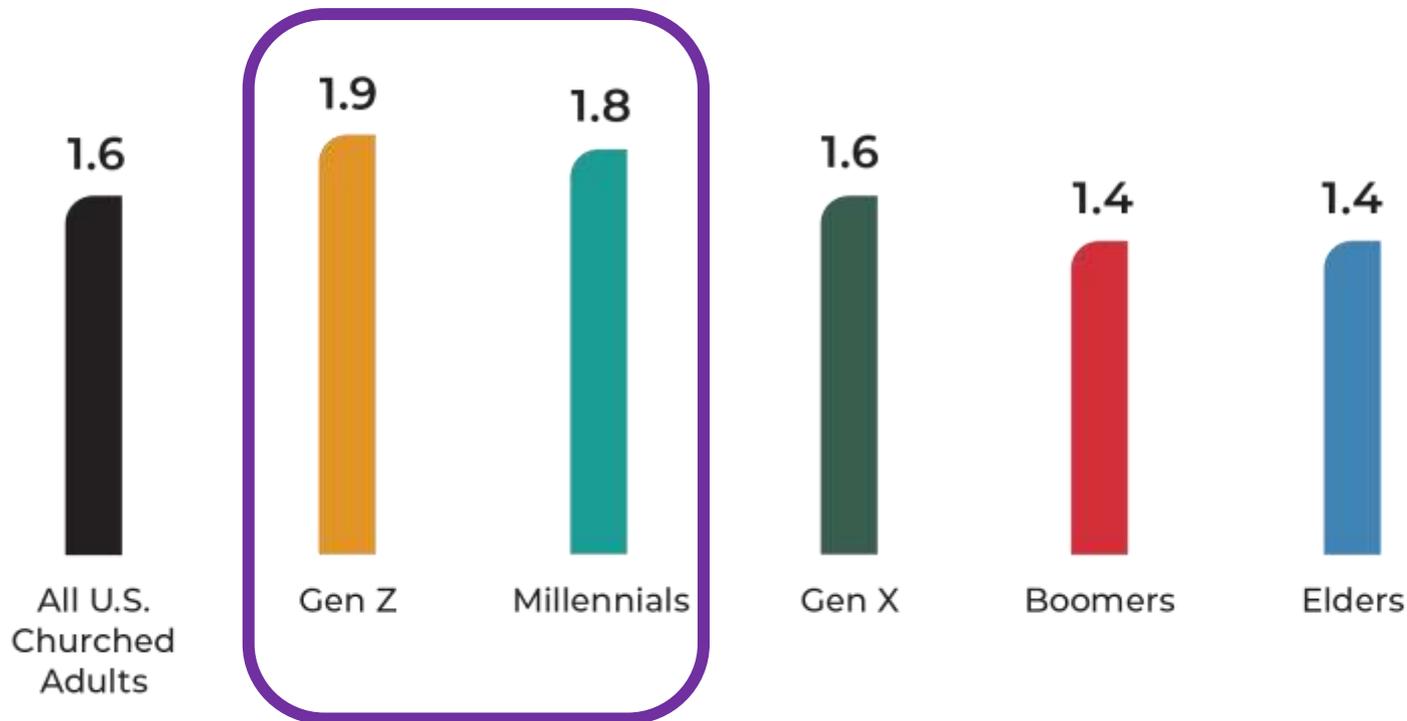
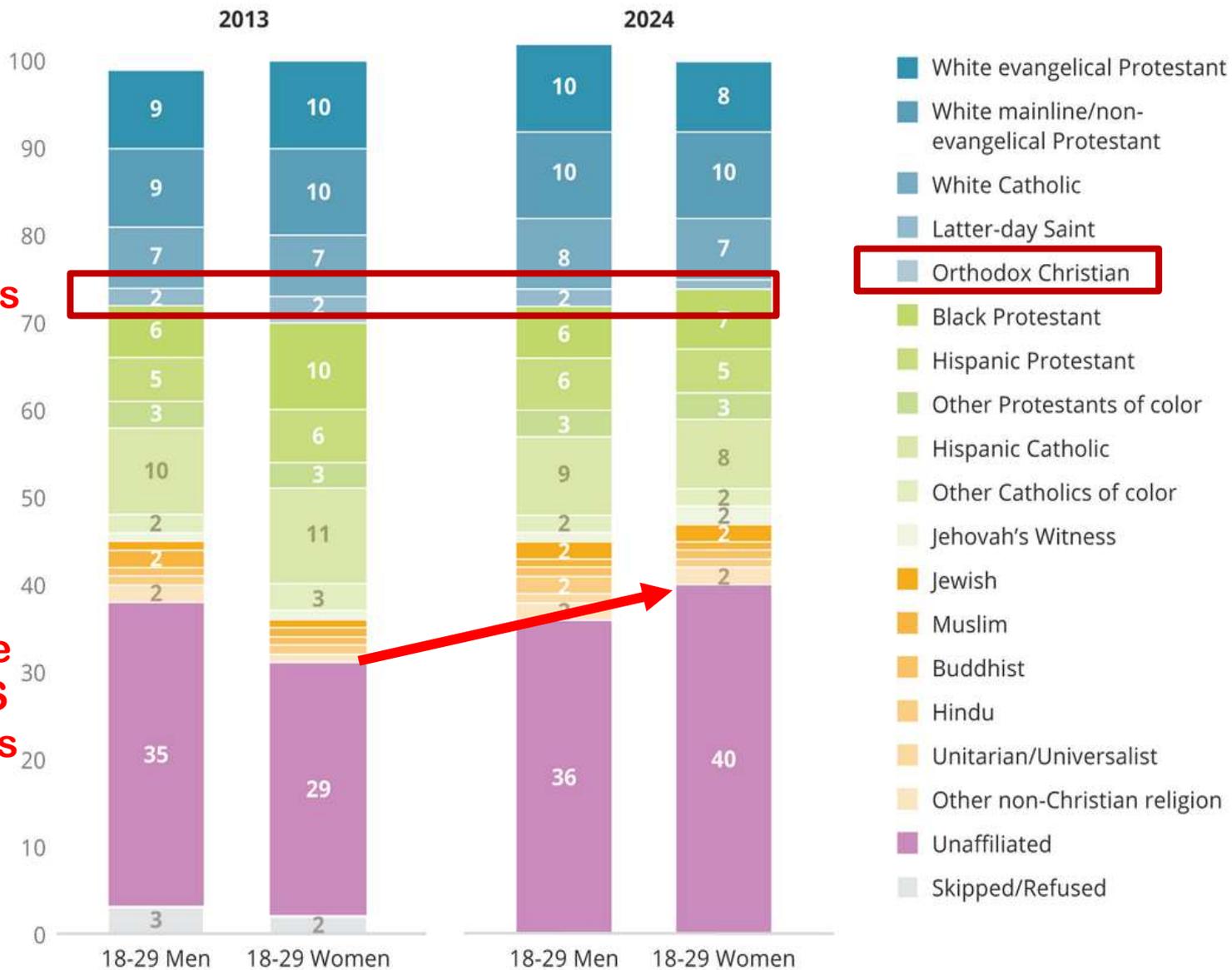


FIGURE 1. Shift in Religious Affiliation Among Young Americans, by Gender

Percent who are: **18-29 year olds**



Decline in young Orthodox females

Massive increase in female NONES over last 11 years from 29% to 40%

Source: PRRI Census of American Religion 2013 & 2024.

