

Case Studies in the Operating Rules of the Church

Goals

- Case studies aid as a review of information from the Orthodox Leadership Training Program
- Can be used for open discussion to set protocols for a Parish
- Use the case studies as a training tool for your Parish Leadership Team

What is a case study?

- An open-ended actual story
 - No Ending Given
 - Brings reality into classroom
- A difficult problem without an obvious solution
- Forces us into a real situation where we have to answer:
“What do we do now?”

How to use a case study

1. Read the entire case study narrative
2. Formulate a clear statement of the problem
3. Identify the issues at stake
4. Clarify facts as well as feelings
5. Consider the case study from different angles
6. Dig around for resources
7. Make some assertions

Background

All Saints Greek Orthodox Parish is a fictitious church. It is headed by the equally fictitious Fr. George.

The scenarios presented are in no way reflective of any Parish or Parish Priest or Parish Members in the Metropolis, but are used for discussion purposes only.

Case Scenario 1:

What's our Future?

The Planning Committee Chairman has just informed the Parish Council President, “ I have great news! We have a donor for our new outdoor playground.” The President is surprised but happy to hear the news.

There had been no long term plans for a playground on All Saints property, but the President realizes many of the younger families have wanted this. As he found more information, he realized the donor was someone who he and the priest, had hoped could donate towards the interior of the church to complete the Sanctuary.

As word spread through the community, the Parish Council President, began to sense some uneasiness. Many of the founding parishioners wanted the green space around the church to remain.

Other members were hoping to add a larger hall or gym to the existing structure into the same space. The younger families were happy to hear the news of the playground as a place where their children could play after church and Greek School.

The Parish Council planned to meet and discuss the issue, but there was division among the Council, as each member represented different factions within the church. What seemed like a generous donation was creating tension throughout the Parish. The President found himself in the middle as all were coming to him to voice their opinions. He did not know what to do next.

Case Scenario 1 Discussion Questions

- Why do you suppose there is tension within All Saints community?
- What could have been done to prevent this tension?
- How do you think the donor is feeling after making his donation?
- What should the President and Parish Council do next?

Case Scenario 2:

Who's Wagging the Dog?

The Parish Council President was, in the middle of a council meeting, and everybody was looking to him about what to do about Basil and Basil's beef. Basil, a member of All Saints Parish Council, had just bolted the meeting. He was mad. Few were surprised because Basil had been belligerent for a week, grumbling to others about the Festival committee's owning the church. As Basil left, he let fly from the doorway, "This council has got to take charge of this church. They can't get away with this anymore. It's the tail wagging the dog. And it's not right."

For years All Saints had a growing Festival attracting many from the neighboring suburbs and preparations were overcoming the ministries of the Church. More than a decade ago, the council had formed a Festival Committee to plan the event, choose the menu, and control the finances with little oversight.

Over time this committee, with almost no changeover in membership, began making its decisions without approval by the Council, increasing advertisement budgets and overall expenses. What once was a huge benefit to the budget was now becoming a drain on the finances. Now the issue of responsibility and authority heated the Council room. Right after the Treasurer's Report, Basil had burst out: "Listen, it's time to put that committee in its place. They can't be making financial decisions that hurt this church. We are the Council. Not them."

With previous advice from the priest, the President had said the issue would not be discussed now but when the Festival Committee gave the council its report. Basil jumped up and said he was fed up: “If we can’t deal with this issue, how can we deal with other issues that are hurting this Church?” He packed up his papers and said, “I am resigning right now. My wife and I will no longer be members of a Church like this.” Then he stomped to the door. After Basil slammed the door, the silence was palpable.

One member pulled the drape back to see Basil sitting in his car in the lot. Some wanted to go get Basil and invite him back; some wanted to send a delegation to his home in “a couple of days” and invite him back; and some wanted to settle the ministries issue without Basil or the committee “holding the council hostage.” Everyone seemed flustered. One Council Member said to the President, “Will you advise us here?” Everybody looked at the President and waited for a response.

Case Study 2 Discussion Questions

- What's at the heart of Basil's beef? Does he have a good point?
- Suppose you were on the Festival Committee. How might you defend the committee against "Basil's beef"?
- What are the leadership principles involved in this case?
- Have you experienced similar "authority and responsibility" issues in your congregation?
- What should the President do next?

