

Strategic Planning Framework for Parish Life and Growth

Purpose

Strategic planning helps a parish clarify its mission, identify priorities, and guide its ministries in a thoughtful and responsible way. A well-developed plan allows the Parish Assembly, Parish Council, and Parish Priest to work together toward shared goals that strengthen the spiritual, pastoral, and communal life of the parish.

Strategic planning does not replace the canonical governance of the Church. Rather, it serves as a practical tool to help parish leadership discern how the mission of the Armenian Apostolic Church can be lived out more effectively within the local community.

This framework offers a simple model that parishes may adapt when developing a three- to five-year parish plan.

1. Mission of the Armenian Church

The strategic planning efforts of every parish in the Eastern Diocese are rooted in the common mission of the Armenian Apostolic Church:

“The mission of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church is to preach the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and to proclaim its message of salvation. This mission is realized through worship, education, witness, service, and the common life in Christ as expressed in the distinctive faith-experience of the Armenian people. All members of the Armenian Church – both clergy and lay – are called to participate fully in its mission.”

Every parish participates in this mission through its worship, ministries, educational programs, and service to the faithful and the wider community. Strategic planning helps parish leadership identify concrete ways to strengthen and expand the living expression of this mission within the life of the parish.

2. Vision

While the mission of the Church remains constant, each parish may articulate a **vision for the future** that reflects its local circumstances and opportunities.

A parish vision describes the community it hopes to become in the coming years. Elements of such a vision may include:

- A spiritually vibrant parish with growing participation in worship and sacramental life
- A welcoming home for Armenian families, youth, and people of diverse backgrounds
- A center of Armenian Christian education, culture, and fellowship in the local community
- A financially stable parish that responsibly stewards its resources for future generations

A clear vision helps guide decision-making and encourages the parish community to work together toward shared goals.

3. Core Values

Strategic planning should reflect the enduring values of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the life of its communities.

Faith

Rooted in the Orthodox faith and the liturgical and spiritual tradition of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Heritage

Honoring and transmitting more than seventeen centuries of Armenian Christian identity, language, and culture.

Community

Strengthening bonds of fellowship, mutual care, and shared responsibility among parishioners.

Service

Responding to Christ's call to serve those in need within the parish and the broader community.

Stewardship

Using God's gifts – people, time, finances, and property – with integrity and responsibility.

4. Strategic Context

Each parish exists within a unique local context. When developing a strategic plan, parish leadership should reflect on several important factors, including:

- The demographic composition of the local Armenian community
- The presence of recent immigrants, diaspora Armenians, and multi-generational families
- The needs of youth, families, and elderly parishioners
- Participation in parish worship and ministries
- The availability of volunteers, financial resources, and parish facilities
- Opportunities for collaboration with diocesan ministries and local community organizations

This reflection helps the parish answer a central question:

How can the parish grow spiritually, pastorally, and institutionally so that it remains a faithful Armenian Christian presence for future generations?

5. Guiding Goals

Strategic plans are most effective when guided by a small number of overarching goals.

Typical guiding goals for parish life may include:

1. **Deepening the Armenian Apostolic spiritual life of the faithful through worship, prayer, and the sacraments.**
2. **Strengthening the parish as a welcoming Armenian Christian community for families, youth, and future generations.**
3. **Fostering a caring community that values the presence and contributions of all members, including elderly parishioners who carry the traditions and memory of the Church.**

These goals can then be expressed through specific strategic priorities.

6. Strategic Priorities

Priority 1 – Spiritual Life and Worship

Aim:

Deepen participation in the spiritual and sacramental life of the Church.

Possible Objectives

- Encourage regular participation in Sunday Divine Liturgy and feast day services
- Offer additional opportunities for prayer such as Vespers, Bible study, or seasonal services
- Provide adult Christian education and catechesis
- Develop clear preparation programs for the sacraments

Possible Initiatives

- Lenten and Advent spiritual programs
- Parish retreats or spiritual reflection days
- Educational programs explaining the Divine Liturgy and teachings of the Church
- Participation in diocesan spiritual initiatives

Possible Metrics

- Average Sunday attendance
- Participation in adult education programs
- Number of baptisms, weddings, and sacramental preparations

Priority 2 – Youth, Young Adults, and Families

Aim:

Help younger generations grow in faith and Armenian Christian identity while strengthening family life within the parish.