On the other hand, we have 3 of the most anxious and lonely generations alive...and it's getting worse!



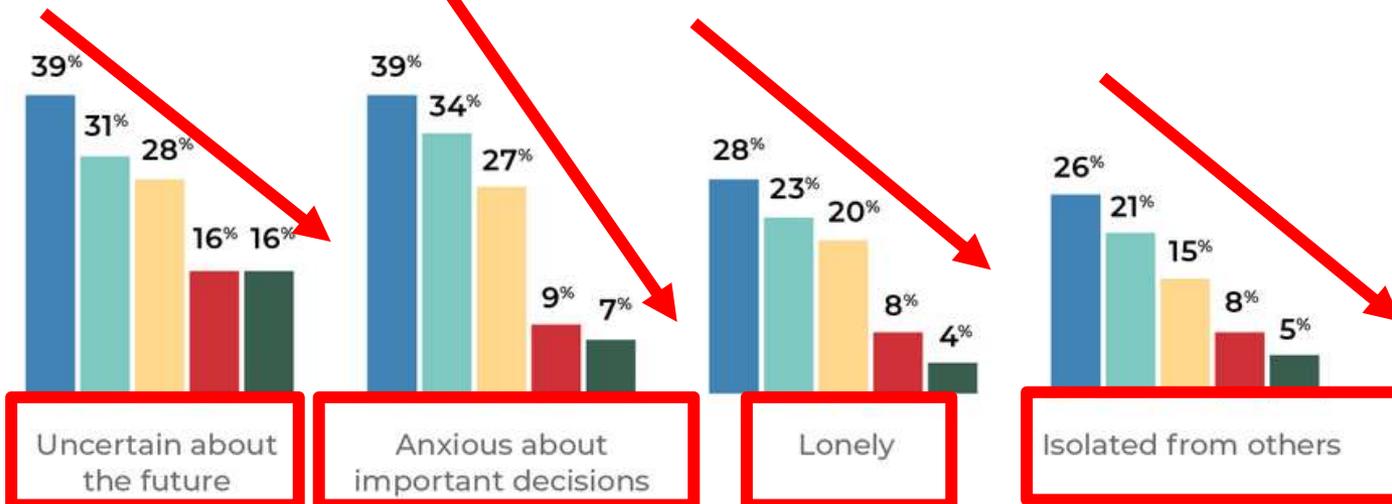
STATE OF THE CHURCH

An Emotional Snapshot of Gen Z

How often, if ever, do you feel the following?

% frequently

● Gen Z ● Millennials ● Gen X ● Boomers ● Elders



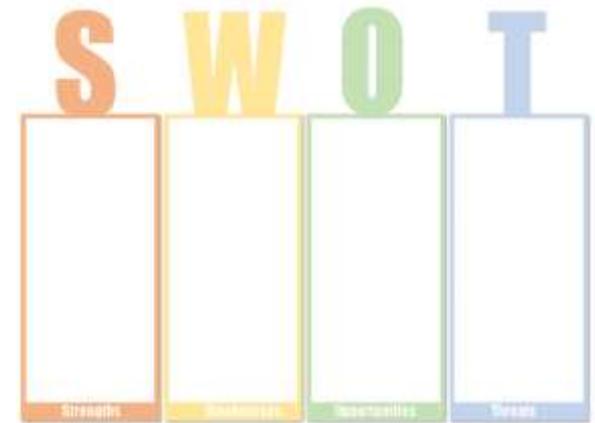
n=2,001 U.S. adults, June 17–June 26, 2024.

~ Answers Vision & Strategic Planning question #2:

Where are we now?

~ First focus on INTERNAL Parish Strengths and Weaknesses

~ Second focus on EXTERNAL Opportunities and Threats that our Parish faces



STRENGTHS

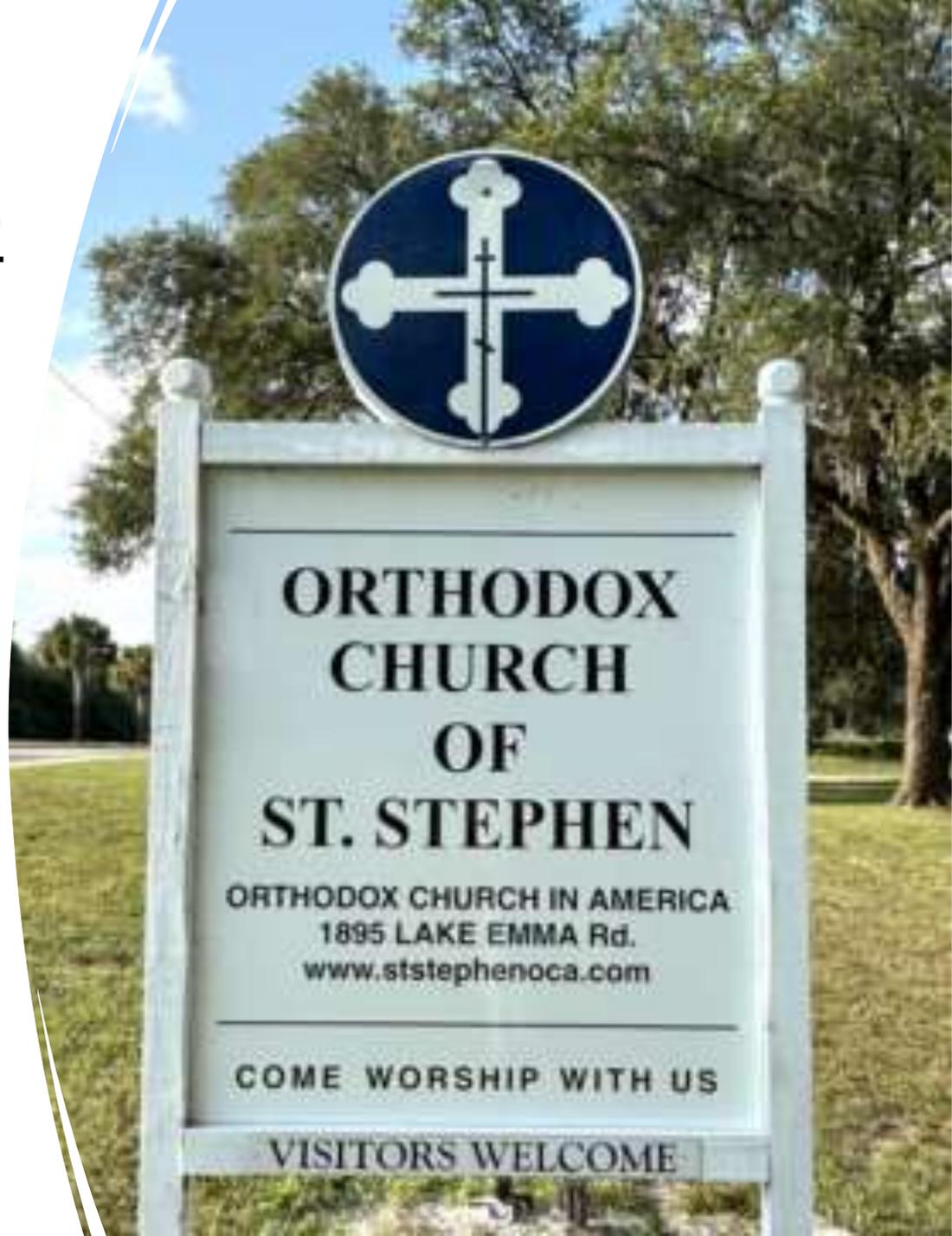
**77 - Sense Of Community,
Welcoming & Engagement**

