

Reclaiming the Great Commission: A Roadmap to Parish Health by Fr. Evan Armatas is a practical guide aimed at revitalizing Christian parishes and refocusing them on Christ's final directive: "Go... and make disciples of all the nations".

Drawing on over 20 years of experience as an Orthodox parish priest, Fr. Armatas argues that many modern churches have lost sight of this foundational goal. Instead of existing as outposts for the Kingdom of God, they often become inward-focused, administratively bogged down, or culturally exclusive. The book provides a strategic framework to help church leadership and parishioners transition from stagnation to health.

Here is a summary of the book's core themes and practical insights:

1. The Core Problem: Inward-Facing Parishes

Armatas challenges churches to look at their current reality honestly. He points out warning signs of a declining parish, such as having more funerals than baptisms, constantly relying on fundraisers just to keep the doors open, or hosting activities that only serve existing members rather than the outside community. He also critiques the "imbalanced identity" found in many churches, where cultural or ethnic heritage (e.g., cultural festivals) overshadows their primary identity as a Christian community.

2. Health Before Growth

A central thesis of the book is that church growth cannot be manufactured through gimmicky evangelism programs. Instead, **growth is a natural byproduct of a healthy church**. When a parish is clean, welcoming, sets clear expectations for participation (tithing time and talent), and empowers its members to form small groups, the clergy are freed up to focus on spiritual matters. This organic health makes the church naturally magnetic to visitors.

3. Diagnosing Barriers and Overcoming Resistance

Armatas acknowledges that transforming a church's culture is difficult and that "resistance is part of transformation". The book provides strategies to:

- Identify and remove the structural or cultural barriers that keep new people out.
- Deal directly with the stagnation, pushback, and "sabotage" that often accompany institutional change.
- Stop spending parish council meetings strictly "putting out fires" and instead focus on vision.

4. Creating a Parish Health Plan

Faith and strategic planning are not mutually exclusive. To combat "spiritual laziness," the book emphasizes the need for a clearly defined Parish Health Plan. Armatas guides readers through actionable steps, ending each chapter with a review section designed for leadership teams to digest the ideas, implement actions, and repent where necessary.

Who is this for?

While written by an Orthodox Christian priest and heavily informed by that tradition, the administrative and cultural advice applies broadly. It is designed as a workbook and guide for clergy, parish council members, ministry leaders, and committed laypeople who want to move their church away from a "maintenance" mindset and back toward active ministry.