Possible Objectives

- Strengthen Sunday School and Armenian language education programs
- Develop youth groups and leadership opportunities
- Provide programs for young adults and college students
- Offer gatherings and educational opportunities for families

Possible Initiatives

- Youth retreats, service projects, and cultural activities
- Family liturgy days explaining the meaning of the Divine Liturgy
- Youth participation in altar service, choir, and parish ministries
- Participation in ACYOA, diocesan camps and youth programs

Possible Metrics

- Enrollment in parish educational programs
- Participation in youth and young adult activities
- Youth involvement in liturgical ministries

Priority 3 – Community Life, Outreach, and Heritage

Aim:

Strengthen the parish as a welcoming center of Armenian Christian community life and heritage.

Possible Objectives

- Strengthen communication with parishioners and the wider community
- Offer regular cultural and educational events
- Develop a welcoming process for visitors and new families
- Collaborate with Armenian cultural and charitable organizations

Possible Initiatives

- Lectures, concerts, and cultural evenings
- Parish festivals and community gatherings
- Service projects supporting those in need
- Programs introducing Armenian history, language, and faith to younger generations and mixed-heritage families

Possible Metrics

- Attendance at parish events
- Growth in parish contact lists and communications
- Number of new households welcomed each year

Priority 4 – Senior Ministry and Pastoral Care

Aim:

Ensure that elderly parishioners remain valued, supported, and fully connected to the life of the Church.

Possible Objectives

- Strengthen pastoral care and regular contact with elderly parishioners
- Encourage their continued participation in worship and fellowship
- Provide support for those who may experience isolation or mobility challenges
- Create opportunities for seniors to share their experiences and traditions with younger generations

Possible Initiatives

- Pastoral visits and home communion when needed
- Senior fellowship gatherings or cultural afternoons
- Transportation assistance for church attendance where possible
- Intergenerational activities connecting youth and seniors
- Volunteer teams that regularly check on elderly parishioners

Possible Metrics

- Participation of seniors in parish programs
- Number of pastoral visits and home communions
- Senior involvement in parish ministries and mentorship

Priority 5 – Stewardship and Financial Sustainability

Aim:

Ensure the long-term sustainability of the parish and its ministries.

Possible Objectives

- Encourage stewardship participation among parish households
- Maintain appropriate financial reserves
- Develop planned giving or legacy programs
- Diversify sources of parish income where appropriate

Possible Initiatives

- Annual stewardship education and communication
- Transparent financial reporting to the parish
- Formation of stewardship or development committees
- Encouraging parishioners to include the parish in estate planning

Possible Metrics

- Percentage of households participating in stewardship
- Total annual stewardship contributions
- Growth of parish reserves or endowment funds

7. Implementation and Review

Strategic plans should be implemented gradually and reviewed regularly.

Year 1

- Present the strategic plan to the Parish Assembly
- Identify initial priorities and goals
- Establish committees or ministry teams where appropriate

Years 2-4

- Select achievable goals each year
- Integrate them into the parish calendar and budget
- Provide annual progress updates to the Parish Assembly

Final Year

- Evaluate the results of the strategic plan
- Identify lessons learned
- Begin consultation for the next planning cycle

8. Canonical and Diocesan Framework

Every parish operates within the canonical structure of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the **Bylaws of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern Diocese)**.

Strategic planning should therefore:

- Respect the authority of the **Parish Assembly** as the governing body of the parish
- Recognize the collaborative leadership of the **Parish Priest and Parish Council**
- Acknowledge the oversight of the **Diocesan Primate and Diocesan Council**

Strategic planning supports the mission of the Church by helping parish leadership thoughtfully guide the life and ministry of the parish.