**26 - Catechism (Spiritual
Formation & Religious
Education)**

23 – Ministry

23 - Church Services

20 - Parish Growth



WEAKNESSES

43 - Spiritual Formation & Religious Education & Etiquette

39 - Property & Facilities

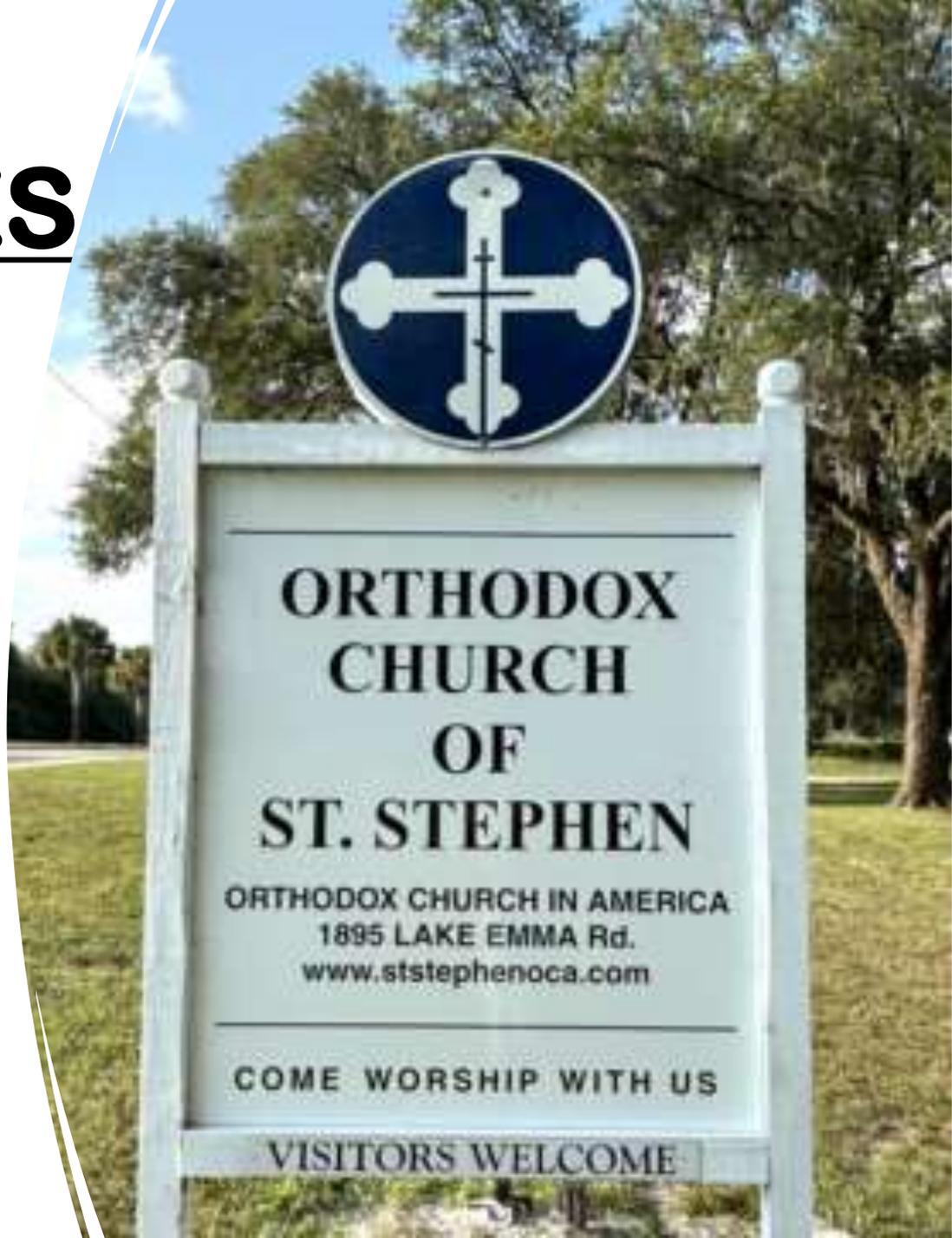
32 - Communication

26 - Stewardship & Engagement

25 - Youth