Case Study 3:

Who's Planning the Festival?

The Festival Chairman was disturbed—disturbed with himself. The end of the Festival planning meeting was near. He felt anxious; he guessed the other members did too. In the awkward silence, he wondered what to say.

Before he was assigned Festival Chairman, All Saints had a history of letting the Chairman make almost all the decisions for the Festival including planning and leading. The Council had generally communicated the boundaries, but the Chairman had led the way in everything. The new Festival Chairman came and encouraged members of the congregation to help plan and lead in the Festival.

He asked a dozen people to join him, some from the council and some not. He created a “Festival Committee” and held regular meetings to tell them his plans for the menu and to ask them their ideas for staging dance performances, overall setup and parking. Slowly the committee began offering ideas.

In the third session for planning, the group was getting a bit creative. They planned to add carnival rides as a new attraction and income stream. They also decided to rearrange the Festival layout to accommodate the rides. The Chairman now encouraged them: “This is good work. You are the owners of this plan.” But he could see frowns on some faces. One older member was plainly anxious: “I’m not quite sure about our roles here. Do we make the final decisions or do you?” Another member added, “Some of us feel we don’t have the experience to make these kinds of decisions.”

Before the Chairman could answer, one member suggested a more familiar layout with one or two rides from what was previously suggested. The whole group brightened to the idea and wanted the change. The Festival Chairman felt anxious, like something was slipping away, but nodded agreement. Was it loss of control that bothered him? Hadn't he said he wanted them to participate? Should he confess his anxiety? Who did have the final say, anyway? Was it the Chairman or the committee? One thing he knew—silence wasn't the answer.

Case Study 3 Discussion Questions

- Why do you suppose the committee felt uneasy? What view of leadership did they have?
- What was behind the Festival Chairman's anxiety? What view of leadership does he seem to have?
- If you were the Chairman in this situation, what would you say to the committee? What steps could be taken to resolve the situation?

Case Study 4:

Where are the Volunteers?

Bickers, Dennis. “Why Churches Should Deep-Six Those sign-Up Sheets”,
Ethicsdaily.com, 2013.

All Saints Church needs a director for their Vacation Bible School. Four weeks before the scheduled date of Bible School, Father George announces from the Pulpit that volunteers are needed to chair the Bible school and to staff it.

He further explains that, the Chair must become familiar with the material, coordinate and train the other workers, make sure the needed supplies are available, plan the promotion, and handle all the other administrative tasks that need to happen for this to be successful.

Is it any wonder that no one is interested in being the director this year?

Case Study 4 Discussion Questions

- What can be done to avoid this scenario next year?
- What characteristics should you be looking for in a recruit to fill this position?
- How would this improve the Vacation Bible School Experience?

“I believe in almost every case that intentionally recruiting and training individuals to lead these ministries will be far superior to putting a sign-up sheet on the back bulletin board hoping to get enough volunteers.”

Dennis Bickers

Case Scenario 5:

Finance Committee Meltdown

You as the President of the Parish Council receive an email from one of your parishioners on the Finance Committee:

Help! I wish I had never agreed to serve on the finance committee! One of the other committee members is so annoying! George delights in using cutting humor and seems to look for ways to ridicule others' ideas and suggestions, especially mine.

When George disagreed with me on a financial issue during last night's meeting, I finally lost my patience. Knowing that he is self-conscious about not attending college, I said something like, "I can see why these figures are hard for you to understand George, but if you had just a little more education, it would all add up." He just sat there stunned, and the rest of the group moved on with the discussion. It was awkward. And I felt sorry for saying it but he had it coming.

This morning I received an email from George harshly criticizing me for all sorts of wrongdoings. I can see why he is angry with me belittling him in front of the others, but he has made all sorts of other accusations that are exaggerated or completely untrue. He concludes by saying I am unfit to serve on the finance committee. He also sent a copy to the chairman.

Case Scenario 5 Discussion Questions

- Why do you suppose George is so upset?
- What could have been done to prevent this tension?
- What should you as the Parish Council President do now?
- What steps should be taken to resolve the issue?