

2018 Philoptochos Convention
Small Group Breakout Sessions – July 4, 2018

Discussion Topic: Working Cooperatively with Priest, Parish Council & Other Church Organizations

Facilitators: Fr. Ted Barbas (Sessions 1,2,3)
Fr. Lou Christopoulos (Sessions 4,5,6)
Fr. Chrysanthos Kerkeres (Sessions 6,7,8)
Katherine Siavelis, National Philoptochos Board
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Purpose: To facilitate discussion on how to work collaboratively with the parish priest and church organizations

(NOTE: The following represents a compilation of the comments made by facilitators and attendees during eight 25-minute breakout sessions. Questions refer to the list of “talking points” handed out during the sessions.)

Questions 1 & 2: What is the best way to work cooperatively with your parish priest and the organizations within the church community?

Responses:

- As first suggested by Fr. Ted and echoed by numerous attendees, it is important to hold a meeting in the summer where the parish priest and the leaders of the various church organizations, including Philoptochos, can discuss their respective goals and plans for the year. This is often called a “Council of Ministries.” This open communication builds mutual respect among the priest and the organizations and avoids conflicts in the church calendar. It also helps the church family to establish a common vision.
- Joint meetings also provide an opportunity for the leaders to explore how they can help each other with their ministries and collaborate on a common project.
- It is important for the parish priest to be present at Philoptochos meetings so that he is always aware of the chapter’s work and to provide appropriate guidance.
 - The majority of those chapters represented in the sessions report that their priests do indeed attend most of their meetings.
 - It was also apparent that in those chapters whose meetings do not have the regular presence of the parish priest, there is nevertheless a positive, respectful relationship between the priest and the leadership.

- Fr. Chrysanthos, during his sessions, expressed his concern that we even have to ask this question. As the church is our home and we are one family, there should be no question but that we cooperate and support each other.
- As necessary, it may be helpful to consult with a past president for guidance and suggestions in case of conflict with your parish priest.

Question 3: Are your communication methods sufficient to reach everyone in your church community? What methods of communication do you use and are they effective?

Responses:

- Across the board, the attendees responded that it is important to employ various communication methods in order to reach all parishioners. The traditional tools of the monthly church newsletter and weekly bulletin have value but must be used in conjunction with email and social media to get your message out and publicize events.
- Many parishes employ one-call phone systems which are useful to broadcast a message and easily notify and remind chapter members and/or all parishioners of a specific event or ministry.
- Many chapters also use a phone tree system to inform members who do not have e-mail of upcoming meetings and events.
- It was agreed that in some cases the best communication method is face-to-face discussion with an individual.
- Regardless of the communication method, it is imperative to always approach others with respect and humility.

Question 4: How can you engage other parish organizations to work on a common goal or project?

Responses:

- Approach one or more organizations with a project that may be relevant and of interest to them. (Examples: involve the Sunday School children for a literacy project; ask teams of GOYA youth to serve meals to the homeless; engage young mothers to help with a used clothing drive for infants and small children)
- Consider holding a joint fundraiser that will benefit both groups; share the work and the proceeds.
- Bring up your ideas when meeting with the priest and other church organizations to discuss the church calendar, or invite them to a special meeting for the purpose of planning a common project.

Question 5: What do you see as obstacles to working cooperatively with other church groups and how can they be overcome?

Responses:

- As pointed out by Fr. Chrysanthos, “ego” is our biggest enemy and he implored each of us to remember that it’s “not about you”, but rather about the church, the mission, and the ministry.
- The key to an effective relationship with any individual or group is effective communication.
- It was repeatedly emphasized that we must remember we are “one church, one family” rather than a collection of separate organizations and ministries and that we must approach each other with humility.
- The issue was raised regarding periodic conflicts with parish councils who attempt to employ Philoptochos for church fundraising purposes or otherwise expect financial assistance for the parish.
 - It may well be that the church council does not have a clear understanding of who Philoptochos is and what we do, so it’s important that we communicate our mission to them.
 - It may be necessary to get the assistance of the parish priest to make it clear that the business of the church is the responsibility of the council, not of Philoptochos.
 - Every Philoptochos chapter should have a liaison to the parish council who can regularly attend council meetings. In this way, everyone is kept informed, and conflicts/ misunderstandings can be avoided.
- Fr. Lou offered that people learn best by example; put your best foot forward and the rest will follow.
- One attendee reported a problem in her parish that she calls “the mall in the hall”, referring to the various organizations who compete for parishioner donations, assistance, etc. during Sunday fellowship. Resolution rests with better organization and communication among the various church groups.
- There was some discussion about the problem of “seasoned” Philoptochos members not always making room for the younger generation of women and their new ideas. Older members may feel threatened by a new way of doing things because “it’s always been done this way”, and the younger members may feel their new ideas are not being considered and they are not respected.
 - One suggestion for resolving this type of conflict is to pair older members to work as mentors with younger members toward the accomplishment of a particular task or project. This is a good way to help open the minds of the older ladies to fresh ideas, the younger members learn from the valuable experience of their elders, and a mutually respectful relationship can develop.
 - Another approach is to implement a project that is relevant to our younger members and let them run with it. The result can be a great confidence builder.
 - Fr. Chrysanthos also suggested that we look at the younger women getting involved as if they are our own daughters and granddaughters and ask ourselves how we would want them to be treated.
 - On the subject of mentoring and developing new members, Fr. Ted reminded us of this four-part “Ministry Growth Model”:

Step 1: I do it, and you watch me;

Step 2: I do it, and you do it with me;

Step 3: *You do it, and I watch you;*
Step 4: *You do it, and I do something else.*

Other Comments from Fr. Ted, Fr. Lou and Fr. Chrysanthos:

- Philanthropy is the responsibility not just of Philoptochos, but of everyone.
- Replace the word “committee” with “team”. *Committee* suggests that someone is in charge, whereas *team* by definition means everyone works together.
- Outside of liturgy and religious instruction, Philoptochos is the most important aspect of our church.
- Start a “council of ministries” every quarter to look at reaching people who have not been active in the church.
- The essence of creativity is the ability to copy others.
- The gifts we are blessed with should always be offered back to Christ.

And now, some words of wisdom to live by....

“Dear Lord, make my words sweet and tender because someday I may have to eat them.”

“Lord, fill my mouth with worthwhile stuff and stop me when I’ve said enough.”

And last but not least...

“It’s your ATTITUDE, not your APTITUDE, that determines your ALTITUDE.”