25 - Integration, Connection & Welcoming

22 - Leadership

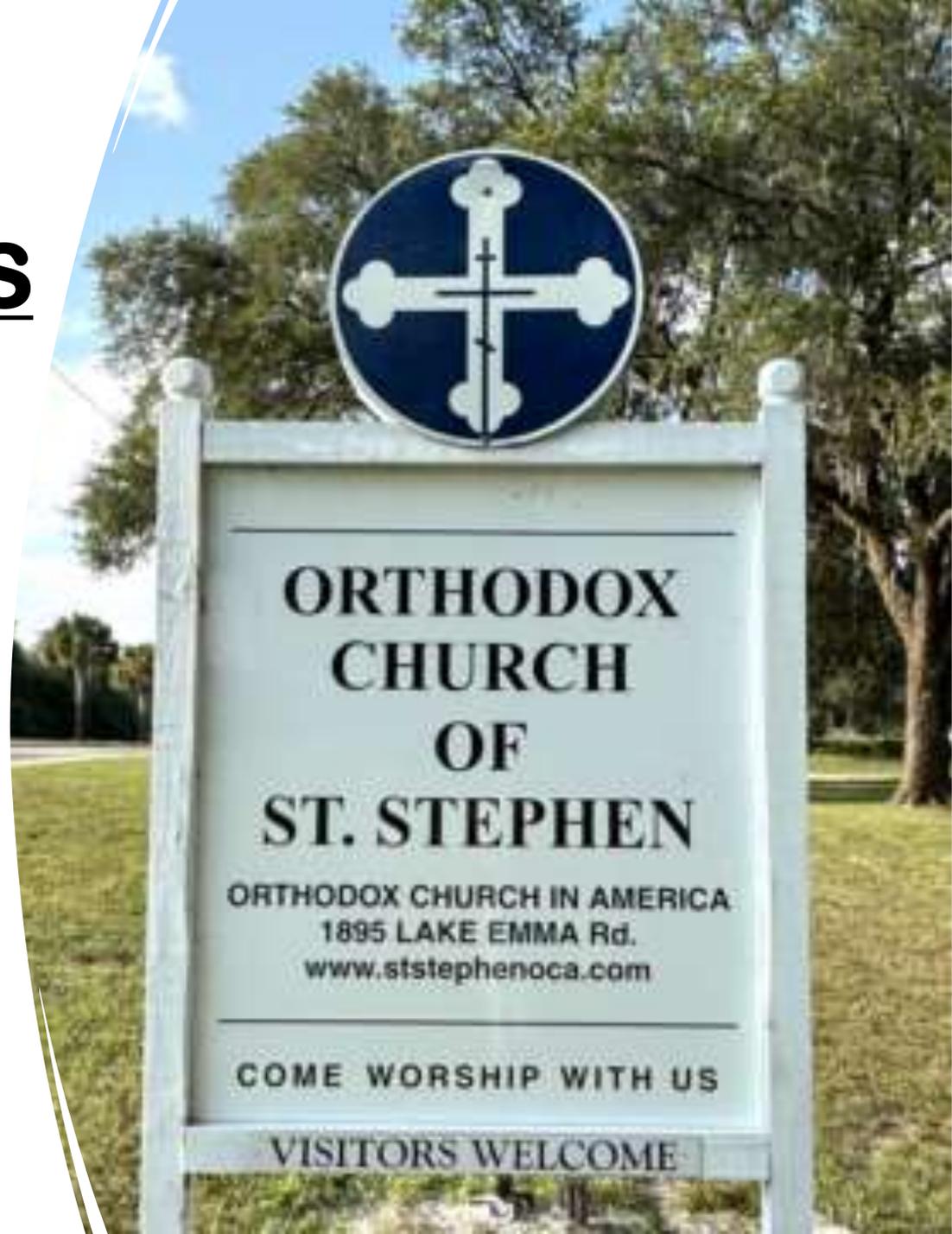


OPPORTUNITIES

**22 - Growing Interest In
Orthodoxy /
Religion / Faith**

**14 - Growing Area /
Region /
Communities /
Evangelism**

13 - Technology

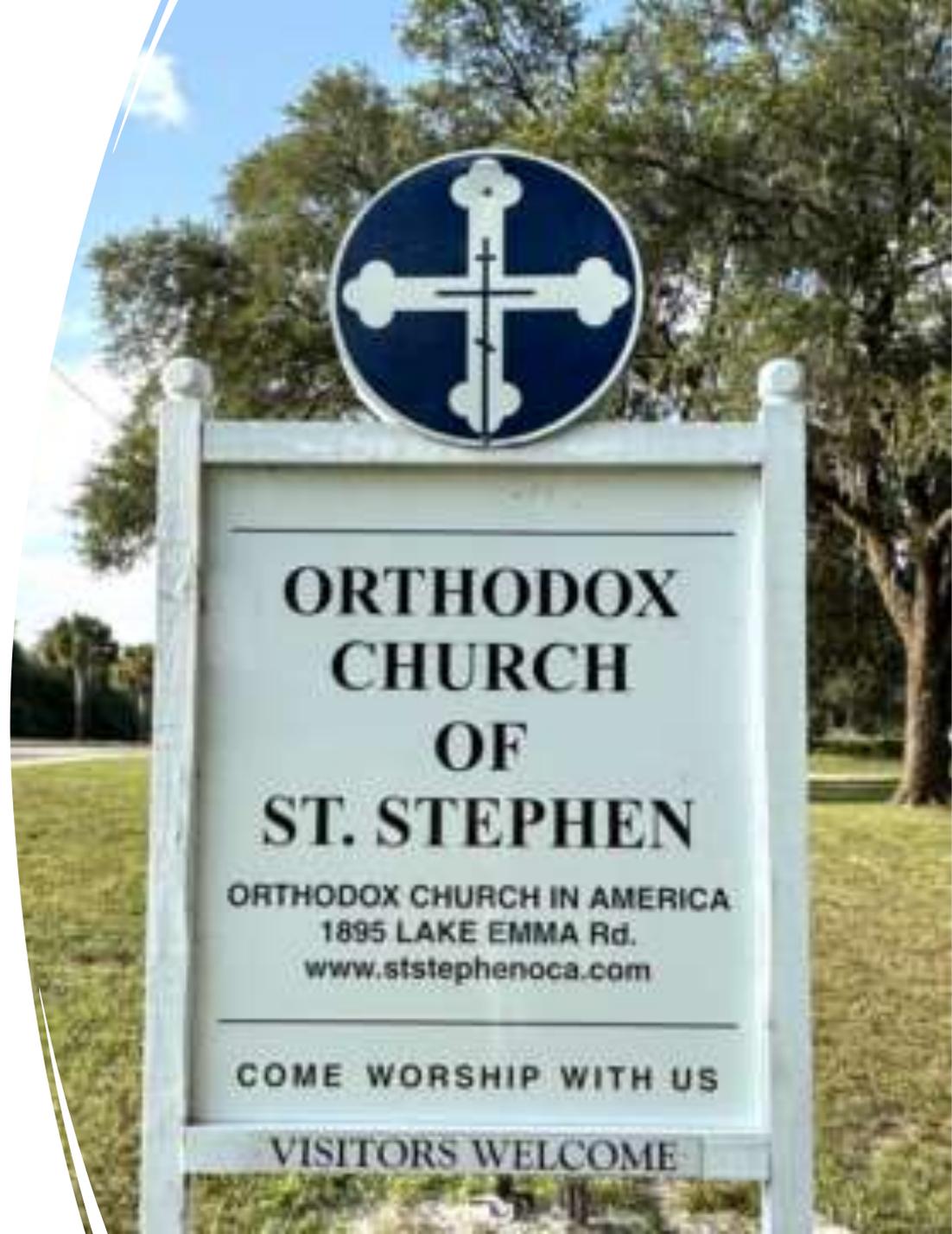


THREATS

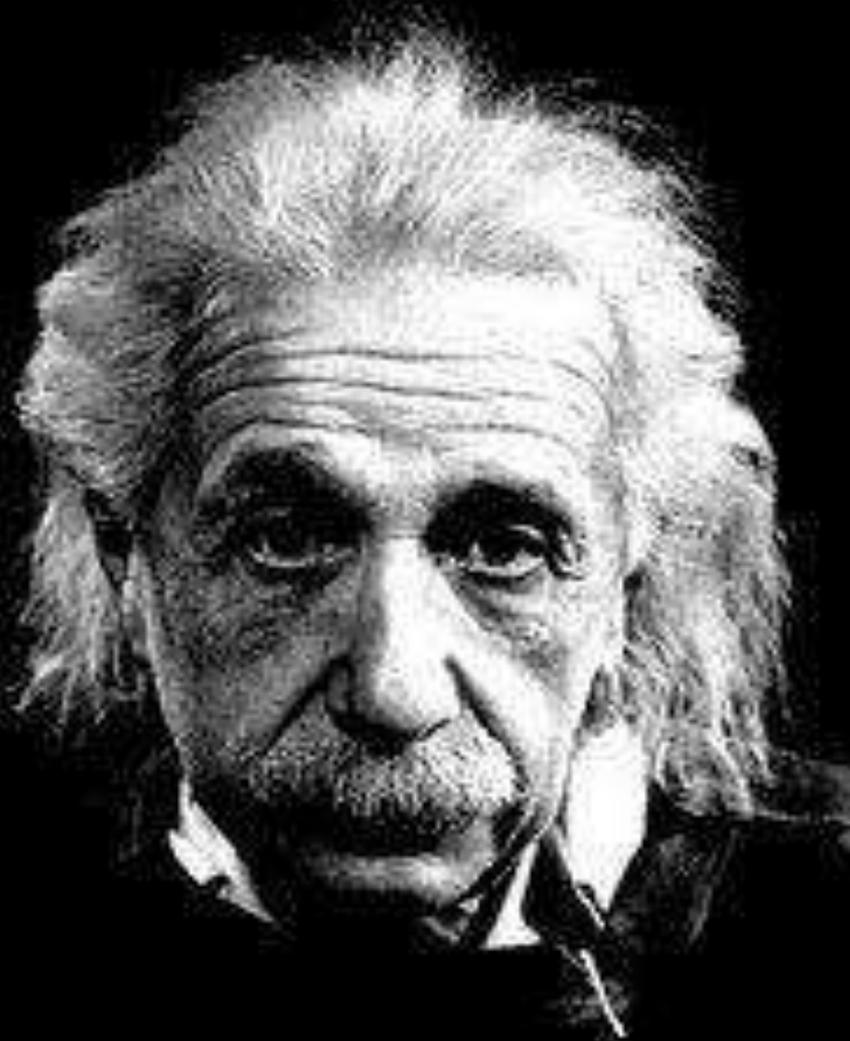
20 - Economy

**18 - Secularism /
Modernity / Culture /
Morality**

**17 - Technology /
Internet**



"WE CANNOT
SOLVE OUR
PROBLEMS
WITH THE SAME
THINKING WE
USED WHEN WE
CREATED THEM"



Why Is St. Stephen's Here?



WHY Statement

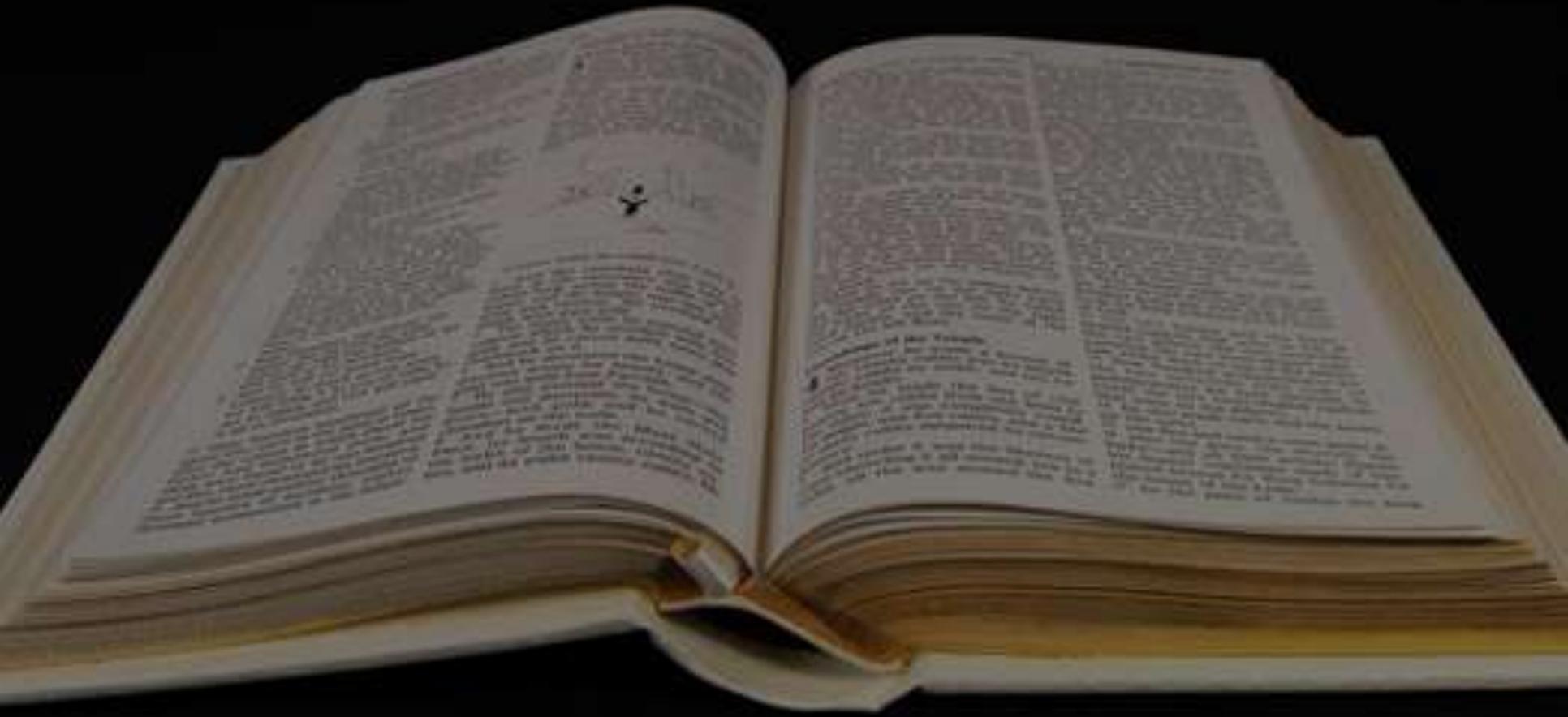
Answers strategic planning question #1:

Why are we here?

~ An articulate, compelling and inspirational reason why our diocese/church exists and why anyone should care, or want to join us.



A Statement of Why is Biblical



“Friends, WHY
are you doing
these things?”

Acts 14:15

Joey Asher's book
Even A Geek Can
Speak, included my
1981 WHY
Statement as a
lawyer



Elevator Pitch to Prospects

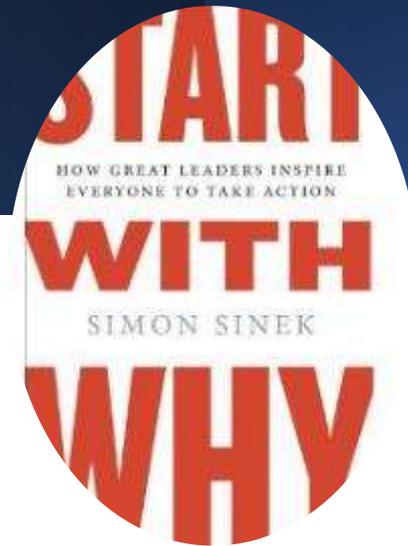
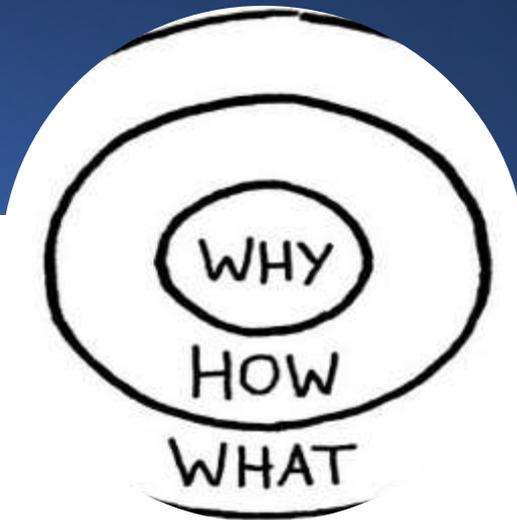
What is a sales prospect interested in? Solutions to problems. With that in mind, your elevator pitch to a sales prospect should highlight how your product serves or solves your client's problems.

Bill Marianes is a transactional attorney with the law firm Troutman Sanders in Atlanta. When people ask him what he does for a living, he says "I'm a problem solver and dream facilitator." That's appropriate, because when people come to see a lawyer, he says, they either have a problem or something they want to accomplish. After hearing the Marianes elevator pitch, prospective clients are always lured into asking him more detail about what he does.

He never responds to the question, "What do you do?" with "I'm an attorney." That kind of response, he says, means, "I'm stuck with whatever box they put all the attorneys and lawyers in. I don't have a chance to distinguish myself."

*"I'm a problem solver
and dream facilitator"*

Start With Why - How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone To Take Action



Over 54,212,375 views

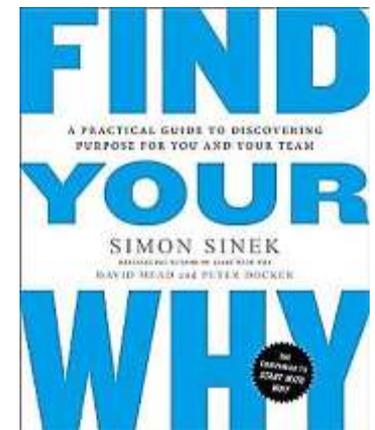
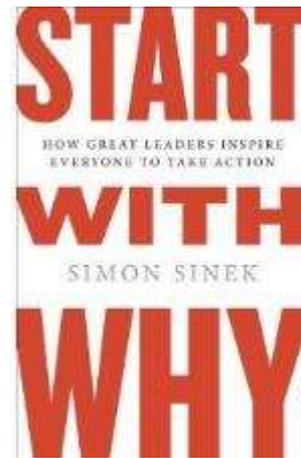
http://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action.html

“People don’t buy-in to what you do. They buy-in to why you do it.”

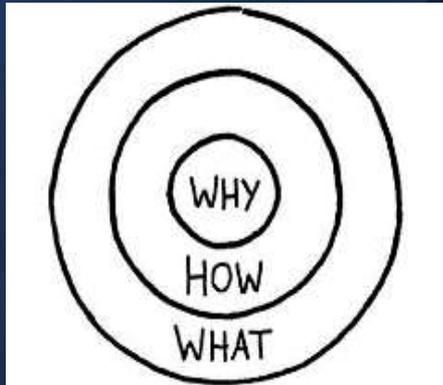
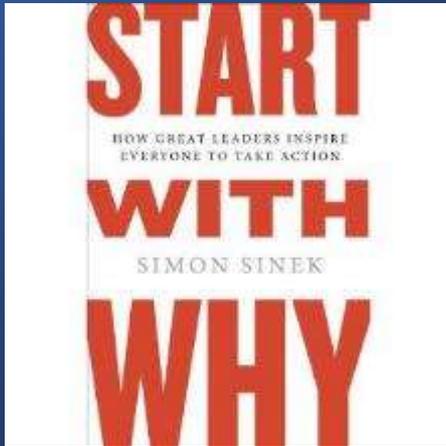
“But if you don’t know why you do what you do, how will you inspire anyone else to follow you?”



Simon Sinek



“There Are Leaders And There Are Those Who Lead”



~ “Leaders merely hold a title or position of power or influence.”

~ “Those who lead, inspire us to follow them.”

~ “We follow those who lead, not for them, but for ourselves.”

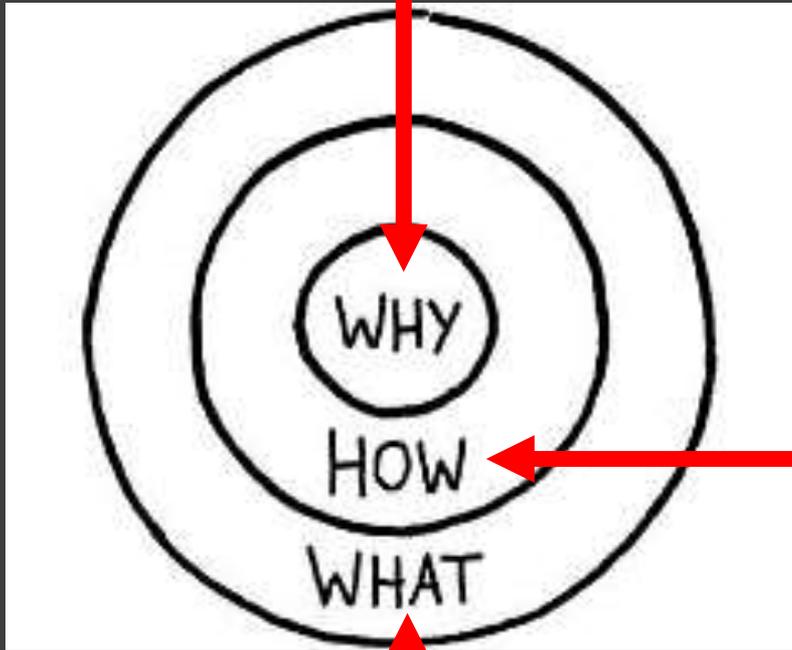


“The goal is not to attract people who need what you have. The goal is to attract people who believe what you believe.”

WHY

Why do we exist and do what we do?

The intersection of WHY with Strategic Planning



Vision / SAFs

Where are we going and how will we get there?

Mission

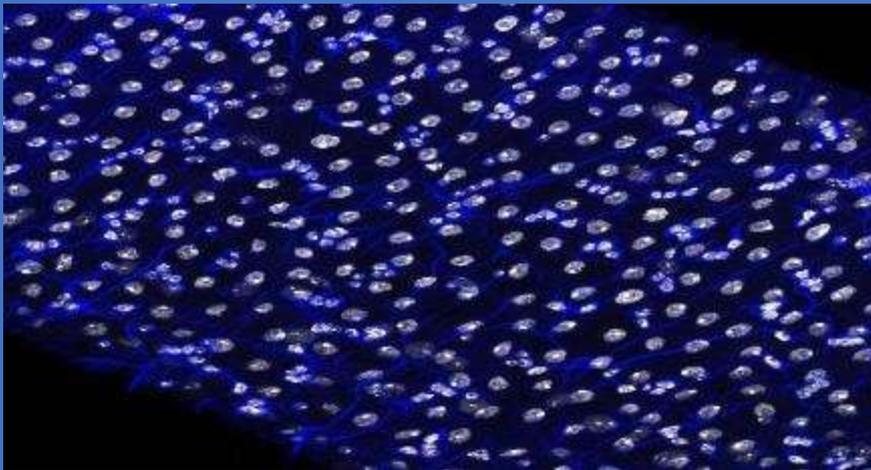
What do we do?

Your Second Brain¹

“The 2nd brain informs our state of mind...”

The enteric nervous system
 (“second brain”) in our gut has
 100+ million neurons

*“A big part of our emotions are
 probably influenced by the
 nerves in our gut...”*



¹ The Second Brain (HarperCollins) Dr. Michael Gershon, Chairman Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology at New York–Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center

² Pictures of midgut enteric neuron system taken from PhD dissertation of Dr. Alexis Marianes –“*How to bust a gut: physiological and stem cell compartmentalization in the Drosophila midgut*” - Johns Hopkins University (2013)



7 Jesus WHY Statements



- ~ To be *the bread of life*, so that those *who come to me will never be hungry or thirsty.* (John 6:35)
- ~ To be *the light of the world*, so that my followers *will have the light of life and not walk in darkness.* (John 8:12)
- ~ To be *the door*, so that people can *be saved* (John 10:9)
- ~ To be *the resurrection and the life*, so that my believers *will never die.* (John 11:25-26)
- ~ To be *the way, the truth and the life*, so that everyone can *come to the Father through me.* (John 14:6)
- ~ To be *the vine*, so that a man can *bear much fruit.* (John 15:5)



Start With WHY?



- ~ A **WHY** should inspire and explain your church's purpose
- ~ It answers: “Why does my church exist?” - “Why should anyone want to join us?”
- ~ Your 1 SHORT sentence **WHY** should be:
 - simple and clear
 - actionable
 - focused on how you'll contribute to others, and
 - expressed in affirmative language that resonates with and can inspire others

2 Parts to a Why Statement

TO = the contribution

SO THAT = the impact



To inspire people to
do the things that
inspire them

so that together, we
can change our
world.



Simon Sinek's WHY?

To help people and
parishes discover
and live their
stewardship callings,

so that they may
have a “good
account before the
awesome judgment
seat of Christ.”

(II Corinthians 5:10)



Bill's Stewardship
Calling WHY?





**To love one another
through Christ and inspire
a joyous life with purpose.**



ST. SOPHIA, SS. FAITH, HOPE & AGAPE
GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

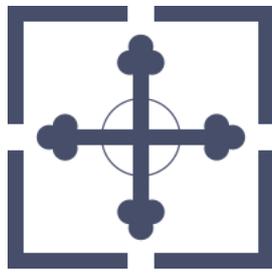
WHY Statement

**To glorify God, serve all
through love, and live a
purposeful life in Christ.**



Welcome!
To Sts. RNI Greek Orthodox Church

**To welcome all on a
transformational journey to
a life of purpose and
salvation.**



St. Nicholas
Orthodox Church

**To seek and share Christ's
love so that all will find eternal
life in Him.**

THE HOLY ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UGANDA



**Grow in Christ's love and
empower people towards
spiritual transformation
and salvation.**

GREEK ORTHODOX
METROPOLIS OF CHICAGO



**To receive and share
unconditional love, mercy,
healing and peace, so that life
has greater meaning and
purpose.**



**To be transformed in
Christ's joy, peace and
sacrificial love, so that
all may become one with
God and others.**



ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL
ORTHODOX BISHOPS

OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**To bring people closer to
Christ and each other.**

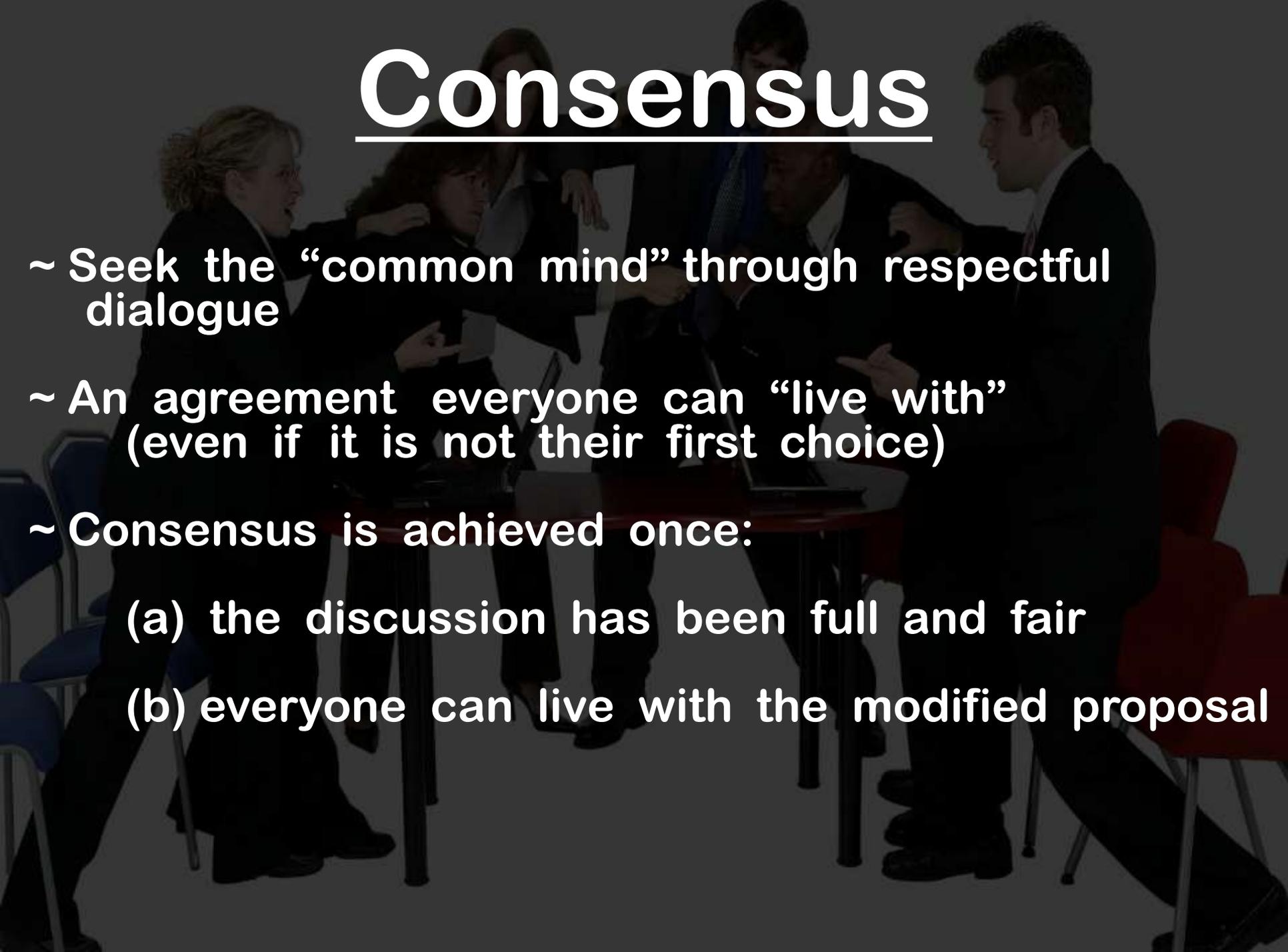
Other WHY Statement Examples

- ~ To be a warm caring Christian environment so that faith, service and community thrive.**
- ~ To welcome all so that we may share Christ's love with one another.**
- ~ To bring together all who want to serve and inspire others so that we can all be ready to enter a life with Christ.**
- ~ To spread God's living word to all so that souls are saved.**

Other WHY Statement Examples

- ~ To be a beacon of Christ's love so that we may make disciples of all nations.**
- ~ To create engaged disciples of Christ SO THAT we may reflect the image and likeness of God in the world.**
- ~ To guide all people to the love of Christ SO THAT we may live eternally in heaven with God.**
- ~ To serve and nurture people so that their path to salvation is an experience of love and peace.**

Consensus

A group of business professionals in a meeting, with text overlaid on a dark background. The image shows several people in business attire, some standing and some sitting at a table, engaged in discussion. The text is white and stands out against the dark background.

- ~ Seek the “common mind” through respectful dialogue
- ~ An agreement everyone can “live with” (even if it is not their first choice)
- ~ Consensus is achieved once:
 - (a) the discussion has been full and fair
 - (b) everyone can live with the modified proposal

Join us on Tuesday

**January 27, 2026 ZOOM to
finalize St. Stephen WHY
Statement at 6:30 p.m. EDT**



Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4661132163>

Meeting ID: 466 113 2163

One tap mobile

+13126266799,,4661132163# US (Chicago)

+16465588656,,4661132163# US (New York)

Draft your proposed St. Sophia Orthodox Church Why Statement and email it to:
billmarianes@gmail.com by:

Midnight - Thursday
January 22nd

DO IT TONIGHT – while it is fresh.
Do **NOT miss omorrow's deadline!**



[StewardshipCalling.com](https://stewardshipcalling.com)

Stewardship Calling

What are you doing with all of the gifts God has given you?

WHY? STEWARDSHIP STRATEGIC PLANNING INTERNET RADIO & PODCASTS KEYNOTES & LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

PERSONAL

HOLY ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UGANDA

ST. SOPHIA JEFFERSONVILLE, PA STRATEGIC PLAN

ST. STEPHEN ORTHODOX CHURCH

CHRIST THE SAVIOR ACADEMY

SAMPLE S.M.A.R.T GOAL & ACTION PLANS

BOSTON METROPOLIS -

Strategic Planning

Scroll down to St. Stephen page

<https://stewardshipcalling.com/st-stephen-orthodox-church/>

St. Stephen Orthodox

By the grace of God, I am bl... strategic planning. This is th

ing parish of St. Stephen Orthodox Church in Longwood, Florida, through

St. Stephen Orthodox Church

Vision & Strategic Planning - WHY Discovery Part 1

Dr. Bill Marianes